

March of Dimes Foundation

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## news release

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### Celebrities Support World Prematurity Day

#### **Fans, Families and Friends Can Send a Virtual Hug To Show They Care About Premature Babies**

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y., Nov. 11, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- International superstars Celine Dion, Pink, Thalia, and world-famous photographer Anne Geddes will join other celebrity parents to send virtual hugs and spread the word that premature birth is a very serious health problem for babies worldwide.

Please visit the March of Dimes [multi-media news release](http://www.marchofdimes.com/multi-media-news-release) to see celebrity videos, pictures or for more information on preterm birth and World Prematurity Day. (<http://www.multivu.com/players/English/59684-march-of-dimes-75th-anniversary/>)

(Photo: <http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20130214/DC59689LOGO>)

March of Dimes celebrity supporters are using their star power to focus attention on the March of Dimes efforts to prevent premature birth and give more babies a healthy start in life. On Nov. 17, they will join with organizations from around the world to observe the third annual World Prematurity Day. More information is available at [facebook.com/worldprematurityday](https://facebook.com/worldprematurityday).

More than 15 million babies are born premature worldwide and more than a million die as a result of their early birth. Babies who survive often have lifelong health problems such as cerebral palsy, vision and hearing loss, and intellectual disabilities. In the U.S., although preterm birth rates have declined in each of the last six years, reaching a 15-year low, still more than 450,000 babies are born too soon. Babies born just a few weeks too soon have higher rates of death and disability than full-term babies. Even infants born at 37-38 weeks of pregnancy have an increased risk for health problems compared to infants born at 39 weeks.

As part of World Prematurity Day, fans, families and volunteers can send their friends a "virtual hug" through Facebook and other social media sites to show that they care about premature babies. The "Hugs" campaign dramatizes the benefits of Kangaroo care, when parents cuddle their premature baby skin-to-skin. Kangaroo care comforts the baby, and also can improve the baby's health by keeping the baby warm, stabilizing the baby's heart rate, helping the baby gain weight and reducing discomfort.

Anne Geddes, renown for her pictures of infants, filmed a "virtual hug" video message for World Prematurity Day, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wC6sdgJHnMU>. She also donated a photograph of Grammy Award winning artist Celine Dion to be used in a public service awareness announcement that has been published in well-known magazines. In an accompanying video message, Celine Dion asks the international community for help putting an end to premature birth.

"I share the concerns and fears of every parent, knowing that more than one million babies die every year simply because they didn't get enough time to grow," Celine Dion says in the global public service



announcement that features kangaroo care, the lifesaving hug, which can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SN8Ggjb9hWg>.

Latin Grammy Award winning recording artist, actress, author, and media personality Thalia, recorded messages in English and Spanish asking for everyone's help to put an end to premature birth. These public service announcements are also being distributed worldwide and can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrtmRQEjZ7o> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMB2UUrxxS>.

Denny Hamlin, driver of the # 11 FedEx Toyota Camry in the NASCAR's Sprint Cup Series, [shared a hug](#) to show he cares about premature babies. This fall, Hamlin teamed up with 8-year-old Nina Centofanti, of Cincinnati, Ohio to advocate for the health of all babies. Nina was born nine weeks too soon and serves as March of Dimes 2013 National Ambassador.

Sherri Shepherd, Emmy Award winning co-host of The View, a longtime March of Dimes ambassador and an outspoken mom of a premature baby, again will help spread awareness for World Prematurity Day. Emmy Award winner Dr. Mehmet Oz, also a parent with personal experience with premature birth, will support global awareness through social media this year. Celebrity parents Pink, Thalia, Celine Dion, Anne Geddes, Camila Alves McConaughey, Deborah Norville, Gretchen Carlson, Samantha Harris, Tia Mowry, and others will also support World Prematurity Day through social media.

Also on Nov. 17, the Empire State Building in New York City will be shining in purple light to symbolize hope for a healthy start for more babies.

In 2013, the March of Dimes celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and its ongoing work to help babies get a healthy start in life. Early research led to the Salk and Sabin polio vaccines that all babies still receive. Other breakthroughs include new treatments for premature infants and children with birth defects. About 4 million babies are born each year in the United States, and all have benefitted from the March of Dimes life saving research and education.

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With chapters nationwide, the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. For the latest resources and information, visit [marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com) or [nacersano.org](http://nacersano.org). Find us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

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