

Helping Parents Help Their Preemie

By Amy Bentley



Dr. Christine E. Bixby
CHOC Neonatologist

Dr. Bixby completed her fellowship in neonatology at Harbor UCLA Medical Center and also completed her residency and internship training in pediatrics at Harbor UCLA Medical Center. She completed a fellowship in neonatology in a joint program between CHOC and Harbor UCLA Medical Center. Dr. Bixby specializes in caring for premature infants and is involved in research studies focusing on issues related to breast milk, establishing a milk supply and using breast milk for premature babies.

Dr. Bixby's philosophy of care: "My philosophy of care is to bring in the parents and family as part of the health care team and making sure they are educated and comfortable with the care we are giving their children."

EDUCATION:

University of California, Davis,
School of Medicine

BOARD CERTIFICATIONS:

Pediatrics Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine

\$26 Billion+

ANNUAL COST TO SOCIETY FOR
PREMATURE BIRTHS

36

PERCENT INCREASE
OVER THE LAST 25
YEARS IN PREMATURE
BIRTHS IN THE U.S.



HELPING PREMIES GROW

A premature or preterm baby is born before 37 weeks of gestation. Premies often require hospitalization but mom can help her preemie from day one, says Dr. Bixby, a CHOC Neonatologist. "Early on, the best way for a preemie to grow is with the mother's milk. Moms can start pumping in the hospital and should start pumping as soon as possible after delivery. We also have found that having the parents place the infant on their chests, skin to skin (called "kangaroo care") helps the baby grow, breathe better and develop better." Parents should ask their neonatologist and pediatrician about medical issues to watch for as their preemie grows. Keeping up with standard vaccinations and special vaccinations for premies is also important, says Dr. Bixby. Parents should also keep up with their vaccinations, particularly influenza and pertussis vaccines, which will protect the baby until the babies immune system has matured and the standard vaccines are completed.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

"Premature infants are at risk for developmental delays so parents should be watchful of the developmental milestones, taking into account the appropriate delay from an early birth," says Dr. Bixby. Premies visit CHOC's Early Developmental Assessment Clinic at 6 months of age for a full assessment of the baby's development and nutritional needs and a referral to the appropriate specialist if necessary, she said, adding, "Parents and families should create a loving and engaging home environment so the baby is encouraged to move around and reach for things and interact with the world and learn."

PREVENTING PRETERM DELIVERY

Pregnant women are encouraged to seek prenatal care as soon as possible to help prevent a premature delivery and to identify any potential problems that could lead to a preterm birth, says Dr. Bixby. "Pregnant women should see their family practice doctor or obstetrician regularly and get a referral to a specialist if there are concerns about the pregnancy. Good dental care helps too. Research shows that dental disease or poor dentition is associated with preterm delivery. Mom should take care of herself, get some exercise in consultation with your obstetrician and eat well."

500,000

NUMBER OF PREMATURE BABIES
BORN EACH YEAR IN THE U.S.
(1 IN 9 BABIES)



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for Neonatology**

Recognized as one of the leading neonatology programs in the nation, CHOC Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) combines the latest in life-saving technology and trained neonatal specialists to provide care for the tiniest patients — most often premature babies suffering from respiratory and circulatory problems. Our team is committed to providing family-centered care and is dedicated to listening to and honoring each family's perspectives, choices, values and culture.

**Learn more at
choc.org/NICU**

