

Preterm labor is labor occurring between 24th and 37th week of gestation. It is characterized by cervical effacement and/or dilatation, and increased uterine irritation. It is the leading cause of perinatal mortality and morbidity in the western world. In addition it is associated with massive neonatal and lifetime medical support costs.

It is important to discriminate between spontaneous preterm labor and iatrogenic/therapeutic preterm delivery. It is estimated that spontaneous preterm labor in otherwise uncomplicated singleton pregnancies accounts for about one third to one half of all preterm deliveries.

Among premature newborns who survive, up to 5% have significant handicaps. Long-term sequelae include concentration problems in school, visual and hearing impairment, chronic lung disease, developmental delay, and cerebral palsy. The rate of preterm delivery has increased in recent years.