

## Extremely premature children at high risk of learning difficulties by age 11

Children born extremely prematurely are at high risk of developing learning difficulties by the time they reach the age of 11. A study carried out by the University of Warwick, in collaboration with University College London and the University of Nottingham, showed almost two thirds of children born below 26 weeks' gestation require additional support at school.

Researchers looked at 307 extremely preterm children born in the UK and Ireland in 1995. Of these, 219 were reassessed at 11 years of age and compared

with 153 classmates born at term.

This study, published in *Archives of Disease in Childhood Fetal Neonatal Edition*, is the latest report from the EPICure study group. This group has produced two previous papers examining the children at aged two-and-a-half and six years old.

Overall, just under half of the extremely premature children have serious disabilities, such as learning difficulties, cerebral palsy and impaired vision or hearing.

Professor Dieter Wolke from Warwick

Medical School said extremely premature birth placed children at higher risk for cognitive and learning deficits affecting their schooling. He said: "We found up to 44% of children had a serious impairment in core subjects such as reading and maths, and 50% had performance below the average range expected for their age. Extremely pre-term children have a 13-fold increased risk of special educational needs requiring additional learning support and were 77 times more likely to have an educational statement at 11 years of age."



## Bliss teams up with the National Blood Service

Bliss and the National Blood Service (NBS) have launched a partnership to raise awareness of the importance of life saving blood donations for sick and premature babies. A vital part of treatment for many premature and sick babies is blood and platelet transfusions that are collected by the NBS.

Bliss will be distributing a poster produced by NBS to neonatal units, encouraging people to become blood or platelet donors.

As mother Pam Richardson says: "My twin girls were born 13 weeks early and each received two units of blood shortly after birth. Had it not been for those anonymous generous donors, they would not have survived."

NBS helpline 0845 7711 711/0300 123 23 23 or [www.blood.co.uk](http://www.blood.co.uk)

## Research boost for health practitioners in the south

A free service has been launched in the south to aid those working in health and social services apply for research funding. It will help people with research ideas and aspirations become more successful in obtaining money from funding bodies.

The £5 million Research Design Service (RDS) is designed to improve patient care in the NHS by developing new and better treatment and services.

A key part of the service will be to encourage public involvement in research. It will set up a network of public and patient groups interested in becoming involved in research and help researchers to link up with them.

The RDS is run by a team of researchers from the universities of Portsmouth, Southampton, Oxford and Reading, with expertise in statistics, epidemiology, clinical trials, evaluations, qualitative approaches and health economics.

Professor Tara Dean from the University of Portsmouth said: "Our experts can help put together a professional funding application which will have the best chance

of success. The key message to anyone with a good research proposal is that there is money available and there are people here who can help you get it."

The aim of the RDS is to increase the number and proportion of high-quality funding applications for applied research relating to people and patient-focused health and social care. It will particularly benefit novice or less experienced researchers in developing strong bids.

The service is available to all NHS health and social care practitioners in the South Central Strategic Health Authority area and includes allied health professionals such as physiotherapists and dietitians.

The research Design Service South Central (RDSSC) team has also been awarded a further £100,000 from the Strategic Health Authority to extend the range of assistance it can offer.

For more information about the South Central RDS: [www.rdsu.soton.ac.uk](http://www.rdsu.soton.ac.uk) or contact the RDS Administrator on 02380 794778, [rds-sc@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rds-sc@soton.ac.uk)

## Nominations are open for Bliss birthday awards

Bliss, the special care baby charity, is 30 years old in 2009 and to celebrate it is holding a national awards ceremony to recognise and encourage the work of those who support premature and sick babies and their families. In association with Cow and Gate Baby Balance Food, the awards will also be an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of families and Bliss supporters.

Nominations are open from 15 April to 30 June 2009 and neonatal professionals are invited to tell Bliss about a colleague who is outstanding in the field or a family who have overcome exceptional challenges. The awards will take place on 18 November.

Categories include neonatal nurse, neonatal doctor, neonatal unit, special support (eg family member, friend, dietician, physiotherapist), family.

Make a nomination at [www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)

## Doula project receives Government funding

An award-winning doula service, which provides support to pregnant vulnerable women, has received £270,000 funding over three years from the Government to provide the service in eight more locations across the country.

Since it was started three years ago the Goodwin Volunteer Doula Service, based in the Fenchurch Street Children's Centre, Hull, has helped nearly 200 women and their children.

The service – operated through social charity the Goodwin Development Trust – trains volunteers to be doulas, or birthing partners, for women who have inadequate support in the later stages of pregnancy, birth and for six weeks postnatally.

Secretary of State for Health Alan Johnson said: "The DH recognises that the pioneering work started in Hull with volunteer doulas has excellent potential to be developed in other areas of the country."

Project manager Heather Barnes said the service has trained 64 volunteers who have had a tremendous impact on the lives of Hull women.



Alan Johnson with the Goodwin Doula team.

She said: "The dedication that volunteers give has been outstanding. Volunteer doulas aim to ensure a positive birth experience and help with breastfeeding."

The service was recognised last year when it won a national award for Maternity Services in Isolated Communities.

Goodwin are inviting organisations across the country to work with them to replicate the project in other areas and a conference will be held in Hull this summer to identify those locations.

**Further information at**  
[www.goodwindoulas.org](http://www.goodwindoulas.org) or contact  
 Heather Barnes on 01482 497811



## Philips AVENT to reward breastfeeding research

Philips AVENT has launched the search for outstanding research by healthcare professionals for which it is awarding €30,000 in prizes.

The first global Philips AVENT Breastfeeding Research Prize rewards outstanding research in the promotion, protection and encouragement of breastfeeding in two areas:

- Research in the social and practical aspects of breastfeeding
- Clinical research in the field of breastfeeding (evidence-based).

A prize of €15,000 will be awarded for the winning research in each category. Research submissions must be drawn from papers published in the last five years and all submissions must be received by 30 June 2009. Prizes will be presented in Berlin at the 9th World Congress of Perinatal Medicine from 24-28 October 2009.

**If you are interested in entering, email**  
[philipsaventworldprize@philips.com](mailto:philipsaventworldprize@philips.com)

## Royal College of Midwives calls all maternity support workers

Maternity support workers can now become members of the Royal College of Midwives. Membership will also be open to all health workers whose role is to support the work of the midwife in the care of childbearing women, the newborn and their family, employed in a role which supports midwives in the workplace.

The College will be offering professional support and resources and will campaign for them on issues such as pay, conditions and training.

[www.rcm.org.uk](http://www.rcm.org.uk)

## Cot death DVD targets teenage mums

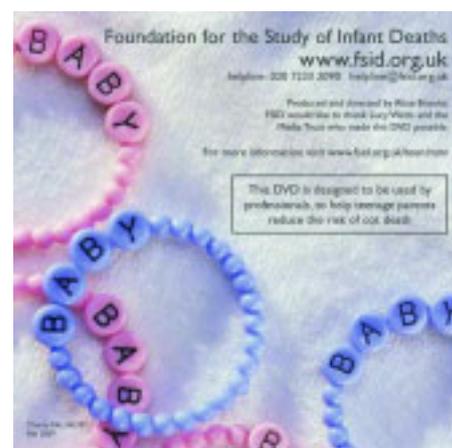
The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID) has released a DVD to promote safe sleep advice to parents whose babies are at greatest risk of cot death.

*Losing Leah – Don't Let it Happen to You* shows the tragic consequences of drinking, smoking and sharing a bed with a baby and will be given to professionals targeting vulnerable teenage parents.

The film is also online at  
[www.fsid.org.uk/dvd09.html](http://www.fsid.org.uk/dvd09.html)

Every year more than 300 apparently healthy babies die suddenly and unexpectedly in the UK. Statistics show that nearly three-quarters of deaths occur among disadvantaged families. Babies of teenage mums in particular are at risk.

FSID was able to make the film,



produced and directed by Alice Brooks, after winning a Media Trust Volunteer Films competition.

It includes powerful interview footage of Lucy Watts, whose son Curtis died as a cot death when she was just 19 years old.