World Prematurity Day 2026 on 15 Nov: focus on follow-up care

Topics: Important Days · UPSC Prelims · TNPSC · SSC · Current Affairs



News

World Prematurity Day was observed on 17 November until now; from 2026 the World Health Organization (WHO) has moved it to 15 November. The change avoids an overlap with other WHO-mandated World Days – 17 November is now World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day. The 2026 theme: 'Small babies, big potential. Invest in follow-up care to protect their future!' The message is that care does not end when a baby leaves the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU); every preterm baby needs a follow-up package of developmental assessment, parental support and specialist services. In May 2025 the 78th World Health Assembly endorsed the day as an official WHO global health campaign. About 15 million babies (1 in 10) are born preterm each year worldwide, and complications of preterm birth are the leading cause of death among children under five.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	15 November (from 2026; earlier 17 November)
2026 theme	'Small babies, big potential. Invest in follow-up care to protect their future!'
Began	2008 – European parent groups (EFCNI); global since 2011
WHO recognition	78th World Health Assembly, May 2025
Definition	Live birth before 37 completed weeks

Point	Details
Global burden	~15 million a year (1 in 10)
India	3.02 million in 2020 – world's highest (over 20%; Lancet 2023)
Symbol colour	Purple
Key intervention	Kangaroo Mother Care – cuts newborn deaths by over 30%

Background

- History: In 2008 European parent organisations (including the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants – EFCNI) began the first awareness day; from 2011 it spread worldwide as 'World Prematurity Day'. WHO first marked it officially on 17 November 2025 ('a strong start for preterm babies'). From 2026 it sits on WHO's calendar on 15 November.
- Science: Below 28 weeks is extremely preterm, 28–32 very preterm and 32–37 moderate/late preterm. Key complications are breathing trouble from lack of lung 'surfactant' (RDS), hypothermia, infection, jaundice and retinal damage (ROP). 'Kangaroo Mother Care' – skin-to-skin contact on the mother's chest with exclusive breastfeeding – devised by Dr Edgar Rey in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1978, is now WHO's 'universal clinical practice for all small and preterm babies'; WHO says it is associated with a more than 30% reduction in newborn deaths (14 Nov 2025).
- India: A study by WHO, UNICEF and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 'The Lancet' (2023) estimated 13.4 million preterm births worldwide in 2020; India had 3.02 million – the highest of any country (rate 13%), followed by Pakistan, Nigeria and China. Nearly one million babies died from its complications that year. India's Newborn Action Plan (INAP), launched in September 2014, aims at single-digit neonatal mortality and stillbirth rates by 2030.

Tamil Nadu link: The first human milk bank in a Tamil Nadu government hospital opened in 2014 at the Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children (ICH), Egmore, Chennai; in August 2015 seven more were opened – at Tiruchirappalli, Madurai, Coimbatore, Theni, Salem, Thanjavur and the Government Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (IOG), Egmore. Government hospitals also offer kangaroo care for preterm babies. DT Next reported ICH doctors as saying Tamil Nadu's preterm rate is similar to the national rate.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

World Prematurity Day was observed on 17 November until now; from 2026 the World Health Organization (WHO) has moved it to 15 November. The change avoids an overlap with other WHO-mandated World Days – 17 November is now World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day. The 2026 theme: 'Small babies, big potential.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: 15 November (from 2026; earlier 17 November); 2026 theme: 'Small babies, big potential. Invest in follow-up care to protect their future!'; Began: 2008 – European parent groups (EFCNI); global since 2011; WHO recognition: 78th World Health Assembly, May 2025.

What is the background to this news?

History: In 2008 European parent organisations (including the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants – EFCNI) began the first awareness day; from 2011 it spread worldwide as 'World Prematurity Day'.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. As defined by WHO, a live birth before how many completed weeks of pregnancy is called 'preterm'?

A) 28 weeks

B) 32 weeks

C) 34 weeks

D) 37 weeks

Answer: D – Explanation: 37 weeks. Below 28 is extremely preterm, 28–32 very preterm, and 32–37 moderate-to-late preterm.

2. 'Kangaroo Mother Care', skin-to-skin care for small babies, was first developed in 1978 in which country?

A) Colombia

B) Sweden

C) Australia

D) Brazil

Answer: A – Explanation: Colombia – Dr Edgar Rey in Bogotá, as an answer to scarce incubators. WHO says it cuts newborn deaths by over 30%.

3. Phototherapy for newborn jaundice, common in preterm babies, mainly uses light of which colour?

A) Red

B) Blue

C) Infrared

D) Yellow

Answer: B – Explanation: Blue light – it turns bilirubin in the skin into water-soluble forms that the body excretes. Immature livers make jaundice common in preterm babies.

4. Breathing distress (RDS) in preterm babies is mainly due to immature lungs lacking which substance?

A) Haemoglobin

B) Mucus

C) Bilirubin

D) Surfactant

Answer: D – Explanation: Surfactant – it lowers surface tension so the air sacs do not collapse. Corticosteroid shots to mothers at risk of preterm birth speed up its production.

5. TN's first government-hospital human milk bank, for preterm and sick newborns, opened in 2014 at which Chennai hospital?

A) Stanley Hospital

B) Kilpauk Hospital

C) ICH, Egmore

D) RGGGH

Answer: C – Explanation: Institute of Child Health (ICH), Egmore – Feb 2014. Seven more opened in 2015, including at Tiruchi, Madurai and Coimbatore.

Sources: WHO – World Prematurity Day 2026 campaign – who.int/campaigns/world-prematurity-day; WHO news, 28 May 2025 & 14 Nov 2025 – who.int; PAHO – paho.org/en/campaigns/world-prematurity-day-2026; WHO news release, 6 Oct 2023 – who.int, and The Lancet (Ohuma et al., 2023) – preterm-birth estimates; Deccan Chronicle, 5 Oct 2014 – deccanchronicle.com; Deccan Herald / Deccan Chronicle, 4 Aug 2015 – TN milk banks; DT Next ('Born too soon') – dtnext.in; UCL – Kangaroo care: a short history – ucl.ac.uk. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.