

When a person goes into labour before 37 weeks, this is known as spontaneous preterm labour. The earlier a pēpi (baby) is born, the higher the risk of complications. Although it may not be possible to stop all early births, there are things that can be done to help babies survive and be healthy, depending how early they are born.

If you go into labour or your waters break at any time, you should come to hospital. Spontaneous preterm labour may happen suddenly without any risk factors and so it is important to understand the signs and symptoms of preterm labour.

What are the signs of spontaneous preterm labour?

- Puku/tummy/abdominal or lower back pain. It may feel like period pain, or come and go at regular intervals (contractions). Even if it's mild, any pain or tightening must be taken seriously.
- Bleeding from your vagina
- Watery fluid from your vagina
- Increase in mucous discharge from your vagina

If you experience any of these signs, contact your midwife or doctor as soon as you can.

Going into labour before 22 weeks

Pēpi born very early (before 22 weeks) are sadly too young to survive. If your pēpi is born before 22 weeks, the staff caring for you will look after you during the birth of your pēpi and provide comfort care whilst your pēpi passes away, or if is stillborn.

Going into labour between 22 and 23 weeks

Between 22 and 23 weeks, pēpi are still too young to survive. However, if you go into labour at this time, input from the maternity and newborn teams is important. There may be treatment options you can choose that could increase the chance of survival for your pēpi.

I have reached 23 weeks pregnant - what happens now?

Even at this stage, there are many issues that can occur for your pēpi. It is not an easy journey. Very few pēpi born at 23 weeks are able to survive. However, each day after 23 weeks, your pēpi is developing and its chances of survival increase. The maternity and newborn teams will talk with you about what to expect and what treatment choices are available to increase the chance of your pēpi's survival.

Further information

Some helpful resources are available for parents online here:

[Parent Information and Decision Aid.pdf](#)

The hospital team and your LMC are here to support and guide you. Whānau are very important at this difficult time and you are welcome to have them with you for support.

There is other support we can provide, including kaiatawhai/kaumatua, religious/spiritual support, social workers, physiotherapists and psychologists. Please talk with the hospital teams or your LMC if you need any of these people involved.