



Multiple Births  
Naissances multiples  
C A N A D A

## National Multiple Births Awareness Day! May 28th



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*Supporting  
Multiple Births  
Together*

# Backgrounder

## Why celebrate National Multiple Births Awareness Day?

Established in 2005 by Multiple Births Canada, National Multiple Births Awareness Day is designated as the day for raising national awareness of the unique issues faced by multiple-birth individuals and their families. The date of May 28<sup>th</sup> is symbolic as it is the birth date of the Dionne quintuplets, who helped Canadians to better understand the challenges faced by Canada's multiple-birth community.

## What is the theme for 2010?

The 2010 National Multiple Births Awareness Day theme is: "Canada's EI Parental Leave must reflect the needs of multiple-birth infants."

## What is the intent of Parental Leave?

Parental leave is designed to provide either or both parents with time to spend with their newborns. For the mother, parental leave provisions commonly stipulate that the leave be taken immediately after maternity leave, thereby extending the total leave period. For the second parent, parental leave provisions allow time off to care for the newborn. During their parental leave, eligible employees may receive 35 weeks of Employment Insurance parental benefits.

## Why should the EI Parental Leave provide additional leave time for parents of multiple births?

The positive outcome of additional leave time for parents of multiples is:

- **Mothers have better support during pregnancy complications** - with a second parent at home, mothers have more time to rest and recover.
- **Parents can better focus on short or long term health problems of the infants** - with both parents home, or more weeks of leave, parents have more time to care for infants in hospital and at home, to attend many medical appointments or therapies, or to grieve the loss of one or more babies.
- **Primary caregiver is better equipped to handle physical and emotional stress** - with a second parent at home, or more weeks with of leave, the parents can take shifts more easily and be less sleep deprived and less exhausted. They have more time to breastfeed, to bond with each baby individually, and to spend one-on-one time with each baby attending to their needs and promoting healthy development.
- **Parents can focus on their babies, not their financial challenges** - with longer paid parental leave, families will have less urgency to return to work, more financial resources to meet the increased costs of two or more babies, and more flexibility to work when it best meets their needs. Also there will be less need to seek daycare for the infants, which is difficult to find and extremely expensive for twins or more.
- **Babies will have better (quality and quantity) bonding time with parents** - parents will be provided with more opportunities to interact individually with their children, accomplishing the strong best start outcome desired from Canada's EI Parental Leave benefit.

# Needs of Multiple Birth Infants

Compared to parents with a single baby, parents who give birth to two, three or more babies need more time at home for the following reasons:

1. Since mothers of multiples are more likely to have bedrest, a Caesarean delivery and other **pregnancy complications**, they experience delayed recovery, and difficulty in holding, carrying and caring for infants.



2. Over half of all multiple-birth infants are born early and/or too small, are more vulnerable and at greater risk of infant death, and have **short and long term health problems**. In particular:

- Many require extended neonatal hospital care;
  - Premature babies require more frequent feedings and vigilant care;
  - Developmental delays and Cerebral Palsy are common and may require parents to commit to intensive and ongoing involvement in therapies throughout the first few years;
- Multiples have an increased risk of congenital anomalies, monozygotic twins in particular;
    - When a major defect occurs in monozygotic twins, 80 percent of the time, only one child is affected. Again, the bonding and attachment processes are further challenged by the complex parental attitudes that accompany these discrepancies.
  - Stillbirths and infant deaths are nearly five times greater. Parents experiencing this anguish need extra time to grieve for their lost baby(ies) and yet cope with caring for the survivors and managing the home;
  - When one or more of the babies need prolonged hospitalization while the healthier multiple(s) is released from the hospital, it adds stress for the parents if they need to travel back and forth to a hospital (sometimes hundreds of miles away) to visit sick baby(ies) and at the same time care for the baby(ies) and/or other siblings at home. This situation can have a negative impact on both the breastfeeding and attachment processes.
  - Low and discrepant birth weights between multiples can compound the parental perceptions and attitudes that influence the bonding and attachment processes. The maternal and paternal emotional attachment process takes longer and is more complex.

“It is the quality of parenting and interaction that influences the physical, cognitive, language and social-emotional outcomes for the children. If the infants are in a less stimulating and responsive environment than a singleton infant, this is of concern. One often sees this when the mother of multiples is left on her own—she is focused on getting the unrelenting amount of “work” done, doesn’t get enough rest, is trying to recover from the pregnancy and delivery, and lacks energy to initiate interactions with her babies or respond to their developmental needs. Research supports these observations (e.g. Olivenness, 2005; Ostfeld, 2000; Thorpe, 2003).”

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3. **Physical and emotional stress** due to the demands of caring for the babies, other siblings (if any), and running the household:

- Without additional support, it is very difficult for parents with triplets (or more) to hold and **transport** several babies at the same time;
- Many mothers suffer from **sleep deprivation**, but still maintain an unrelenting workload, unless outside help is acquired;
- Mothers of multiples require informed, sufficient and sustained **support to breastfeed** their infants successfully;
- Parents must **divide their attention** between two (or more) children with similar developmental needs, which is likely to affect the quantity and quality of interactions experienced by each infant;
- Daycare vacancies are difficult to find; often parents are forced to separate their babies to ensure daycare placement until they reach the more mature age of 18-24 months (as controlled by provincial regulations).



4. Parents often face a **financial dilemma** – they assume extraordinary financial commitments yet if they return to the paid labour force, suitable childcare for two or more babies can be very expensive and difficult to find. For instance:

- Purchasing **special equipment** such as strollers;
- A **larger vehicle** to accommodate several infant car seats safely within the law;
- A larger home or renovations may be needed;
- Compared to the first year costs of basic infant needs for a single baby, expenses are \$5,000.00 higher for twins, \$10,000.00 higher for triplets, and \$17,000.00 higher for quadruplets;
- Consistent **volunteer help** is difficult to find. To purchase additional in-home support services can cost as much as \$7,000.00 for the first year;
- Daycare costs (without subsidies) for one set of twins under the age 2 is approximately \$10,000.00 per year.

5. Due to the combined physical, emotional and financial stress associated with parenting 2, 3 or more babies, families with multiple-birth children are at **higher risk** (compared to that of singletons) of:

- Family dysfunction and child abuse
- Post Partum Depression

***“Creation of healthy public policies must recognize the need for and benefits of additional supports for multiple-birth families. Programming must address barriers to supports and services for multiple-birth families including lack of services, long waiting lists for services, and the need for service coordination.”***

*Low Birth Weight & Preterm  
Multiple Births: A Canadian Profile  
Best Start – Meilleur Départ 2005*

# About Multiple Births Canada

Multiple Births Canada (MBC) was originally formed as Parents of Multiple Births Association {POMBA} Canada in 1978, and was restructured as Multiple Births Canada in 2001. It is the only national support organization for multiple-birth families and individuals. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for multiple-birth individuals and their families in Canada, which we do by providing support, education, research, and advocacy to individuals, families, chapters, and organizations with a personal or professional interest in multiple-birth issues.

MBC's dedicated volunteers work on behalf of Canada's multiple-birth community by:

- Improving the support networks and services available to multiple-birth individuals and their families across the country.
- Producing educational and informative publications, including a quarterly magazine *Multiple Moments*, a quarterly newsletter *Report From National*, and a wide variety of relevant booklets, pamphlets, and fact sheets
- Promoting stronger relationships between parents of multiples and professionals involved or interested in multiple-births issues (e.g., doctors, nurses, midwives, doulas, educators, researchers). This ensures that professionals are aware of the unique needs and concerns of multiple-birth families.
- Representing the Canadian multiple-birth community at national and international conferences, and in research, health promotion, and other related initiatives. These activities help raise awareness of multiple-birth issues and help to ensure that the needs and concerns of Canadian multiple-birth families are taken into account by researchers, government officials, and other professionals.
- Networking with other national organizations (e.g., the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, the Canadian Institute of Child Health, the Canadian Health Network, and Infertility Awareness Association of Canada) to promote multiple-birth issues within Canada. These organizations look to Multiple Births Canada to represent the Canadian multiple-birth community and provide input on key policies, programs, and proposals impacting multiple-birth families.
- Collaborating with international organizations such as the International Society for Twin Studies (ISTS), the International Council of Multiple Birth Organizations (COMBO), and the Twins and Multiples Births Association to promote multiple-birth issues on the international stage. Such collaboration resulted in the often-cited *Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher Order Multiples*.
- Consulting professionals who support multiple-birth families (e.g., physicians, nurses, prenatal instructors, educators, bereavement counselors) to ensure that the best and most up-to-date care is provided to all multiple-birth families.
- Advising local and national media on multiple-birth issues to ensure that the interests and concerns of multiple-birth families are accurately conveyed.
- Working with government agencies to enhance services, supports, and opportunities for multiple-birth individuals and their families.
- Sharing information and research findings with members through publications, emailed information circulars, the MBC website, and at MBC's Annual General Meeting and Conference.
- Supporting the work of MBC Chapters across Canada.