

This Just In...

The latest parenting news, research,
and health tips from our experts

An Early Spring

A recent study by the University of Pittsburgh reports that women who become pregnant during the spring season are more likely to deliver prematurely. "Preterm birth is a complex condition, and risk factors can change with the seasons," says Dr. Lisa Bodnar, assistant professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health and a co-author of the study. Giving birth prematurely (before the 37th week of gestation) happens to about 12 percent of pregnancies in the United States, which adds up to more than 500,000 a year. That's an increase of more than 30 percent since 1981.

Solving the Mystery of SIDS

Researchers have come one step closer to solving the heartbreaking mystery of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), the unexplained and unexpected death of a baby.

SIDS is the nation's leading cause of death for babies between 1 month and 1 year old. It claims the lives of nearly 3,000 infants in the United States each year, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Infants who die of SIDS have abnormalities in the brainstem, a part of the brain that helps control heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, temperature, and arousal, reported researchers funded by the NIH.

"These findings provide evidence that SIDS is not a mystery but a disorder that we can investigate with scientific methods, and some day, may be able to identify and treat," says Dr. Hannah Kinney, the senior author.

The study appeared in a recent edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. It was conducted by researchers led by Dr. Kinney at Children's Hospital Boston and Harvard Medical School, as well as at other institutions.



Just for Kicks

A study published in the February issue of *The American Journal of Sports Medicine* tracked nearly 1.6 million soccer injuries from emergency room reports around the country. It is the first nationwide analysis of soccer injuries among children ages 2 to 18.

The number of injuries among girls grew during the 13-year period studied. The most common were sprained ankles, knee injuries, scrapes and bruises, and fractures.

On the other hand, boys were more likely to have face, head, and neck injuries, as well as cuts and punctures. Children 2 to 4 years old had a higher proportion of head, neck, and face injuries than the older children in the survey.

With more children playing soccer, the true injury rate may actually be going down. The study concluded that children need adult guidance to prevent severe injury. It also called for tracking injury risks by setting up a national database to track soccer participation and injuries.

Researchers from Children's Research and Ohio State University's Department of Pediatrics, both in Columbus, Ohio, conducted the study. The mean (average) age of children was 13.2 years, and boys made up 58.6 percent of the study.

Sparky to the Rescue

Natural disasters disrupt the lives of thousands of families each year — it's just a fact of life. But if you are concerned that your children would not know what to do in a crisis, check out the new online game "Look and Learn," compliments of the National Fire Protection Association (www.riskwatch.org/kids.html#).

The game teaches children about the importance of being prepared for an emergency by showing them items that should be included in an emergency supplies kit. Led by Sparky, the NFPA's official spokes-dog, players visit six different scenes as they help the pooch find hidden items for his emergency supplies kit. Players try to locate emergency staples such as flashlights, batteries, extra clothing, a whistle, canned food, and other necessities.

After finding all of the supplies in each section of the game, children will be able to download and print out a checklist that they can use to make their own emergency supplies kit.

"Look and Learn" is part of the NFPA's Risk Watch, a comprehensive injury prevention and disaster preparation program that gives children and their families the skills and knowledge to create safer homes and communities.

The game is most appropriate for children in kindergarten through second grade. In addition, the Web site (www.sparky.org) offers lots of other fun and educational activities, including Sparky's Arcade and a Sparky e-greeting. There is no advertising on the kids' section of the site.



Model Misbehavior

Young women are putting their physical and mental health at risk by following the extreme eating habits of modern magazine models who appear in publications featuring dieting and weight loss, according to new research.

Researchers found that the more frequently teenage girls read magazines about dieting and weight loss, the more likely they were to engage in unhealthy eating habits. The findings came from a five-year study by the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota and were published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

The study charted the eating, activity, weight, and related issues in 2,516 middle and high-school students. Girls who often read magazines about dieting were twice as likely to engage in "unhealthy weight-control behavior," such as fasting, skipping meals, and smoking, than those who did not read them.

The group at highest risk was made up of girls who read the most articles about dieting and weight loss. They were three times more likely to engage in extreme behaviors, such as self-induced vomiting or using laxatives, than those who never read the same type of articles.

Researchers recommend that adults should reduce their daughters' exposure to dieting and weight loss messages in the media, and find ways to reduce the emphasis on those messages when they see them.

By contrast, teenage boys did not exhibit the same psychological associations or effects, according to the study.

Breast is Still Best

The number of Americans who wrongly believe that "infant formula is as good as breast milk" has increased from 14.3 percent in 1999 to 25.7 percent in 2003, according to a new study.

"The findings underscore the need to educate the general public that breastfeeding is the best method of feeding and nurturing infants," concludes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Dr. Rowe Li and colleagues in the January issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.

The nationwide HealthStyles survey is conducted annually by the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center's Hollywood, Health & Society project and funded by the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and partnering agencies.