

Baby facts: Free text messaging sends new and expectant moms health tips

by Jaclyn Gray May 20, 2011



Ultrasound image courtesy of Jaclyn Gray/MEDILL

'Text4baby' supports the health of mothers and babies, both before and after birth.

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'Text4baby' is the nation's first free text messaging service that provides women with health tips via text messages during their pregnancy and throughout their babies' first year of life.

The short, simple texts provide critical information about prenatal care, nutrition, breast feeding, immunizations, safety and more and supply 800-numbers where users can get help with things like finding a doctor, quitting smoking or buying an inexpensive crib.

"Your baby will be here soon, & it's time to get a car seat. The hospital won't let you leave by car or taxi without one." "Premature babies need extra help with breastfeeding. Even if your baby can't breastfeed at first, she can still be fed your pumped milk." These are sample messages from text4baby.

The National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition launched the service in partnership with numerous organizations. Partners include Johnson & Johnson and Voxiva, many of the nation's wireless service providers and U.S. government agencies.

More than half a million babies are born prematurely in the U.S. each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That fact was a key reason for launching the site, according to Arlene Remick, director of education for the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition.

Ashley Walton, 22, of Chicago said the messages she received helped ease some of the worries she and many pregnant women and new moms face.

"I got a few texts about breastfeeding and learned how much it can help my baby," said Walton who gave birth to a baby girl in April. "I talked about it with my doctor and ended up breastfeeding and pumping for almost a year after she was born."

To ensure scientific accuracy, text4baby.org states that all the information and content in the messages are reviewed by several organizations and private healthcare professionals, including the CDC, the Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Remick stated via email that the power of text4baby lies in its ability to get the most essential health information to mothers quickly and easily using a technology they regularly use and rely on: a cell phone.

"Cell phones represent a much greater, yet still largely untapped, tool for improving individuals' health," stated Remick. "However, research has shown that mobile health applications can help people stay healthier."

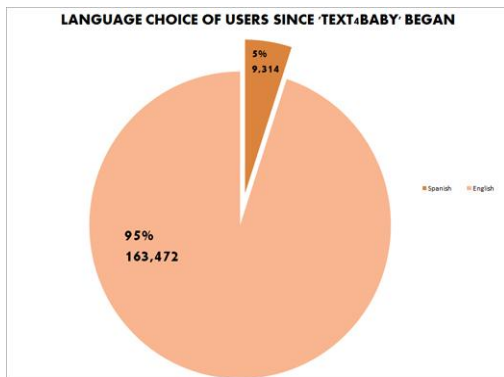
More than 85 percent of Americans own a cell phone and 72 percent send and receive text messages so text4baby literally puts information right into the hands of moms and moms-to-be.

Registration for the text4baby is simple. Send the message, 'BABY' or 'BEBE' for Spanish speakers, to 511411 and you'll be prompted to enter your estimated due date or, if you've already delivered, your baby's birthday. Then and until your baby is a year old, you'll receive up to three messages a week. Users can stop the messages at any time by simply texting STOP to the same number.

Remick said text4baby has enrolled 170,000 users since it launched in 2010. In an effort to enroll more than 1 million users by December 2012, text4baby partners have created a state enrollment contest.

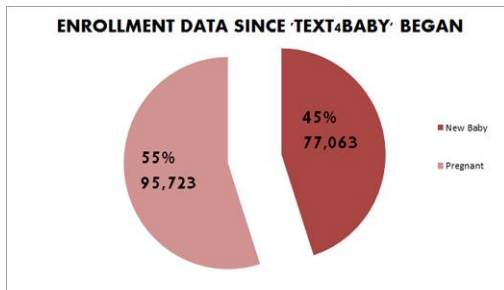
"The contest is an exciting opportunity to build on the momentum of enrollment, capture the spirit of over 500 Outreach Partners and reach as many users as possible through healthy competition," said Remick.

Each state has from May 10 through December 20 of this year to enroll as many women as possible. The top three states will win a sponsored luncheon and press conference for partners in their state.



Data from text4baby.org. Graph by Jaclyn Gray/MEDILL

'Text4baby' text messages can be sent in English or Spanish.



Data from text4baby.org. Graph by Jaclyn Gray/MEDILL

'Text4baby' text messages offer information for both pregnant women and new moms.