

Asthma drug that may prevent the onset of preterm birth goes on trial

- *First potential new treatment in 50 years that could help delay the onset of preterm labour*
- *15 million babies worldwide are born too soon every year; resulting in 1 million deaths*
- *Medical research into preterm birth is significantly under-funded say experts*
- *Keeping preterm babies in the womb for just one more week could save the NHS > £260 million p.a.*

London, 17 November 2017: A clinical trial with the aim of delaying the onset of premature labour is set to start this month. Funded by preterm birth charity Borne and children's charity Action Medical Research, this exciting new trial will be using a first-line medicine prescribed by the NHS for the treatment of asthma, in combination with progesterone, to delay the onset of premature labour.

Led by Borne's Founder Professor Mark Johnson, who is an Imperial College Professor of Obstetrics at the Chelsea & Westminster Hospital where the clinical trial will be conducted, the study will assess the efficacy of combining aminophylline, a smooth muscle relaxant and anti-inflammatory, with the hormone progesterone as a treatment administered to women who are at high risk of early labour.

"Aminophylline has already been used widely to treat asthma during pregnancy and to help with breathing in very premature babies," said **Professor Johnson**. "Our laboratory work is very exciting, showing that the combination of progesterone and aminophylline works better than either agent alone, suggesting that this approach has the potential to prevent the onset of preterm labour.

"Importantly, as we are repurposing an existing, readily available drug. If we find that aminophylline is effective in preventing preterm labour, then it could be made available more quickly following clinical trials," he added.

The initial trial will be conducted on 70 women who are at high risk of preterm labour. Half of the women will be given the combination treatment (progesterone with aminophylline) to observe their tolerance of this, while the others will be prescribed progesterone only. With no new effective treatments to stop the onset of preterm labour arriving in the last 50 years, this new drug combination to enhance the ability of progesterone to prolong pregnancy could be a major breakthrough for women at risk of delivering early.

Julie Buckler, Chief Executive of Action Medical Research, said: "This trial is a potential turning point in our quest to better understand premature birth and ultimately stop so many babies from being born too soon."

Around the world, 15 million babies are born too soon every year and more than 1 million die as a direct consequence. “Medical research into preterm birth is significantly under-funded, when compared with cancer and heart disease, and so much about what causes preterm birth remains unknown,” said **Borne’s Professor Johnson**. “Many survivors face childhood disabilities with lifelong implications – cerebral palsy, autism, asthma, deafness, blindness and learning difficulties. This is why Borne is committed to raising awareness of the cause, so that we can continue to invest in pioneering research,” he added.

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Notes to editors

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Additional sources:

RCOG fact sheet on preterm birth can be found [here](#)

World Health Organisation’s stats on preterm birth can be found [here](#)

The cost of preterm birth through childhood in England & Wales can be found [here](#)

Royal College of Midwives’ stats on the cost of preterm birth can be found [here](#)

For more stats and facts on preterm birth, please visit Borne’s website [here](#).

About Borne

Borne was founded in 2013 by Professor Mark Johnson to find solutions to preterm birth, the leading cause of infant mortality and childhood disability. Through research, we find interventions and treatments that can be translated into clinical solutions with global application. By addressing prematurity, we make a vital difference in reducing death and disability in childbirth, and creating lifelong health for mothers and babies. Our vision is a world in which a child’s first day on earth would not have to be their hardest. Through our pioneering research, we can make that vision a reality. For more information, visit www.borne.org.uk
Registered charity no. 1167073

About Action Medical Research

Action Medical Research is a leading UK-wide charity saving and changing children’s lives through medical research. For 65 years we’ve helped pioneer ways to prevent disease and develop treatments benefiting millions of people. Our research has helped to beat polio in the UK, develop ultrasound in pregnancy, fight meningitis and prevent stillbirths. But we urgently need to develop more new treatments and cures for sick babies and children and we can’t do it without you. Join our fight for little lives today. www.action.org.uk
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