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For immediate release

### **Breastfeeding and Breastmilk Critical for Preterm Infants**

**Morrisville, NC-** The United States Lactation Consultant Association (USLCA) joins the March of Dimes in recognizing November as the National Prematurity Awareness Month. The rate of preterm birth in the United States has increased 36 percent in the past 25 years. Children born prematurely have higher rates of disease, learning disabilities, cerebral palsy, sensory deficits, and respiratory illnesses compared to children born at term. These negative health and developmental outcomes of preterm birth often extend to later life, resulting in enormous medical, educational, psychological and social costs. Breastmilk is recognized as the ideal form of nutrition for all infants, especially those born preterm.

Research has shown that breastmilk offsets many of these negative health outcomes. It also protects extremely vulnerable infants from life-threatening conditions commonly seen in preterm infants such as necrotizing enterocolitis, infections, and pneumonia. Healthcare costs of these diseases and conditions can run into the thousands and hundreds of thousands dollars for each preterm birth.

USLCA reaffirms the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation that all preterm infants receive breastmilk as their source of nutrition. Breastmilk also functions as a unique form of medication, shielding susceptible preemies in a manner that conventional drugs cannot.

USLCA president, Laurie Beck, RN, MSN, IBCLC calls upon hospitals, physicians, and all other health care providers to recommend human milk for infants born preterm. "Breastfeeding and breastmilk form the foundation of both nutrition and disease protection for our most vulnerable infants. Breastfeeding education and support should be provided as early as possible to mothers of preterm infants," says Beck.

If a mother is unwilling or unable to provide her own milk, donor human milk is the next best choice. The use of donor milk has saved the lives and improved the health of countless premature and sick infants for many years. Human milk banks adhere to strict national guidelines from the Human Milk Banking Association of North America for quality and safety of the pasteurized milk they provide.

Knowledgeable professional breastfeeding support can be obtained from lactation consultants with the IBCLC credential (International Board Certified Lactation Consultant). To locate a lactation consultant to assist with breastfeeding or expressing milk go to <http://www.ilca.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3337>.

USLCA is the professional association of over 3700 lactation consultants and health professional dedicated to high quality support of breastfeeding.

*USLCA is a national affiliate of ILCA*