MULTIPLE PREGNANCY AND DELIVERY AFTER ART

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS FROM THE AFRICAN NETWORK AND REGISTRY FOR ART

Multiple pregnancy means being pregnant with twins, triplets, or even more babies. Worldwide, multiple pregnancies are the biggest safety risk of ART. In Africa, 1 in 4 deliveries after ART are multiple deliveries. Couples choosing ART often wish to have twins and the safe delivery of two healthy babies is for many a happy outcome of ART. But not all multiple pregnancies have good outcomes, because multiple pregnancies are far more risky for both the woman and her babies compared to a singleton pregnancy.

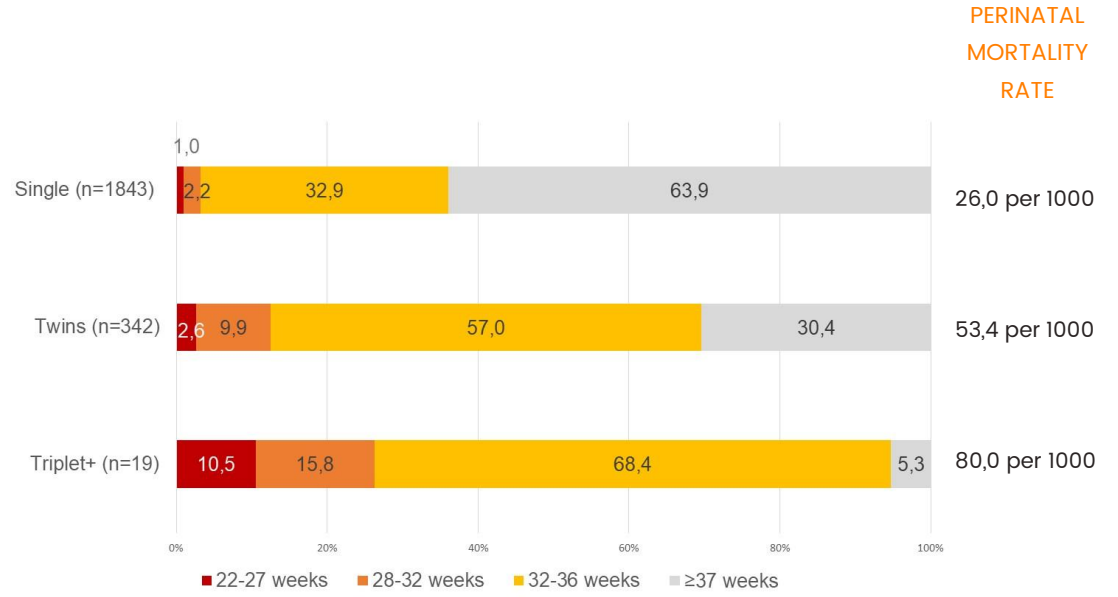
WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF MULTIPLE PREGNANCIES AND DELIVERIES?

There are many risks, and the more babies are in the womb, the bigger are the risks. For the mother, high blood pressure in pregnancy and bleeding before, during or after delivery are the most dangerous complications. At times they can even become life threatening. Some women may have to spend long periods of time in hospital. Other problems include babies not reaching their full growth in the womb or being born too early (preterm delivery). Babies born too early may require intensive hospital care, sometimes for long. They may also develop long-term health or developmental problems, or they may not be able to survive.

Gestational age at delivery is the number of weeks a baby has spent in the womb before being born. Babies born too early can be born preterm (after 32 weeks but before 37 weeks); very preterm (after 28 weeks but before 32 weeks) and extremely preterm (after 22 weeks but before 28 weeks). The earlier the baby is born, the more frequent and more severe are the complications affecting its health and ability to thrive.

FIGURE 1: Gestational age by type of delivery
(Source: African Registry for ART, 2024)

Data from the African Registry for ART show that in 2024, most twins (69,6%) and triplets (94,7%) were born too early (before 37 weeks). Compared to a singleton baby, twin babies were two times, and triplet babies were five times more likely to die before or soon after birth.



The Perinatal mortality rate is the number of stillbirths (dead born babies) and babies that die in the 1st week of life divided by 1000 born babies. Together with the rate of maternal mortality, the perinatal mortality rate is a very important indicator used all around the world to monitor the health and safety of pregnant women and their babies.

CAN RISK BE AVOIDED?

Most multiple pregnancies are avoidable, because they are the result of replacing more than one embryo into the womb. If only one embryo is transferred, the risk of getting twins is very, very small. Worldwide, many efforts are made to transfer fewer embryos to reduce the risk of multiple pregnancy and make ART safer.

WHAT ABOUT SINGLETON PREGNANCIES?

Singleton ART pregnancies and deliveries are much safer for women and babies than multiple pregnancies and deliveries. But even singleton pregnancies have more complications when compared to a singleton pregnancy without the use of ART. These complications include mainly early delivery and smaller growth of the baby. Because of theses risks all pregnancies after ART should be carefully managed.

This factsheet is brought to you by the African Network and Registry for ART (ANARA) in cooperation with the Latin American Registry of Assisted Reproduction (RLA) and Network (REDLARA). It is endorsed by the International Committee for Monitoring ART (ICMART), the African Federation of Fertility Societies (AFFS)*, and Groupe Interafricain d'Etude, de Recherche et d'Application sur la Fertilité (GIERAF)**.

This information does not replace individual medical advice of a qualified care provider in ART.