

World's smallest surviving baby is born

A baby weighing 285 grams at birth has been released from a Florence hospital, with doctors calling her good health a miracle and saying she was the tiniest baby known to have survived.

The girl, nicknamed "Pearl" by doctors and nurses at Florence's Careggi medical centre, was delivered by Caesarean section at the beginning of February, during the 27th week of pregnancy.

Doctors said that until this baby, the tiniest known baby to have survived, weighed 300 grams at birth in Japan in the 1990s.

The Italian baby's parents had requested that neither they nor the baby be identified in news reports.

"I was afraid of holding her," said Dr Margarita Psaraki, the baby's paediatrician at Careggi hospital. When the baby was born she was 25 centimetres long. But that's when she was stretched out. Normally babies curl up and then she would fit right into your hand," the doctor told Canale 5, a private TV network.

She now weighs two kilograms and is living at home near Florence with her parents, doctors told reporters at a news conference on Friday.

Firmino Rubaltelli, in charge of the medical team that cared for her, told reporters that her survival was a "true and proper miracle".

Doctors said the baby was delivered prematurely because the mother had developed a leg artery problem that carried the risk the woman's leg would have to be amputated.

Psaraki said that when the mother was about to give birth, doctors had expected the baby to weigh much more than she did and were surprised at how little she weighed.

"We said: 'Do we go on? And how do you go on?'" with her care, the paediatrician recalled.

Despite her tiny size, the girl always seemed strong and "she always behaved like a perfectly normal baby" while in the hospital, the paediatrician said.

Dr Firmino Rubaltelli, who led the medical team which cared for the baby, predicted that her chances of having a normal life are "nearly 100%".

"The child is healthy and in good shape. She is a beautiful little girl," he told RAI state television.

Hospital officials said the parents agreed to let them tell her story to give hope to other parents.

After delivery, the baby's weight dropped to 255 grams, but she rebounded. Her mother was allowed to nurse her when the baby reached 700 grams. - Sapa-AP

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