

Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service

Information for Patients

Making decisions about your stored embryos

What are my options for my stored embryos?

Depending on your situation there may be different options available for your embryos, such as renewing them for your own use, or deciding not to use them yourself. This is a very personal decision, and we are happy to support you however we can help you reach a decision.

Please be aware that if an egg and/or sperm donor was used, your embryos can only be used for training if your donor has consented to this. Donation to research is not an option in these cases.

You and/or your partner are welcome to call the Department of Reproductive Medicine to book a free counselling appointment if you would like to discuss your options in more detail. Please ring and book an appointment with a clinician on 0161 276 6000 Option 6. We will check your original consent forms and arrange for you (and your partner if applicable) to complete the appropriate paperwork to request removal from storage.

Renewal or withdrawal of consent to storage of embryos for use in your own treatment

You will be contacted at least 12 months prior to the end of the period that you and your partner have consented for storage to document your wishes for your embryos going forward.

All patients may store their gametes or embryos for their own treatment for the maximum of 55 years, but they can only do this if they 'renew' their consent to storage, and this must take place within 10 years of first storage and at each successive 10-year period.

You will be sent all the relevant statement notices, consent forms and supporting information to enable you to do this. This must be completed within the timeframes which will be highlighted to you on your renewal forms. Both partners must complete the forms to enable the period of consent to be extended.

You can also use this same form to withdraw your consent to storage of your embryos.

If you withdraw your consent to the storage of embryos, and the embryos were to be used for your named partner's or someone else's treatment, they will be notified that you have withdrawn your consent.

If you are withdrawing your consent to the storage of embryos you should be aware that if the egg or sperm provider does not wish to withdraw their consent to the storage of the embryos, the embryos may remain in storage for up to 12 months after you withdraw your consent. The embryos cannot be used during this 12-month period. At the end of the 12 months the embryos will be removed from storage and disposed of.

If you both consent to withdraw your consent to the storage of your embryos, they will be allowed to respectfully perish.

If you no longer wish to use your embryos for your own treatment you may wish to consider the following options:

Donation for treatment to others

Unfortunately, we cannot accept applications for donation at present to other patients at Saint Mary's Hospital Department of Reproductive Medicine due to lack of demand for donated embryos.

Research

We have links with a team of researchers at the University of Manchester who are working to improve In vitro fertilisation (IVF) results, develop new techniques and to increase our scientific knowledge of fertilisation, embryo development and abnormalities that can arise. As part of this research programme, they require embryos that have been created without egg or sperm donation. If you would like to learn more, please contact the department confirming you are happy for us to pass your details to a research nurse at the University of Manchester. This does not commit you to anything, but they will be in touch to share current project information, explain the donation process and answer any questions you might have. All aspects of the research are performed in full alignment with the Human Embryology and Fertilisation Authority (HFEA).

If you wish to donate your embryo(s) and you are eligible to do so, the research nurse will ask you to complete consent forms. By completing the form, you are granting consent for the researchers to store your embryos until they can be used for research. You can choose to allow your embryos to be stored for research for up to 10 years from the date you give your consent. You won't need to renew this consent in the future and there will be no cost to you. However, it is important that you understand that once the embryos have been transferred to the research group, they cannot ever be used in treatment. It is also not possible for any feedback to be provided on the results of individual embryos used in research.

You can withdraw your consent to research at any point up until the eggs, sperm and embryos have been used for research. Please consider that the embryos could be used for research in the future, within the legal limits of storage, even if you were to die or become mentally incapacitated.

If you do not wish to donate to research your embryos are respectfully removed from storage without, use for research.

Training

Embryos can sometimes be used for training. The sperm and egg providers need to consent to this, so this may not be an option if you have used an egg and/or sperm donor.

New embryologists/andrologists must be trained to handle eggs, sperm, and embryos safely before they are qualified to do clinical treatment work. This can only be done safely with spare eggs which are not used for treatment. This is particularly important for Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) training, which is carefully regulated by the HFEA. Each ICSI practitioner must demonstrate a high degree of technical competence using highly sophisticated machines called micromanipulators before they practice clinically. Donated eggs and embryos will also be used to practice and develop cryopreservation (freezing) techniques, such as vitrification (rapid cooling).

We may also use your donated embryos to train embryologists to operate our laser, which is used during freezing of blastocysts. The laser is a delicate instrument which makes a tiny hole between the cells of the outer layer of the embryo. Embryologists need good quality embryos not for use in treatment to train on to be able to use this equipment safely and effectively.

Saying yes or no to training or research will not affect your treatment in any way and you won't be contacted with further updates about the embryos being used for training. You should be aware that once your embryos have been used for training, they will not be available for your use in treatment. You can withdraw your consent to training until the embryos have been used for training. Please consider that the embryos could be used for training in the future, even if you were to die or become mentally incapacitated.

If you do not wish to donate to training your embryos are respectfully removed from storage without use for training.

Removal from storage

If you do not wish to donate to another patient (s), donate to training or research or one or both of you do not return your renewal forms within the timeframes given in law your embryos are respectfully removed from storage.

This may be your only option if an egg and/or sperm donor was used.

If you wish to discuss anything further or make an appointment, please telephone 0161 276 6000 and choose the general enquiries option.