

Storage limit for frozen eggs, sperm and embryos extended during coronavirus outbreak

Anyone who has frozen their eggs, sperm and embryos will be able to extend their storage for an additional 2 years under new government plans to support those going through fertility treatment during the global coronavirus pandemic.

To support wider changes to the health service in responding to the pandemic, fertility treatment in the UK across the NHS and private sector was temporarily paused earlier this month.

In recognition of the potential impact this may have on those wishing to start a family, the government has confirmed that the current 10-year storage limit for embryos and gametes will be extended by 2 years to enable sufficient time for fertility treatment to resume.

Currently the storage period for embryos and gametes is limited to a maximum of 10 years, after which people must choose whether to undergo fertility treatment or have their frozen eggs, sperm and embryos destroyed.

Health Minister, Lord Bethell, said:

Many people rely on fertility treatment as their only hope to start a family and the current pandemic means some will have to put their hopes on hold.

We are taking steps to ensure during these extraordinary times, those that have embryos, sperm or eggs stored as part of their treatment are not unfairly caught out by the existing storage limits and have the best possible opportunity to start their family in the future.

I know for some people the pausing of services will be extremely worrying and we are constantly assessing when it will be appropriate to commence fertility services again while balancing the pressures of the pandemic on our NHS and workforce.

Sally Cheshire, Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, said:

We welcome today's announcement from the DHSC. We have been working together to ensure those patients who have stored sperm, eggs or embryos that are reaching the 10-year storage limit are not penalised by the current suspension of fertility treatment due to

the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know this is a difficult and distressing time for all patients, so this decision brings good news for those who are reaching the 10-year storage limit. It provides them with some much-needed reassurance and most importantly gives more time to try for their much longed for family.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will be issuing new guidance to fertility clinics across the UK to support them in implementing the new storage limit extension.

Freezing and storing sperm, eggs and embryos are becoming more frequent with patients choosing to do so for various reasons. These may include that:

- they are not ready to have a family but want to preserve their fertility so that they can start a family later in life
- they are having cancer treatment that may affect their fertility and wish to protect and preserve their future fertility
- they may be planning on transitioning or having gender reassignment surgery but intend to start a family later
- they have several good embryos as part of their treatment cycle and store these for future treatment use
- Earlier in the year, the government launched a consultation for views on whether the current law to store their frozen eggs, sperm and embryos for 10 years should change.
- Currently the storage period is limited to a maximum of 10 years and only those stored for medical reasons, such as cancer treatment, and premature infertility can be preserved for longer – up to 55 years in total. The consultation will also consider arguments about whether women are disproportionately affected by the current time limit.
- The consultation continues until 5 May to consider [whether the limit should be extended in line with significant improvements in freezing technologies.](#)