

IVF eligibility criteria for NHS funded IVF treatment for Hertfordshire and West Essex

This leaflet is intended to provide you with information regarding the IVF policy and eligibility criteria for NHS funded IVF treatment within Hertfordshire and West Essex. It is to help explain some of the information already discussed at your initial consultation. Please speak to your consultant or a member of the fertility team if you have any further questions.

What procedure is used to fertilise the egg?

There are two common methods that can be used to aid the fertilisation of the woman's egg with sperm outside the body:

1. **In vitro fertilisation (IVF)** - This procedure includes the stimulation of the women's ovaries to produce eggs, which are then placed with sperm in a special environment to be fertilised. The fertilised egg (embryo) is then transferred to the woman's uterus (womb).
2. **Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)** - Involves injecting a single sperm directly into an egg in order to fertilise it. The fertilised egg (embryo) is then transferred to the woman's uterus.

What is a full fresh cycle of IVF/ICSI?

A full fresh cycle of IVF treatment (with or without ICSI) should comprise of one episode of ovarian stimulation, uterine transfer of resultant fresh embryo(s) and storage of viable embryos.

Patients should be advised at the start of treatment that this is the level of service available on the NHS and storage of embryos is only covered for **a period of one year**. Any extended period of storage has to be either self-funded or allowed to perish.

What is a frozen embryo transfer?

A frozen embryo transfer is where an excess of embryos is available following a fresh cycle; these embryos may be frozen for future use. Once thawed, these embryos are transferred to the patient as a **frozen transfer**.

What is an abandoned/cancelled cycle of IVF?

An abandoned or cancelled cycle is defined as one where an egg collection procedure is not undertaken.

What is the eligibility criteria to qualify for NHS funded IVF treatment?

In Hertfordshire and West Essex, couples are eligible for NHS funded IVF treatment if they meet **all** of the following eligibility criteria:

- **Maternal age** - Women must be aged between 23-42 years. For women aged 42, funding will be valid up to their 43rd birthday.
- **Paternal age** - Age criteria for men is not specified.
- **Body mass index (BMI)** - Women to be between 19 and 29.9, and men must have BMI below 30, i.e. must not exceed 29.9. For same sex couples, BMI criteria only applies to the female partner undergoing treatment.
- **Childless couples** - both parties must not have children themselves nor have children from previous relationships (regardless of the child's age). This includes any adopted child within their current or previous relationships; this will apply to adoptions either in or out of the current or previous relationships.
- **Both parties must be non-smoking** - Both parties must be non-smokers for at least 2 months prior to referral for IVF.
- **Residency/GP** - The couple should either be registered with a GP in the Integrated Care Board (ICB) area for at least 12 months or, if their GP registration is less than 12 months, they can be eligible if they can demonstrate residency of at least 12 months in the ICB area they are currently residing.
- **Previous private IVF treatment** - There should not have been any previous private (self-funded) or NHS funded IVF treatment. Couples who have had previous private or NHS funded IVF treatment will not be eligible for NHS funded IVF treatment. There are no restrictions on funding for patients who have undergone private rounds of IUI.
- **Previous sterilisation** - No previous female or male partner sterilisation. Couples will not be eligible for NHS funded IVF treatment if previous sterilisation has taken place (either partner), even if it has been reversed.
- **Anti-Mullerian hormone (AMH)** - AMH must be above 5.4 (5.5 and above) in order to be eligible for IVF treatment. AMH must be within 6 months from the date the sample has been taken. Bloods must be completed by secondary care providers.

Subfertility factors and timing to refer for IVF, when applicable

Subfertility is a delay in conceiving; the possibility of conceiving exists but takes longer than average. The timings to refer for IVF are explained below - the eligibility criteria still apply.

1. Couples with **unexplained subfertility** or **mild male factor subfertility** must have infertility with at least 3 years of ovulatory cycles, despite regular unprotected vaginal sexual intercourse.

Where mild male factor subfertility has been diagnosed, evidence to be provided to demonstrate that any underlying treatable cause has been investigated and ruled out.

If the woman has a miscarriage, the couple will wait for a further 3 years of unexplained subfertility from the date of the miscarriage to be eligible for NHS funded IVF.

2. In cases of **anovulation** (the absence of ovulation/release of an egg). This must be adequately treated in line with NICE¹ guidelines - Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and other ovulation problems adequately treated (in line with NICE guidance) but no successful pregnancy achieved.

(¹National Institute for Health and Care Excellence).

Couples who have been diagnosed with **absolute infertility**, and meet all other eligibility criteria, will qualify for immediate access to NHS funded IVF treatment (**no 3 year wait**). Examples below:

- **Azoospermia** - This means no sperm in ejaculate and would have been fully investigated by a local fertility consultant to rule out any underlying treatable cause and precludes any possibility of natural conception, i.e. absolute infertility.
- **Severe male factor** - Significantly low total motile sperm (a total motile sperm number $< 0.5 \times 10$). This means the sperm are not moving properly and would have been fully investigated by a local fertility consultant to rule out any underlying treatable cause and precludes any possibility of natural conception, i.e. absolute infertility.
- **Tubal damage** - Bilateral salpingectomy (where both fallopian tubes have been removed), moderate or severe distortion, total tubal blockage.
- **Severe endometriosis** - With specialist opinion.
- **Essential medical treatment** causing infertility, such as cancer treatment.
- **Premature menopause** defined as amenorrhoea (the absence of menstrual periods) for a period of more than 6 months, together with a raised FSH >25 and occurring before the age of 40 years.

IVF using donor eggs where no other treatment is available

IVF using a **self-funded donor egg** will be available to women who have undergone premature ovarian failure (defined as amenorrhoea >6 months and a raised FSH >25) due to an identifiable pathological or iatrogenic cause before the age of 40 years, or to avoid transmission of inherited disorders to a child where the couple meet all of the other eligibility criteria.

The couple are expected to self-source and self-fund an egg donor. Alternatively, they may choose to be placed on a waiting list until an altruistic donor becomes available. The ICB do not hold any responsibility for the quality and genetics of donor eggs. When funding has been approved, it is valid for 12 months only - this should be taken into consideration when sourcing a donor.

Same-sex couple

Same-sex couples are entitled to IVF treatment on the NHS following 6 cycles of self-funded intrauterine insemination (IUI) and a maximum of 6 cycles of NHS funded unstimulated IUI. This will only be offered if prior approval for funding is obtained from the ICB. However, patients are expected to **self-source** and **self-fund the donor semen, storage and transport**. The ICB do not hold any responsibility for the quality and genetics of donor semen.

- Both partners must be non-smoking at the time of referral.
- BMI eligibility criteria above applies only to the female partner undergoing fertility treatment.
- The couple must meet all the other relevant eligibility criteria.

Entitlement of NHS funded IVF treatment

For those couples who are eligible for NHS funded IVF treatment, the ICB supports a maximum of **one** full fresh IVF cycle (with or without ICSI), including a maximum of **two** embryo transfers (one fresh and one frozen embryo transfer, providing their fresh cycle resulted in surplus embryo suitable for freezing/storage). However, if any fertility treatment results in a living child, then the couple will no longer be considered childless and will not be eligible for further NHS funded fertility treatments, including the implantation of any frozen stored embryos.

Any costs relating to the continued storage of the embryos beyond the first calendar year of the egg retrieval date is the responsibility of the couple.

To clarify: Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB will fund the storage of frozen embryos for a maximum of 1 year from the date of the egg collection procedure. Following this period, continued storage will need to be funded by the couple.

Further reading

Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB: Fertility treatment and referral criteria:

- <https://www.hweclinicalguidance.nhs.uk/all-clinical-areas-documents/search-results/fertility-treatment-and-referral-criteria-for-tertiary-level-assisted-conception-ivf/ii/>

Useful contact details

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Leaflet information

You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Date of publication: June 2022

Version number: 4

Author: B Abdulrahim, C McShane

Reference: Fertility

Review Date: October 2028

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