

Freezing and Storage of Sperm Prior to Fertility Treatment

Why is my sperm sample being frozen?

The Hewitt Fertility Centre will want to make sure they have sperm to use when fertility treatment starts with your partner. Frozen sperm samples can be thawed when required and used in procedures such as artificial insemination (IUI), in vitro fertilisation (IVF) or intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI). Freezing your semen sample before fertility treatment will help maximise the chance of this being the case.

- Sperm freezing, also known as sperm cryopreservation, is typically offered for the following reasons;
- Some forms of chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery, and hormone therapy can lead to infertility which may be temporary or permanent. Fertility preservation is particularly important for patients undergoing cancer treatment or gender reassignment. Before any of these procedures are carried out, it is possible to store sperm using a freezing process known as cryopreservation.
- Sperm samples can also be collected and frozen in the case of a medical condition known as retrograde ejaculation, where the sperm is passed into the bladder instead of passing out through the urethra.
- If you have difficulty with or concerns about producing a sperm sample on the day of treatment.
- If the quality of your sperm sample is such that we have concerns that there may not be an adequate number of sperm to perform your ICSI treatment on the day of egg collection.
- Social reasons. For instance, not being available when your semen sample will be required during fertility treatment.

Please ask a member of staff for further information if you wish to consider freezing a sample prior to infertility treatment.

I've been asked to freeze my sperm, what happens next?

If your doctor has recommended sperm freezing, you will first have a blood test where we screen for HIV, Hepatitis B & C. This is for sperm storage purposes as there is a theoretical risk of viral cross-contamination between samples.

Once the results of the blood test become available, The Hewitt Fertility Centre will then telephone you to arrange an appointment date and time to visit the centre and store your sperm. The appointment made will be before further treatment is due to begin (IVF, ICSI or IUI treatment).

On your sperm freeze appointment date, you will first have a consultation with a Reproductive Scientist to discuss the implications of storing your sperm and complete the relevant consent forms. You will be asked questions with regards to the storage and use of stored samples. At this appointment, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions you might have.

Next, you will be asked to produce a semen sample through masturbation. The centre has private, specially designed, sound-proof production rooms available in which you produce your sample. In some circumstances, it may be possible to produce your sample at home, provided it is delivered to the centre within one hour.

What happens to my sperm once I've produced a sample?

Once you have produced your sample, it will undergo a semen analysis test to quantify the quality of the sample. Your sample will then have cryoprotectant added (a liquid media that prevents damage to sperm cells during freezing) before being transferred into a number of 'sperm straws'. The straws are gradually cooled to -196°C . Once cooled, your sample will be placed into special containers called dewars, where they will be kept in liquid nitrogen until you potentially require them for fertility treatment.

Have I produced enough sperm and what is its quality like?

The Hewitt Fertility Centre will ensure that enough of your sperm will be frozen for future fertility treatment/s. This may involve attending the centre up to two further times. We will know whether further appointments will be needed after you have produced your first sample and will arrange this with you if further appointments are required. If your sample is unsuitable for storage, you can discuss your options and next steps with your clinician. You are also welcome to use our counselling service if you wish to do so.

What are the legal implications for storing sperm?

All fertility centres are under the regulation of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). Prior to freezing and storing sperm, it is a legal requirement that you give written consent concerning;

- Storage of your sperm and the length to which it is stored for
- The circumstances to which your sperm can be used in the future (you may have a partner with whom you wish to have a family named on your form)
- Your decision over any embryos created using your sperm

- What happens to your frozen sperm in the event of your death or incapacitation

What will happen if your sperm is not used

You are free to withdraw or vary the terms of your consent at any time. You should be aware that in the event of your death, you can have your name registered as the parent of any child or children born as a result of using your sperm, provided you have consented to this in writing. If your circumstances change, for instance you move address, change telephone number, or separate from your partner at the time of storage, it is vitally important that you make the Hewitt Fertility Centre aware of these changes immediately.

How long can sperm be stored?

In normal cases, sperm may be legally stored for up to ten years. This storage period can be extended up to 55 years if premature infertility is diagnosed or suspected to occur. It is unlawful to store sperm beyond the period to which you consent, and the Hewitt Fertility Centre has a legal obligation to dispose of your sample once consent has expired.

Do I have to pay for freezing & storing my sperm?

This is dependent upon which NHS clinical commissioning group you fall under and what specific criteria they have set for funding sperm storage. This will be assessed before you freeze sperm.

If you qualify for NHS funding, sperm storage is typically funded by the NHS for 10 years.

When funding for storage ends, you will be contacted by the Hewitt Fertility Centre to ask whether you wish to continue storage up until the length that you have legally consented for. Continued storage after this period, will incur an annual fee.

If you do not qualify for NHS funding, sperm freezing and storage incurs a fee.

How successful is the use of frozen sperm?

We would expect around 50 to 75% of your frozen sperm sample to survive the thawing procedure. Treatment using frozen sperm has a similar success rate to treatment using fresh sperm. Please note, success rates are partly dependant on sperm quality.

Safety & Quality

We promise to look after your sperm as carefully as possible but we cannot be held responsible for its safety or the risk of the loss of sperm due to equipment failure. In addition we cannot guarantee your sperm will survive the freeze-thaw process or that a successful pregnancy will result from its use.

The Lewis-Jones Andrology Department at the Hewitt Fertility Centre has provided a dedicated Andrology service for over 30 years. We are attached to the Hewitt Fertility Centre HFEA licenced centre 0007) and can provide all fertility treatments potentially required in the future. We also have a centre at Knutsford (Centre number 0344) where the same care can be provided if more convenient and appropriate.

Contact with the unit

Please feel free to contact the laboratory on 0151 702 4214 or email lwft.andrologylab@nhs.net if you require any further information about fertility preservation.

You must keep us informed of any change in your circumstances e.g. change of address. This is because we will contact you every three years to see if you still want your sperm to be stored. If we are unable to contact you, your samples will be destroyed when they reach the end of their statutory storage period. If you have any questions on sperm storage, please contact the unit and ask to speak to a member of the Andrology team.

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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