Giving consent
A guide for patients and their partners

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You can also email us if you’d like to know more about our evidence sources.

www.hfea.gov.uk
Before you undergo fertility treatment, or store eggs, sperm or embryos, you must fill in one or more of our consent forms. This leaflet explains more about consent and why you need to complete these forms, what you should consider when giving your consent and how your clinic should support you.

First, a little bit about us

We’re the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), the UK’s independent regulator of fertility treatment. We’re a Government body responsible for licensing and inspecting UK fertility clinics and setting the standards they must meet.

Legally, your clinic can only use your eggs, sperm or embryos in fertility treatment, or store them, if you give your consent. We produce the consent forms your clinic will ask you to fill in to help ensure you and your clinic have covered everything required by the law.

Find out more

Our website, www.hfea.gov.uk, has lots more useful information. If you have any questions, you can contact us by emailing enquiriesteam@hfea.gov.uk or calling 020 7291 8200.

Why do I have to fill in a consent form?

We know that paperwork is probably the last thing on your mind, but it’s a legal requirement and for good reason. A consent form is not just a signature on a piece of paper; it is your opportunity to record what your wishes are in particular circumstances.

The process of giving consent involves carefully thinking through everything that will, and could, happen in your situation and discussing your questions and concerns with the experts at your clinic. This is incredibly important – you must be fully aware of what could lie ahead and have thought about all the things you need to before you start your treatment.

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For example, you will be asked to consider what you would like to happen to your eggs, sperm or embryos if you were to die or lose the ability to decide for yourself (become mentally incapacitated).

While this might be something...
If you're using donated sperm or embryos in your treatment and you're not married or in a civil partnership, it is essential that you and your partner fill out our legal parenthood consent forms to enable your partner to become the legal parent of your child.

Our legal parenthood leaflet, available on our website www.hfea.gov.uk, explains more.

As we said earlier, consent is much more than a signature on a consent form. For your consent to be valid, your clinic must offer you an opportunity to have counselling and must support you throughout the process by making sure you are given the relevant information. This includes giving you:

• the different options set out in the forms
• the implications of giving your consent (or not giving consent)
• how to make changes to, or withdraw your consent

You should not be given the form(s) to complete by yourself without any guidance, nor should your clinic complete the form(s) for you. You should take your time to read the form(s) thoroughly in a quiet place with no distractions. After you have read the form(s) to the end, you should choose whether or not you wish to give your consent on the relevant form(s) and sign the form(s) if you do. If you do not wish to give your consent on the relevant form(s) and sign the form(s), you should make sure that you give the relevant information to your clinic so that they can provide you with further information.

When deciding how long to store your sperm, eggs or embryos, you should consider your personal circumstances and your future decisions. You should discuss the options with your partner or any other people you may wish to discuss it with. If you have a right to store for up to 10 years, you do not have to agree to storing your sperm, eggs or embryos for 10 years if you do not wish to do so. If you do not have a right to store for up to 10 years, you may need time to explore how you feel you can store your sperm, eggs or embryos.

Some clinics have had to limit the length of time you can store your sperm, eggs or embryos. If you're storing eggs, sperm or embryos, you legally have a right to store them for any period up to 10 years. In certain circumstances, it may be possible for you to consent to store your eggs, sperm or embryos for up to 55 years if you or your partner is prematurely infertile. Your clinic will be able to advise you whether this applies in your case.

It is important to talk to your clinic before you start treatment and to discuss the options with them. Your clinic will be able to advise you on the implications of giving your consent (or not giving consent) and how to make changes to, or withdraw your consent.

Why should I be offered counselling?

Because fertility treatment is such a complicated process, all clinics licensed by us must offer you an opportunity to talk to a counsellor before you start treatment. This will help you to think about your treatment in advance and how it might affect you and those close to you. Counselling on the implications of treatment is especially important if treatment involves complicated issues.

You may need to consider the needs and legal rights of a donor-conceived child and to think about whether or not you wish to use your sperm, eggs or embryos. Make sure you understand the implications of your decision.

What do I need to make sure I've done?

You should take your time to read the form(s) thoroughly in a quiet place with no distractions. Make a note of any questions you have so that you can discuss them with your clinic. You should make sure you understand the implications of your decision before you sign the form(s). Make sure you understand what you are agreeing to before you sign the form(s). Make sure you fully understand the implications of your decision.

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