

From 1st June 2019, the Department of Health, in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board, has revised the eligibility criteria for publicly funded fertility services.

Eligibility for HSC funded IVF and related treatments effective from 1st June 2019

For people entitled to the full range of publicly funded health services in Northern Ireland, access to publicly funded fertility treatment is provided as follows.

Criteria for referral for investigation

In the absence of any known cause of infertility, a woman of reproductive age should be offered further clinical assessment and investigation (along with her partner, where appropriate) where:

- She has not conceived after one year of unprotected vaginal sexual intercourse; or
- If using artificial insemination (with either partner or donor sperm), she has not conceived after four cycles of artificial insemination.

Earlier referral for specialist consultation should be made where clinically indicated.

Provision of IUI

Unless otherwise clinically indicated, women trying to conceive using artificial insemination, who have not conceived after four cycles of donor or partner insemination, should be offered four cycles of unstimulated intrauterine insemination (IUI) before referral for IVF is considered.

Provision of IVF

Where:

- A fertility problem has been demonstrated at investigation; or
- a woman has not conceived after 2 years of regular unprotected vaginal intercourse (including the year prior to being referred for investigation) or eight cycles of artificial insemination (where at least four are by IUI).

One cycle of IVF, with or without ICSI, and one frozen embryo transfer, should be offered for:

- Women aged under 40; or

- Women aged between 40 and 42 who have never previously had IVF treatment and where there is no evidence of low ovarian reserve and there has been a discussion of the additional implications of IVF and pregnancy in this age group.

Criteria for referral to assisted reproductive services

Provision of IUI and IVF/ICSI is subject to the following conditions:

- The woman has a body mass index of at least 19.0kg/m² and up to and including 30.0kg/m².
- Neither the woman, nor her partner, has had three or more IVF cycles previously (including both publicly funded and private treatment).
- Neither the woman, nor her partner, has undergone a voluntary sterilisation procedure, even if reversed. This does not include conditions where sterilisation occurs as a result of another medical problem.
- Treatment will only be provided to people who have been assessed by the clinic as meeting HFEA requirements on the welfare of any child who may be born as a result and of any other child who may be affected by the birth.

Advisory

Smoking - Women who smoke should be informed this is likely to reduce their fertility. Women should be encouraged to abstain from smoking for 3 months prior to IVF.

Alcohol - Women who are trying to become pregnant should be informed that drinking no more than 1 - 2 units of alcohol once or twice per week and avoiding intoxication reduces the risk of harming a developing foetus. Men should be advised that excessive alcohol intake is detrimental to semen quality. (New recommendation will be provided in near future)

BMI - Women with a BMI over 30.0kg/m² are likely to take longer to conceive and men with a BMI over 30.0kg/m² are more likely to have reduced fertility. Women with a BMI over 30.0kg/m² and who are not ovulating should be informed that losing weight is likely to increase their chance of conception. Women with BMI over 30.0kg/m² should be referred to a group program involving exercise and dietary advice to lose weight.