

HIV testing and treatment



Fertility Facts

Screening for HIV, and other infectious viruses, is a routine part of Assisted Reproductive Technology, both to protect children that might be born and laboratory equipment. Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) and IVF have been used in New Zealand and world-wide to help couples have children when one or both partners are HIV positive.

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Fertility Associates is certified by the Ministry of Health to the New Zealand Fertility Standard. The Standard recommends all patients are screened for HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C to reduce the chance of the mother infecting her baby and to reduce the chance of contamination of laboratory equipment.

Screening for HIV in New Zealand carries some specific responsibilities which are covered in the first part of this information sheet.

Testing for HIV

What is HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immune Deficiency Virus. This virus attacks white blood cells and damages the immune system making it difficult to fight off infections that would normally be resisted. It is these infections that can cause death. AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome, is the name for illness caused by HIV. Currently there is no cure for AIDS.

How is the virus transmitted?

HIV is transmitted through exchange of blood, semen, or vaginal fluids. An infected woman can sometimes transmit infection to her baby during either pregnancy or birth.

Testing for HIV

The HIV test is a blood test that measures antibodies against HIV. It can take up to three months for antibodies to appear after HIV infection. The antibody test is usually very accurate.



Pre-test counselling

Before having an HIV test you may wish to see a counsellor. This gives you a chance to discuss in confidence the implications of having an HIV test. It is also a chance to explore ways of protecting yourself if you are not infected but are at risk. If you think you may be at risk of having been infected by the HIV virus, counselling covers ways of how to cope with a positive test result and what to do next.

You may prefer to seek counselling outside Fertility Associates. There are specific Sexual Health Clinics that offer free and confidential pre- and post-HIV test counselling. The numbers to ring are (09) 307 2885 in Auckland, (07) 839 8732 in Hamilton, or 0800 188 881 in Wellington. Or you may prefer to consult a G.P.

Contact us

www.fertilityassociates.co.nz | phone 0800 10 28 28



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A negative test result

A negative test result means that no antibodies were detected at the time of testing. If you think that you could have been exposed to HIV within three months of the test you should have the test repeated.

A positive test

A positive test for HIV means that you have been exposed to the HIV virus. It does not mean that you have AIDS. If you test positive you would be contacted personally and you will be helped to plan what to do next. Fertility Associates will need to refer you to appropriate health professionals.

A positive test may mean that some assisted reproduction treatment is not appropriate for you and it will definitely mean that you cannot become a donor of eggs or sperm.

Privacy of information

Fertility Associates will not release any of the medical records it holds about you to anyone without your written permission. HIV is not a notifiable disease, which means the clinic does not have to pass the result on to anyone else. If you do request your medical information to be transferred to someone outside of Fertility Associates, then your HIV result would be included unless you specifically ask for it to be excluded.

Treatment where the man is HIV positive

Background

'Sperm washing' is routinely used for in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and intrauterine insemination (IUI) to separate sperm from the seminal fluid. Because the HIV virus is found in seminal fluid and in non-sperm cells, sperm washing can be used to reduce the risk of transmission from the HIV positive male partner to the female partner and hence the child.

Sperm washing for HIV risk reduction was first used in Italy in 1992. Since then over 300 HIV negative babies have been born.

There are two ways of preparing sperm for treatment when the man is HIV positive. If sperm numbers and quality are reasonable, then sperm are prepared for IUI. The process of sperm washing involves sperm being forced through layers of culture medium using a centrifuge. The pellet of motile sperm is then washed and a small amount is tested for HIV viral load. The remainder of the sample is frozen. If HIV viral load is sufficiently low in the tested sample then the frozen sample is cleared for use. There is a small chance that the sample tested will give a positive result (about 5%). In that case the frozen sample will be discarded and another will be required for testing and freezing.

One frozen sample will often be sufficient for more than one treatment cycle.

If the number of sperm is low, then IUI is not practical and the sperm is used for IVF using a technique called ICSI (Intra-Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection). In this case, a single sperm is injected into each egg. The low number of sperm makes it impractical to test the HIV viral load in the sperm preparation. However, the chance of carrying HIV virus particles into the eggs is very low because of the tiny volume used, and because of the absence of non-sperm cells.

Process

The list and flow diagram below show how the process works.

1. Following referral the patients will be seen by a doctor at Fertility Associates. The doctor will outline treatment options and explain the process, timeframe and patient requirements
2. Three counselling sessions are required, both partners separately and then one together
3. Sperm is washed, tested and banked if it is suitable for IUI
4. Another doctor appointment may be required to discuss treatment options.
5. Treatment cycle (IUI, IVF or IVF with intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI))
6. More sperm banking may be required for further treatment cycles.

See the flow diagram on the next page for more information...



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