

# INFERTILITY TREATMENT

There is still some stigma attached to infertility and many couples worry about colleagues finding out that they are having difficulty conceiving. The emotional impact of infertility cannot be under-estimated and going through tests and treatment is often a deeply traumatic process. People undergoing fertility treatment can suffer from depression and feelings of isolation.

## INFERTILITY

Infertility is a medical condition that affects one in seven couples in the UK; around three and a half million people. Infertility has a wide range of causes and there are different treatments, ranging from drug therapy to assisted conception. Men as well as women are affected by infertility but women are likely to need greater and more prolonged treatment.

There are a number of different types of assisted conception; one of the best known is IVF. During this type of treatment women patients have to attend a clinic on a regular basis over a period of weeks.

This issue is very personal and you may worry your confidentiality will be breached or that you will be penalised for taking time off or that your career prospects may be affected. Attached are two policy documents from BT and Royal Mail which provide you with information on this issue.

Appointments can sometimes be fitted around work but some aspects of the treatment may involve a general anaesthetic or sedation when it will not be possible to work. Individuals may also react in different ways to the treatment.

### Your Rights

There is no automatic right to time off for fertility treatment but time off for medical appointments related to fertility should be treated in the same way as any other medical appointment under your employer's policy.

If your employer refuses time off for such treatment you may be able to bring an employment tribunal claim for indirect sex discrimination.

Women who have had fertilised eggs implanted in their womb as part of IVF treatment will be regarded legally as being pregnant from the date of the implant and are protected from adverse treatment or dismissal under pregnancy legislation.

Keep your employer informed about ongoing treatment for infertility and the reasons for absence.

### The following policy documents are included with this factsheet:

- Royal Mail IVF policy
- BT IVF Policy

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## IVF Treatment

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### Policy owner and title:

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In the first instance, any queries relating to this policy should be directed to People Contact Services on 0845 6060603; Postline 5456 7100 (for POL colleagues call, 0845 601 6260).

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# Policy Purpose and Scope

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to give guidance on IVF treatment to both the individual and line managers. The document covers a range of issues relating to appropriate levels of time off for an individual to attend treatment.

- (C) This policy document replaces the Royal Mail Group Ltd IVF Treatment created 04/09/03 in its entirety.

This policy does not form part of the Employment Contract

## Scope

The policy applies to all individuals in Royal Mail Group who meet the criteria with the exception of casual employees and Post Office Limited.

This policy gives guidance to managers and individuals of reasonable level of time off when an individual is going through IVF treatment as it is recognised that individuals who seek Assisted Conception (AC) such as undertaking an IVF programme are under a lot of strain. Accordingly, a high degree of sensitivity and flexibility needs to be exercised in handling requests for time off.

This policy is effective from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006.

## Reserved Powers & Delegated Authorities framework

Overall accountability is held by the Royal Mail Letters Head of Diversity and Inclusion Business Unit Lead or someone given delegated authority by him/her must sign off any change to this policy.

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Line managers of all grades who have the responsibility of managing people are empowered to take decisions under this policy.

## Key Policy Steps and Areas

It should be recognised at the outset that individuals who seek Assisted Conception (AC) such as undertaking an IVF programme are under a lot of strain. Accordingly, a high degree of sensitivity and flexibility needs to be exercised in handling requests for time off.

As with any request for special leave, although there may be general guidelines and limits, each case should be dealt with on its merits taking account of the individual circumstances.

These general guidelines are intended to help in striking a balance between the individuals' needs and those of the business so that such requests can be both agreeable and agreed.

### 1. Time Off

Assisted Conception treatment does not automatically have an instant success rate and therefore as an individual moves through from one round of treatment to the next the need for extra care and time off may become greater.

Given the personal nature of the treatment, individuals will often seek to avoid revealing a need for time off and will go to great lengths to meet their treatment requirements. Many will try to fit treatment around work trying to mitigate the need for time off.

Every effort should be made to assist such attempts but should not be seen as the sole option. As treatment progresses the level of strain on the individual is likely to increase and the option for special leave should be counted.

### 2. Paid/Unpaid

Managers will need to take account of all the relevant issues related to the request for time off. Having taken account of attempts to seek duty adjustments, plan treatment times around duties etc. it would be quite reasonable to grant paid leave.

### 3. Post Treatment Absence

Treatment does carry some degree of discomfort from side effects. This may well result in the prospective mother needing more than an occasional day for the actual treatment. As treatment programmes progress there is often a requirement for the individual to undertake an extended period of rest or at least a period of reduced activity. In these

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circumstances managers will need to seek a flexible approach to meet the individuals' needs.

On rare occasions an individual may feel quite unwell and may report sick. It is important that further advice should be sought from the EHS (HELP) should such absence become a cause for concern. Reference to EHS (HELP) should also be considered in relation to requests for recuperation or returning to work where treatment has failed.

#### **4. Partners/Donors**

Apart from being required to attend appointments for donation purposes individuals may also need to accompany their partner for counselling sessions and may need to support their partner after treatment in the event that she is unwell as a result.

As with other release issues each case should be looked at and decisions taken on merit. Taking account of such issues as the effort made to mitigate the need for time off, the opportunity to 'flex' duty times or to use short periods of casual leave.

## **Other Related Policies**

This policy is linked to Special Leave, Paternity Leave, Maternity Leave and Annual leave.

## **Supporting Documents**

In the event of any inconsistency between this policy and the supporting documentation the terms of the policy take precedence.

## IVF – Guidance for BT Line Managers and BT Employees

### Information about IVF

#### What is IVF (In Vitro Fertilization?)

In the UK, one in seven couples who are trying for a baby experience delays in conceiving. Conception is a complex process that involves many different factors. If one of these factors is impaired, infertility can occur. IVF is just one of several assisted conception techniques available to help people with fertility problems to have a baby. It involves an egg being surgically removed from the ovary and fertilised outside the body. The resulting embryos are then transferred back into the woman's uterus through the cervix.

#### How long will the treatment last?

One cycle of IVF takes four to six weeks to complete. The couple can expect to spend about half a day at the clinic for the egg retrieval and fertilisation procedures. Two to three days later another appointment is required for the embryos to be transferred to women.

Other clinic visits may be required for additional tests, such as scans or blood tests, depending upon the individual treatment programme.

Recovery after egg retrieval depends upon whether this was performed under sedation or general anaesthetic but the common advice is not to drive for 24 hours.

#### Some Facts about IVF

- In 1978 Louise Brown was the first child to be born through IVF. Now there are one and a half million 'test tube babies' worldwide.
- 1 in 6 couples are infertile
- Approximately six thousand babies are born as a result of IVF each year. However, the procedure has an average success rate of only 15%.

### Guidance for BT Line Managers and BT Employees

The following information is provided as guidance to Line Managers who have a member of their team undergoing treatment or for BT employees who wish to seek help and support in managing their home and work commitments during treatment. The information may also be useful for individuals who have a colleague undergoing treatment and who wish to understand more about IVF.

Every case will be different and should be treated on a case by case basis. If BT was to prescribe a specific number of days leave an employee could take for treatment, this would reduce the flexibility of the support BT could offer. It is therefore recommended that individuals discuss their requirements with their line manager in order to agree how the business can provide the best support whilst maintaining operational effectiveness. Casual, paid special leave, unpaid special leave and annual leave should

all be considered and offered individually or in combination. Details on the special leave policy can be found at:

<http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/17416>

Line managers and individuals should also consider how BT's flexible working policies may help to support an individual as well as any sensible adjustments that can be put in place during treatment. Options can range from adjusting start and finish times to agreeing to a period of reduced hours working. More details on flexible working options can be found at: <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/index/fairness/eadiversity/atb-home.htm>

No job applicant or employee should receive less favorable treatment on the grounds that they are undergoing fertility treatment.

Confidentiality is important; employees approaching their line manager for support with fertility treatment should feel confident that their requests will be treated as a private matter. Both parties should discuss how the requirements will be handled, acknowledging that confidentiality is a right and that only those who need to know should be privileged to the information.

Fertility Treatment can be difficult emotionally and physically for all involved; therefore supporting our people is an important role for line managers and colleagues (where colleagues are informed, either by or with agreement from, the individual). Line managers should be mindful that performance may need to be reviewed during times of treatment. Open communication and regular reviews will ensure that realistic objectives and goals are set and performance is measured accordingly. The individual has a joint responsibility to ensure that performance is discussed and reviewed appropriately.

Receiving results following treatment can also be a difficult and emotional time for an individual. Consideration and support should also be provided during these periods. Again experiences and coping mechanisms will vary with each individual and possibly each cycle of treatment. It is important that a line manager can put their own opinions and perceptions to one side, allowing them to focus on the support which can be provided to the individual at, what may be, a difficult time for them.

Line managers should be aware that there may be times during treatment when a doctor or consultant deems the individual unfit to attend work. If this happens the individual should be recorded as off sick in line with BT's sick absence policy. Once there is a confirmed pregnancy, absences would be recorded as pregnancy related and in due course BT's maternity policy can be followed (although there may still be a need to attend appointments at the IVF clinic).

Line managers should offer individuals access to the counseling services provided by the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Contact with the EAP is confidential and individuals can contact them directly on 0800 917 6767 or by emailing [eaprequest@ppcuk.com](mailto:eaprequest@ppcuk.com). Further information can be found at: <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/pcounselling-link>. Line managers can also seek guidance and support via the Employee Assistance Management (EAM) services, which provide support to managers with people management issues or concerns. When using this service line managers can continue to respect confidentiality issues by discussing cases on an anonymous basis. For further details visit <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/index/health/ea/cglmanagers-link>.

As previously mentioned IVF treatment can be a stressful and emotional time for an individual. BT's Mental Wellbeing site provides useful information & support on dealing with stress and pressure both for use by the line manager and the individual.

There are three simple steps a line manager can take to support an individual undergoing IVF:

1. Recognise that this is a difficult time for the individual – this guidance should help you better understand what is involved and the supporting role you can play.
2. Listen to the employee, and be open & honest. Explore what adjustments can be made to support the individual at this time and work together to find a solution that works for the individual and for the business.
3. If the individual is having a difficult time, offer the support of the EAP (see above), also seek guidance yourself via EAM.

## **Case Studies**

### **The support that's already working for you...**

BT recognises that everyone's experience of infertility is different. Some people cope incredibly well with the emotions involved whilst others find it more difficult to cope with the extreme highs and lows that treatment can bring. A supportive workplace can help an individual during this time but the extent of the support will depend on how comfortable the individual feels about sharing their situation with their manager and perhaps their colleagues.

It is hoped that by sharing some of the experiences gathered from BT employees it will demonstrate how others have managed and the support that can be provided in the workplace. For line managers or employees with a colleague undergoing IVF it will also provide an insight into the thoughts and emotions experienced.

To better understand the experiences of BT employees, we asked the following questions:

- **What support/adjustments were made to your role / working environment to accommodate your needs?**
- **How did your treatment impact on you at work and at home?**
- **What type of support did you find most valuable?**

- **What other comments would you like to share?**

**The responses gathered from individuals in BT are shown in the following pages .**

- BT People share what support/adjustments were made to their role / working environment to accommodate their needs
- BT People share how treatment had an impact on them at work and at home?
- BT People share what type of support they found most valuable?
- Other comments shared by BT People

A number of BT people were also kind enough to share their story with us:

- **Patricia's story**
- **Maria's story**
- **A BT employee's story**
- **Barry's story**
- **Charles's story**
- **Rob's story**

### **Help and Support**

Going through fertility treatment is an emotional experience, so it's important to make use of all the support you can get.

#### **BT Employee Assistance Programme**

There are two ways in which an individual can initiate contact with the Employee Assistance Programme. The first is via a telephone call to 0800 917 6767 or +441865 397076 for outside the UK (For UK and Asia Pacific based BT employees only) That call can be made from an official line in a BT office. Alternatively, if people have concerns over their privacy, they can send an e-mail asking the service to contact them at a convenient time and on a specified telephone number. Please give at least one hour's notice if utilising the e-mail method of access.

The service is available for use 24x7. The Accenture help desk will be able to provide access to a completely independent confidential off-site counselling service. The counselling service can arrange up to four face to face sessions with an appropriate specialist. The service is free for end users and local language support is available for people in all parts of Asia Pac. However, please note that the service is only available for permanently engaged employees not contractors or temporary employees.

#### **Counselling**

Fertility clinics offer counselling to those undergoing assisted reproduction treatments, as IVF and related treatments are technically known, and to patients using donated sperm or eggs. Some clinics offer unlimited sessions; others offer a certain number of free sessions, after which they have to be paid for. Some people choose to have just one or two sessions and then opt in intermittently, as and when they feel the need. Enquiries should be made directly with the fertility clinic.

***There are three broad types of counselling.***

- **Implications counselling**

This should be available free of charge at all licensed fertility clinics. A dedicated counsellor will talk through the treatment so you understand what it involves and how it might affect you and your family, now and in the future. This is especially important when thinking about treatments that involve donation or surrogacy, which involve complicated issues.

- **Support counselling**

Emotional support may be needed before, during or after treatment. It may be preferable to talk to a counsellor who's independent of the clinic. Ask the clinic or a specialist organisation, such as the [British Infertility Counselling Association](#), for contact details. This type of counselling can help you work through emotions felt at specific stages of treatment. These may include, for example, when the fertility problem is diagnosed, when waiting for test results, if the treatment doesn't work, or when trying to decide whether to give it another try.

- **Therapeutic counselling**

Infertility can throw up all sorts of feelings and this kind of counselling can help you work through these. If it's not available at the clinic you attend, the staff should be able to suggest an independent counsellor.

**Support groups**

Some people prefer the anonymity of support/patient groups, as they feel they can be more honest about their true feelings. Talking things through with people who have been or are going through the same experience can be helpful.

There are some support groups specifically for people experiencing infertility, some of which have local groups and/or sub-groups specialising in particular issues.

**Fertility Friends**

Supporting Assisted Conception, Parenting, Adoption, Surrogacy and Living Child Free. FertilityFriends.co.uk Limited is a Non-Profit UK Registered Company dedicated to providing free support services

<http://www.fertilityfriends.co.uk/>

**IVF World**

A supportive community and network making a positive difference to those experiencing the pain of fertility issues and celebrating the joy when

it's overcome.

<http://www.ivfworld.com/>

#### **Donor Conception Network**

The main aim is to support and guide would-be and current parents in the issues they face about how to be open with children about donor conception, thereby avoiding damaging secrets.

<http://www.dcnetwork.org/>

#### **Infertility UK**

Infertility Network UK is the UK's leading infertility support network, and they are there to offer information and support to anyone affected by fertility problems.

<http://www.infertilitynetworkuk.com/>

#### **Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority**

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is the UK's independent regulator overseeing the use of gametes and embryos in fertility treatment and research.

<http://www.hfea.gov.uk/>

#### **ACeBabes**

Was established as a UK charity in 1998 to support the growing number of people who were using assisted conception as a way to bring about their longed for family.

[www.acebabes.co.uk](http://www.acebabes.co.uk)

#### **Foresight**

First established in 1978, Foresight is a charitable organisation based in West Sussex in England, whose primary role is to promote the importance of good health and nutritional status in **both** parents **before** conceiving a baby, and to provide sensible, achievable information and advice on how to do this.

<http://www.foresight-preconception.org.uk/>

#### **The Daisy Network**

Early menopause, Egg donation IVF is the type of fertility treatment offered to most women who have suffered premature menopause.

<http://www.daisynetwork.org.uk/>

#### **NHS Direct**

NHS Direct is here to make a difference to the lives of people in England, 24 hours a day, and 365 days of the year. It is there for people whenever they have health worries and they have the knowledge and experience to give real help and reassurance.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/IVF/Pages/Introduction.aspx?url=Pages/Ov%20erview.aspx&r=1&rtitle=IVF+-+Introduction>