NHS
Royal Devon
University Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Sperm Banking

Fertility Exeter

What is sperm banking?

Sperm banking is a process of storing sperm in a deep-frozen state for a period of time. The sperm are mixed with a special fluid to protect them from the harmful effects of the freezing and storage process. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) is the statutory licensing body for centres performing fertility treatment and cryopreservation in the United Kingdom. The HFEA requires centres that freeze and store sperm to strictly follow a code of practice, this includes counselling and obtaining written consent from the patients wishing to bank their sperm.

- **Sperm banking is the process of freezing and storing sperm for future use**
- **It is regulated by the HFEA**

Why may I need to bank my sperm?

You should consider banking your sperm if there are factors likely to affect your fertility in the future. These include 'radical surgery', treatment for conditions such as cancer or a need to take drugs known to cause fertility problems or abnormalities in pregnancy. Those actively trying to conceive and travelling to Zika affected countries may also wish to consider sperm storage prior to travel. Sperm banking can be provided if you are having assisted conception treatment and are unable to produce a sperm sample on demand, will be absent at the time of treatment, or you have poor sperm quality and there is a risk sperm may not be obtained on the day of treatment. In some cases it may be possible to bank sperm after a surgical sperm recovery to use in subsequent IVF treatment cycles. If you are about to undergo male to female gender reassignment you may want to bank your sperm too.

You will be offered sperm banking if you:

- **Are about to undergo chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy for cancer**
- **Are about to take drugs known to cause abnormalities in pregnancy**
- **Are about to have 'radical' surgery that may affect your fertility**
- **Are having assisted conception treatment and you have difficulty producing a sample or you have a very low sperm count**
- **Are actively trying to conceive and travelling to Zika affected countries**
- **Are about to undergo male to female gender reassignment**

How do I get started?

Usually, you will need to be referred by a doctor or alternatively you may self-refer. Once your referral has been received, an appointment will be arranged at Fertility Exeter to discuss the procedure, its implications and to obtain consent before any samples can be produced for potential storage. The specialist will check your personal information and verify your identity. Therefore, it is important that you bring along a certified photographic ID, such as your passport or driver's license. You can name your partner, if relevant, on the consent forms to allow them access to the samples for future treatment. If this is likely to be the case, it is important that your partner also attends the appointment and brings photographic ID with them.

For urgent oncology or haematology referrals, if you have not been offered an appointment within one week of this, please ask your referring doctor to phone 01392 40 5051.

To start the banking process:

- **Obtain a referral from a doctor. Self-referral would require an initial consultation with a fertility doctor**
- **Fertility Exeter will contact you regarding an appointment to discuss the procedure and give consents**
- **For urgent oncology or haematology referrals, if you have not received an appointment within one week of referral, please phone 01392 40 5051**
- **If applicable you will need to attend the initial appointment with your partner**
- **Please bring your photographic IDs**

When will I be required to submit a sample for storage?

Following your appointment, you will be invited to submit a sample for analysis and potential storage. This is often possible on the same day as your appointment providing everything that is required to store the samples is in place. You will be provided with a sample pot. If required, a private room in which to produce your sample is available on-site. Alternatively, it may be possible to produce a sample at home and bring it in, depending on how close you live to the hospital. It is important that the sample is processed within an hour of production which may limit this option as a possibility. This will be discussed with you at your appointment.

Typically, two to three samples are advised. Ideally each sample needs to be produced after two to three days abstinence from ejaculation. This may not be possible if your chemo/radio therapy or surgery is imminent and cannot be delayed. Once stored, a small fraction is usually thawed to assess the survival rate of the sperm. There can be no guarantee that the sperm will survive the freezing/thawing process or that the use of such sperm would result in a pregnancy. There is a small risk that samples may be damaged or deteriorate due to circumstances beyond the centre's control.

You will be required to:

- **Produce 2-3 samples**
- **Abstain from ejaculation for 2-3 days before each sample production**

How are the samples stored?

The samples are usually divided into a number of ampoules with colour-coded caps and labelled with your name, date of birth and hospital number. The ampoules (vials) are split between two storage vessels in liquid nitrogen vapour at around -180°C.

These hold the samples in a deep frozen state and are monitored and alarmed continuously for security purposes. All samples are kept together. It is therefore necessary for all individuals to have screening tests performed prior to storage. You must test negative for HIV (1&2), Hepatitis B (surface antigen & core antibody) and Hepatitis C. To further minimise the theoretical risk of cross contamination all screened samples are stored in vapour phase and not liquid nitrogen.

- **You must be negative for HIV, Hepatitis B & C in order to store your samples at Fertility Exeter**
- **Samples are stored in ampoules and split between two separate liquid nitrogen vapour storage vessels for extra security**
- **Storage vessels are monitored continuously and attached to alarm systems**
- **There is a theoretical risk of cross contamination, but this is minimised by the infection screening and vapour phase storage**
- **There is a small risk of deterioration and no guarantee that the sperm will survive the freezing/thawing process or that the use of such sperm would result in a pregnancy**

What will I have to consent to?

You will be required to give consent on a series of consent forms specifying:

- That you want to freeze and store your sperm
- How long you want to store your sperm
- How the sperm can be used (e.g. treatment with your partner, training)
- What should happen to your sperm if you die or lose the ability to decide for yourself (mental incapacity)
- Which other people (such as GPs, healthcare professionals or administrators) we may share/disclose information regarding your sperm storage

You will also be asked to sign a Fertility Exeter Terms and Conditions of Storage agreement to ensure you understand your obligations including any costs incurred if you aren't eligible for NHS funding. You may at any time, change/modify your consent by notifying the clinic in person. Significant changes will require your attendance at the centre and proof of your identity. This includes withdrawal of consent to storage. You will also be offered an optional independent counselling appointment for any potential fertility issues you may wish to discuss.

As part of your consenting process, you will be expected to:

- **Specify that you want to bank your sperm and for how long**
- **State how your sperm can be used if and when required**
- **State what should happen in the event of your death or mental incapacity**
- **State which people within the healthcare system you are happy for information to be shared with**
- **Accept or decline an offer of independent counselling for fertility-related issues**
- **Understand your contractual obligations to the clinic and that you may vary or withdraw your consent at anytime**

What happens once I've stored my samples?

After banking your samples, we will send you a follow-up letter with copies of all relevant paperwork for you to keep in a safe place. All correspondence will be marked 'Private & Confidential' and we will contact you annually by letter.

Should you wish to find out about your fertility status after your medical treatment or surgery, we can perform a routine semen analysis after a period of time (this is usually not advised until one year after you have finished your chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy, where applicable).

It is also advised to have a semen analysis carried out near to the time that the storage period expires. This will help you to decide whether you want the stored samples to remain in storage or be disposed of. You may then consent to the extension of the original storage period, or request that the samples be removed from storage and disposed of at the end of the initial period.

A semen analysis can be arranged through your GP. For further details, you may contact the centre on 01392 40 5115.

How long will I be able to store my samples?

The HFEA permits the storage of your samples for up to ten (10) years initially. However, you can potentially store your samples for up to fifty-five (55) years but this will require you to legally renew your consent every 10 years. Regardless of how long you consent to your samples being stored, you must comply with the Fertility Exeter Terms and Conditions for storage (such as annual payments). Otherwise your samples may still be disposed of after reasonable efforts to facilitate your compliance have been made.

How will I know when the storage period is going to lapse?

Once you have samples in storage with us, we will endeavor to contact you annually to confirm if you wish to continue with storage. It is therefore important that you notify the centre of any changes to your address or circumstances.

As part of our annual contact with you, we will inform you of any expiry of the clinic contract. This may be linked to your funding arrangements but this will be clearly detailed in the letter including any lapse of NHS funding where applicable. In such cases, there is the option to continue on a self-funded basis. It may be advisable at this stage to perform a semen analysis to help your decision making.

As the end of the given consent period approaches, we will legally be required to issue you with a 'Statutory Notice' from the HFEA. This will be 12 months in advance of the consent end date, providing sufficient notice for you to consider and put into effect your ongoing wishes.

Where it is your intention to continue with storage for potential use in treatment, you must legally renew your consent within the 18-month period starting 12 months before and ending 6 months after the end of consent. This 18-month time frame is known as the 'renewal period'.

What happens when the storage period lapses?

Consent cannot be renewed after the end of the renewal period. If consent is not renewed within the renewal period, samples must be removed from storage and disposed of.

Consent can only be supported by the clinic where a valid contract is in place. Failure to maintain a valid contract or payment for storage will result in disposal of samples, regardless of how long consent is in place for.

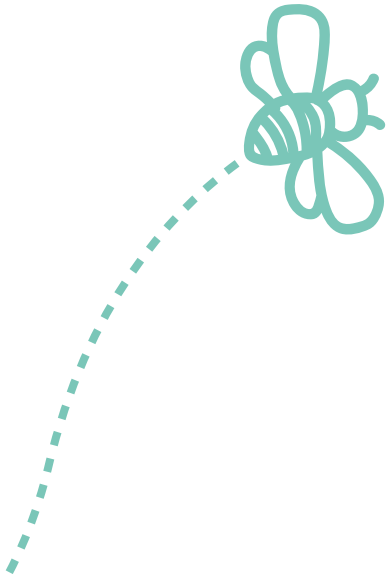
- **You will receive annual communication from Fertility Exeter**
- **Notify us with any changes to your contact details or circumstances**
- **You can usually store your samples for up to 10 years**
- **Renewal of consent is legally required to store samples for use in treatment beyond 10 years and for each subsequent 10-year period**
- **You can potentially store your samples for a maximum of 55 years**
- **Samples will be removed from storage if consent is not renewed before the end of the renewal period**
- **You must comply with the Centre's Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) for storage including arranging for and/or making annual storage payments**
- **If, after reasonable attempts have been made to help you comply with the T&Cs and you fail to; your samples may be removed from storage, regardless of how long you have given consent for**

What if I need to use the samples for treatment with my partner?

This should be discussed with you and your partner's GP and a referral made to either Fertility Exeter or another licensed centre of your choice. It is possible to transfer samples between centres, but this requires specific arrangements to be made and will have cost implications.

Will I get NHS funding to bank my samples?

NHS funding for fertility preservation (including sperm banking) is assessed against eligibility criteria which vary according to the location of your GP's surgery, and which Integrated Care Board/Service (ICB/ICS) funds your treatment. The precise criteria should be checked on your ICB/ICS website (e.g. Devon, Somerset, Cornwall (Kernow), NHS England, Dorset).



Devon CCG

- **Will fund for an initial period of five years for patients aged 39 years or younger and are:**
  - **About to start treatments, for example chemotherapy for cancer or radical surgery, where there is a significant likelihood of making a patient permanently infertile as an unwanted effect of treatment, or**
  - **About to start gonadotoxic or teratogenic treatment which is likely to continue for their reproductive life and in whom stopping treatment for a prolonged period of time to enable conception is not an option**
- **Possibility of extending storage period up to the patient's 40th birthday**
- **Where criteria are not met, 'exceptional' funding may be sought via application to ICB/ICS by clinician(s) but not patient**
- **Other ICB/ICS will vary**

If you do not meet your ICB/ICS eligibility criteria for NHS funded storage you will have an option to self-fund. Current charges are available on request or on the Fertility Exeter website.

You may also advise us, or your GP, to apply to the relevant ICB/ICS for exceptional funding or reconsideration (see below for Devon ICB/ICS).

There are different criteria for NHS-funded assisted conception treatments and you will need to meet those criteria separately, should you require the use of your banked samples.

- **NHS funding for sperm banking is available with eligibility criteria**
- **Criteria are dependent on location and relevant ICB/ICS**
- **Funding may be available even when criteria are not met, by application to the ICB/ICS**
- **Funding application must be completed by a doctor**
- **Funding application must demonstrate sufficient 'exceptionality' otherwise the request is likely to be declined**
- **Separate eligibility criteria for fertility treatment must be met, should banked samples be required**
- **Always check ICB/ICS website for current details**

How do I make an NHS funding application?

Again, this will depend on your locality. Applications will not be considered from you personally. Therefore, your GP or clinician has to make the application on your behalf outlining reasons for the 'exceptional treatment.' The application form is available on the ICB/ICSwebsite. Individual cases are reviewed by the ICB/ICS upon receipt of completed applications. The ICB/ICS panel meets regularly, but the timeframe for the decision-making process of each application will vary. The report will contain the reasons for any decisions, as well as details of an appeal/request for reappraisal/complaints process, where applicable. It is therefore crucial that the doctor making the application has, or is able to obtain a complete picture of your circumstances and demonstrate their exceptionality.

Feedback

Here at Fertility Exeter, we care about getting things right for our patients. As such we would welcome any feedback to help us continually improve the services we provide.
You can do this in a number of ways:

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital (Wonford)
Barrack Road
Exeter
EX2 5DW

Direct Dial: (01392) 402093

rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net

"What went well could go better if ....."
Please complete a yellow card, located in our waiting room, and put it in the box provided. The box is sorted weekly and suggestions are acted on accordingly.

Alternatively:

Tell your story via Care Opinion

www.careopinion.org.uk/kiosk/rh802-fertility-clinic

You can also provide feedback about Fertility Exeter directly to the HFEA by using their online feedback tool:
https://www.hfea.gov.uk/choose-a-clinic/rate-your-clinic/

Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (Heavitree)
Gladstone Road
Exeter
EX1 2ED

(01392) 40 5051

rduh.fertilityexeter@nhs.net

www.fertilityexeter.co.uk

Filename: PIL - Sperm Banking v3.4
Q-Pulse reference: F/PI/14
Authors: N. Melie & R.Cowie
Approved: 29.06.2026
Review date: 29.12.2027
Expiry date: 29.06.2027