

InfoSheet : SAFETY OF IVF AND ICSI

INTRODUCTION

IVF and ICSI have been used to help infertile couples since 1978 and 1992 respectively. Some doubts have been expressed, particularly about ICSI children, fuelled by fears that the process of selecting just one sperm and using a needle to inject it inside an egg might have a negative effect on the development of these babies.

THE MOST RECENT EVIDENCE

A recently performed major study of babies born as a result of the common fertility techniques has confirmed that they are just as healthy as children conceived naturally. This newest study was presented at the annual meeting of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology held in Madrid in July 2003. The study compared the progress of hundreds of IVF and ICSI babies from 5 European countries with their naturally-conceived peers.

IVF and ICSI babies had similar birth weights and height at age 5 years to non-IVF children. They had no significant differences in medical illnesses or in verbal performance and total IQ – although girls scored higher than boys in all groups. In addition, compared to their naturally-conceived peers, IVF/ICSI children were no more likely to have behaviour problems, and their parents no more likely to have higher levels of stress.

There was, however, one difference. Babies conceived using ICSI had a higher rate of malformations – mainly genetal and cardiac – although most were minor in nature. This is because many men who need ICSI due to very poor sperm might be carrying genes that predispose their children to these particular problems. While the role of genetics in causing male factor infertility is still being unravelled, it is clear that, under normal circumstances, these men would not be able to pass such genes on to children.

THE FUTURE

We who use technology to help couples build families continue to strive towards excellence, and to practise our profession with the highest possible standards. We continue to do research looking for safer and better treatments, as well as continuing to review and audit the outcome of our technology. We also strive to always provide our patients with as much information as possible.

If you have any remaining concerns, please discuss them with us.

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