

Thinking about donating sperm or eggs to a third party?

Assisted Human Reproduction

What I need to know?

Many Canadians undergo assisted human reproduction (AHR) procedures such as *in vitro* fertilization using their own sperm or eggs, also known as gametes. Sometimes, however, the best or only chance of achieving pregnancy requires the use of gametes that are donated by a third party.

You are considered to be a third party donor if you provide your gametes for reproductive use to someone you know such as a friend, or to someone unknown to you. In either case, your medical history will most likely be provided to the recipient by the clinic or physician using your gametes. In the case of an unknown recipient, if not otherwise required, you may remain anonymous or indicate that you wish your identity to be provided to the recipient or any resulting offspring at a later date.

This brochure provides information about some of the considerations of donating gametes that may apply to you, your spouse or partner, and any children who are born as a result of your donation.

Why would I consider being a donor?

Perhaps you may empathize with someone who has gone through the pain of infertility, know someone who is/was a donor, or were approached to donate by someone you know. If you have donated blood or other tissues, you may consider this another form of altruistically helping others. However, being a sperm or egg donor has different implications from being a blood or bone marrow donor since the goal of gamete donation is to help create human life.

Who might benefit from receiving my donation?

People seeking donor gametes for AHR do so for a variety of reasons the most common of which are the following:

- They are unable to achieve a pregnancy using their own sperm or eggs due to infertility or some other physical condition;
- Donor gamete(s) or embryo are needed in order to build their family;
- There is a known genetically inherited condition that they wish to avoid passing on to their children.

What does being a donor involve?

Being accepted as a sperm donor by a reproductive clinic or centre requires that you undergo health screening and testing and provide an accurate medical history¹. Based on this information a determination is made as to whether you qualify as a donor. Egg donation is more complex and personally demanding than sperm donation as it involves a medical intervention that requires fertility medications first to stimulate your ovaries followed by a surgical procedure to retrieve your eggs at the appropriate time. As with all medications and medical procedures, you should discuss the process and specific health issues and risks with a physician prior to making your decision.

What issues should I consider?

In addition to the medical issues involved in donating, there are other issues associated with being a third party donor that are similar regardless of whether you are planning to donate eggs or sperm. Some of these issues include:

Motivation

You should consider if this is a good time in your life to make a decision about being a donor. For example, if you have life stressors such as family tensions, relationship problems, and financial difficulties or are dealing with loss it may be advisable to postpone your decision. Although you can withdraw your consent to use your donated gametes provided timely and appropriate notice is given, you should not feel pressured or obligated to donate since this could lead to later regret. Under the federal *AHR Act* the donation of sperm or eggs must be altruistic. This means that you may only be reimbursed for your actual expenditures incurred in relation to the donation.

Implications for couples

Your decision to help others create a family could have implications for your current or future spouse or partner. If your spouse or partner does not agree with your decision or feels uncomfortable with it, this could impact your relationship as a couple.

Implications for children

Your donor-conceived children will be genetically linked to you and to your own children. If you are open about having donated, your children may want to know whether there are any genetically linked siblings that may have resulted

from your donation. If you don't already have children when you become a donor, it is important to think about your future goals for parenthood.

Regarding donor-conceived children, it will normally be the decision of the intended parents whether they tell the child conceived from your gametes as to the manner of their conception and the extent of such information. If the child is told, you may wish to consider how you would respond if a person who was conceived from your donated sperm or eggs later wanted to know more about you, or to have contact with you and your other family members. Your views about this may influence your decision about whether to allow your identity to be released or remain anonymous.

Implications for extended family

Other family members may also have opinions about your decision to donate gametes should you decide to tell them. Your parents, for example, may be supportive or experience distress in knowing that there may be a genetically linked grandchild with whom a relationship is not possible. In the case of providing your identity they may also be contacted by the recipient or donor conceived child in the future.

Donating to someone you know

Knowing the recipient of your donation could be rewarding since you would likely know the outcome of your donation, and if it resulted in the birth of a child, you would be aware that you had helped someone achieve an important life goal. However, depending on the extent of any interaction, it may also present challenges. It is also important to determine in advance how many times you will donate; how you will share information with others, especially any existing children and the children that are born from your donation; and whether your genetic link to any resulting children will affect the role you have in that family as well as your own.

Legal issues

Federal legislation stipulates a minimum age of 18 years in order to be a donor. It also requires your written consent to use your gametes before they can be used by a clinic or physician in an AHR procedure, and your written acknowledgement of certain requirements relating to your donation².

Your province or territory may have specific laws concerning the rights and responsibilities of parties involved in third party donation. In all cases, you should consider seeking independent legal advice. A reproductive clinic or centre may also be able to provide guidance on this issue.

Where can I find further information and support?

The donation of sperm or eggs to help someone have a child is a most generous act of altruism. However, it is not a decision to be taken lightly. Counselling with a professional experienced in third party donation issues such as a psychologist or social worker is highly recommended in order to assist you in making an informed decision. A counsellor can also refer you to sources of further information and support.

Resources

Assisted Human Reproduction Canada (AHRC)
www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca
Phone (toll free): 1-866-467-1853
Email: info@ahrc-pac.gc.ca

Counselling and Assisted Human Reproduction: A Guide for Patients
www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/counselling-counseling-eng.php

Thinking About Using Assisted Human Reproduction?
www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/index-eng.php

Thinking About Using Sperm or Eggs from a Third Party Donor?
www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/index-eng.php

Infertility Awareness Association of Canada
www.iaac.ca
Phone: 514-484-2891
Email: info@iaac.ca

Infertility Network (Canada)
www.infertilitynetwork.org
Phone: 416-691-3611
Email: Info@InfertilityNetwork.org

LGBTQ Parenting Network Canada
www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca
Phone: 416-324-4100 ext. 5219
Email: parentingnetwork@sherbourne.on.ca

¹ Health Canada, **Guidance on the Processing and Distribution of Semen for Assisted Conception Regulations**, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mcps/compli-conform/info-prod/don/index-eng.php

² Assisted Human Reproduction Canada, **Information Sheet: Regulations under Section 8 of the Assisted Human Reproduction Act Regarding "Consent to Use"**, www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/legislation/consent-consentement/info-sheet-8-fiche-dinfo-8-eng.php