

UK may allow IVF for older women, same-sex couples

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(AP) -- A powerful health advisory agency says Britain should extend free fertility treatments to women up to age 42 as well as same-sex couples, recommendations likely to be followed by many of the U.K.'s medical centers.

The British [health system](#) generally pays for up to three cycles of in-vitro fertilization, or IVF, for couples who have been trying to get pregnant for at least three years. Previously, women had to be under age 40 to qualify. Many government-funded clinics already treat gay and lesbian couples, but the recommendations now make that explicit, though they are not binding.

The guidelines are likely to affect only a minority of patients and it will be up to hospitals to decide whether to pay for IVF treatments. Britain's health service is being forced to trim >20 billion (\$31 billion) from its budget by 2015 and many hospitals often ration who gets IVF and deny the treatment to eligible patients. One IVF cycle typically costs about >3,000 (\$4,730).

Adam Balen, chairman of the British Fertility Society, said the new [draft guidelines](#) recognized the importance of treating [infertility](#), citing the [psychological harm](#) it can cause. "No one who stands a reasonable chance at conception should be denied the opportunity," he said in a statement. "These (new) guidelines outline how that can be achieved."

The draft guidelines issued Tuesday also say the government should pay for IVF in people with diseases such as HIV who request it or patients facing [cancer treatment](#), who want to preserve their fertility. About one in four [IVF cycles](#) results in a baby; that drops to about one in 10 for women over 40.

Elsewhere in Europe, many countries including France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland ban gay and lesbian couples from receiving IVF and often

impose similar age limits for eligible women, cutting off treatment to women over 40.

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