

Lockdown impacted women's ability to give birth due to increased age, research finds

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Pausing in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment during lockdown will have a significant impact on women's ability to give birth, given that they were two months older when their treatment resumed, according to research carried out by the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and the University of Glasgow.

Statistical analysis carried out by UWE Bristol using data from the US and UK, showed that across all ages, the COVID-19 lockdown will likely lead to a drop of 0.5% in the live [birth](#) rate following IVF treatment. In the US, this is equivalent to 734 fewer [live births](#) per year.

Dr. Andrew Smith, a Senior Lecturer in statistics at UWE Bristol, who is first author on a paper published in July that outlined the findings, said: "As IVF success is very sensitive to age, [older women](#) are less likely to have a successful outcome and live birth rates will be lower as a result. For a three-month shutdown in treatment, we predict a 0.8% reduction in live birth rate, which is significant.

"There is generally not much of a drop-off in a

woman's ability to have a baby after IVF between the ages of 26 and 35. After 35, this starts to fall quite dramatically, so every month counts."

During the lockdown, across all ages of women, the two months with no access to hospitals for IVF treatment meant that women in the UK had a 0.5% lower chance of giving birth, compared to their usual chances. For instance, a woman who is aged 41-42 has a 12% chance of giving birth at her age.

IVF involves women being administered an injection to stimulate her ovaries, after which eggs are removed from her ovaries, before being fertilised with sperm in a laboratory. The embryo is then inserted into her uterus. Modern techniques mean that doctors can also freeze some of her eggs to be used at a later date to form an embryo that will be inserted into her womb.

The findings of this research is now being used by health providers and policy-makers in determining how IVF treatment resumes after the lockdown.

Prof Scott Nelson, who works at the University of Glasgow and is lead author on the paper, said: "The work undertaken by Andrew Smith and colleagues on the impact of temporary cessation of fertility treatment provision has been critical to the decision making by healthcare providers to recommence treatments within the United Kingdom and globally.

"The Scottish Government and National Infertility Group have used the data and the differential age groups identified, in the planning of the resumption of services and prioritisation of patients whose treatment was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next stage of the research will lead the experts to explore how the economic impact of the pandemic may affect IVF live birth success rates. Results are expected to be published later this

year.

Provided by University of the West of England

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