

# Assisted conception involvement



**We would like your views on work we are undertaking around assisted conception. At the moment, the criteria for accessing assisted conception are not the same across the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. We want to align the criteria (make them the same) across our area.**

We started this work in 2020, as part of a bigger programme called **Clinical Policy Alignment (previously called Difficult Decisions)**. This included talking to patients, clinicians and other interested people about what any future policy could look like.

While we were working on our recommendations, the **Women's Health Strategy (WHS)** was released. This is a 10-year strategy, which will include a review of fertility services across England. We

also expect updated NICE guidance on fertility treatments at the end of 2024. As we will not know the results of this review for some time, we have decided to develop **an interim (temporary) policy for assisted conception.**

The interim policy will make the criteria for accessing assisted conception services the same, wherever you live within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This will give fairer access to services across our geographical area.

## **What is assisted conception?**

**Infertility is when a couple cannot get pregnant (conceive) despite having regular unprotected sex. Around 1 in 7 couples may have difficulty conceiving.**

GPs will work with couples to explore reasons why they may be struggling to conceive and look at lifestyle changes or medicines which could help. If these aren't successful, there are other steps to assist with conception.



There are two different treatments:



**Intrauterine insemination (IUI)** – also known as artificial insemination – involves inserting sperm into the womb via a thin plastic tube passed through the cervix. Sperm is first collected and washed in a fluid. The best quality specimens (the fastest moving) are selected.



**In vitro fertilisation (IVF)** is when an egg is fertilised outside the body. Fertility medicine is taken to encourage the ovaries to produce more eggs than usual. Eggs are removed from the ovaries and fertilised with sperm in a laboratory. A fertilised egg (embryo) is then returned to the womb to grow and develop.

## How will the interim policy affect me?

**There may be changes, depending on where you live. At the moment, there are different policies in these three areas:**

- North Staffordshire
- Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, South East Staffordshire and Seisdon Peninsula, and Stafford and Surrounds
- Stoke-on-Trent.

The interim policy would make all the criteria the same in each area. At the moment, the main changes proposed are:

- For the number of cycles of IVF to go **down** from 2 to 1 in Stoke-on-Trent
- For the upper age limits for accessing the services to go up in North Staffordshire. For women, the current age limit of 35 to go **up** to 39, and for there to be **no upper age limit for men** (currently 55)
- People in North Staffordshire can currently have 3 cycles of IUI (see box) if this is preferred to IVF. The interim policy proposes that **IUI will no longer be offered.**

## Why are you suggesting an interim policy?

**We recognise that the current difference in access depending on where you live is unfair, so we want this to change as soon as possible.**

We know that a wider review of access to fertility services in England will be carried out as part of the Women's Health Strategy (see link below). We also expect updated NICE guidance on fertility treatments at the end of 2024.

Once we know what these wider reviews say, we can look at whether our interim policy matches any new guidance that comes out. If needed, we can make changes so that we put the right policy in place for the long term.



## How can I be involved?

**We are keen to hear your views and suggestions. You can take part in our [short survey](#), from 1 March to 22 March 2023.**

If you would prefer to use a paper copy of the survey, please call us on **0333 150 3069**.

We are also holding **two online sessions** where you can ask questions and share your suggestions.

These will be on:

- **Wednesday 15 March, 12.30 to 2pm**
- **Monday 20 March, 6pm to 7.30pm**

You need to register to join these events – this can be done quickly and easily on our [registration page](#).

**[Read more about the Women's Health Strategy for England.](#)**