

Britain expands embryo screening

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Britain's fertility watchdog agency has approved expanded screening of embryos to include genetic links to ovarian, breast and colon cancers.

At a meeting in Belfast, the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority said pre-implantation genetic diagnosis could be done for the three cancers as part of in-vitro fertilization.

The agency already allows testing for certain gene mutations linked to serious conditions that occur in early childhood, such as cystic fibrosis and some cancers, The Independent reported.

The procedure entails removing a single cell from a fertilized embryo once it starts to divide in the laboratory. If genetic tests on that cell are normal, the embryo is implanted into the womb and the pregnancy continues normally.

HFEA Chairwoman Suzi Leather denied the approval was part of a slippery slope toward genetic testing for genetic characteristics.

"This is not about opening the door to wholesale genetic testing," she said. "This is about considering a particular group of genetic conditions to be sufficiently serious to merit the use of PGD embryo testing."

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