

# Many male cancer patients are missing out on sperm banking

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whose fertility may be at risk from cancer treatment – are not being offered the chance to store their sperm according to new research published today in the *Annals of Oncology*.

Guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) state that any men or adolescent boys who are receiving treatment that may leave them infertile should be offered the opportunity to store their sperm.

But in a study funded by Cancer Research UK, researchers at the University of Warwick and University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust found that only half of oncologists and haematologists across the UK agreed that information on sperm banking is readily available to patients, despite national guidelines which state sperm banking should be offered.

In a survey of nearly 500 clinicians, the researchers also found that 21 per cent were unaware of any local policies on sperm banking.

And only a quarter (26 per cent) of oncologists and 38 per cent of haematologists reported that discussions about sperm banking with male [cancer patients](#) are being documented systematically, yet nearly all doctors believed it was an integral part of their role to raise this topic.

Dr Ann Adams, study author from Warwick Medical School, said: "Our findings are very concerning and show that doctors in the UK aren't

following sperm banking guidance, meaning many men are missing the opportunity to store their sperm for the future. Instead it appears that clinicians are deciding who is offered the chance to bank sperm based on their own personal beliefs, attitudes and assumptions about their patients' likelihood of starting a family in the future.

"Doctors know that many chemotherapy drugs can cause problems with fertility, so it's vital that all teenagers and men of any age who may want to start a family in the future are given the chance to bank their sperm."

Professor Geraldine Hartshorne, also an author from Warwick Medical School, added: "We're urging clinicians to discuss sperm banking with all their male cancer patients. Improved awareness and access to training for clinicians would hopefully increase both the opportunity and the uptake of sperm banking for cancer patients."

Martin Ledwick, head information nurse at Cancer Research UK, said: "We hope this new research raises the awareness of the sorts of discussions cancer patients should be having with their doctors and results in all men being offered the opportunity to bank their sperm for their future use. More and more people are surviving cancer so finding ways to improve their quality of life after treatment is becoming increasingly important."

**More information:** 'Who should be offered sperm banking for fertility preservation? A survey of UK oncologists and Haematologists'. Hartshorne, G and Adams, A at al. *Annals of Oncology* (2010).

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