

Four women with new wombs are trying to get pregnant (Update)

March 3 2014, by Maria Cheng



In this April 4, 2012 photo made available by the University of Goteborg in Sweden, the Swedish research team practices before the operations to transplant wombs at the Sahlgrenska Hospital in Goteborg, Sweden. Swedish doctor Mats Brannstrom says four Swedish women who received transplanted wombs have had embryos transferred into them in an attempt to get pregnant. Since 2012, nine women have received wombs donated by relatives in an experimental procedure designed to test whether it's possible to transfer a uterus into a woman so she can give birth to her own child. The women had in-vitro fertilization before the transplant, using their own eggs to make embryos. (AP Photo/University of Goteborg, Johan Wingborg, File)

A Swedish doctor says four women who received transplanted wombs have had embryos transferred into them in an attempt to get pregnant.

He would not say on Monday whether any of the women had succeeded. In all, nine women in Sweden have received new wombs since 2012, but two had to have them removed because of complications.

The women received wombs donated by their mothers or other close relatives in an experimental procedure designed to test whether it's possible to transfer a uterus so a woman can give birth to her own biological child. The women had in vitro fertilization before the transplants, using their own eggs to make embryos.

"We have already begun transferring embryos into four of the women and plan to make attempts with the others when they are ready," said Dr. Mats Brannstrom, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Goteburg, who is leading the research.

Brannstrom predicted that three or four of the seven women might successfully give birth.

"One or two more will perhaps get pregnant and miscarry, and one or two won't be able to get pregnant," he said.

There have been two previous attempts to transplant a womb—in Turkey and Saudi Arabia—but both failed to produce babies. Doctors in Britain and Hungary also are planning similar operations, but using wombs from women who had just died.

Brannstrom said any woman in the study who does get pregnant will be on a low dose of drugs to keep from rejecting the transplanted womb

and will be monitored as a high-risk pregnancy.

The transplants are intended to benefit women unable to have children because they lost a uterus to cancer or were born without one.

Some doctors said women who got pregnant with a new uterus would have to be watched carefully for how the womb progresses throughout pregnancy.

"There are questions about how the physiological changes in the uterus will affect the mother and whether the transplanted uterus will be conducive to a growing baby," said Dr. Charles Kingsland, a spokesman for Britain's Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and a gynecologist at Liverpool Women's Hospital.

In a study published last week, Brannstrom and colleagues described the procedures used to transplant the nine wombs and said there were "mild rejection episodes" in four patients.

He said the transplanted wombs would be removed after a maximum of two pregnancies.

Other experts called it a promising step but said it would be crucial that babies get enough nutrients from the mother's blood supply.

"We really don't know if the blood flow to the uterus will increase and adapt in the same way," as in a regular pregnancy, said Dr. Yacoub Khalaf, director of the Assisted Conception unit at Guy's and St. Thomas' hospital in London.

"It is a good sign they have done the (embryo) transfers," Khalaf said. "But a live birth will be the best validation that this works."

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