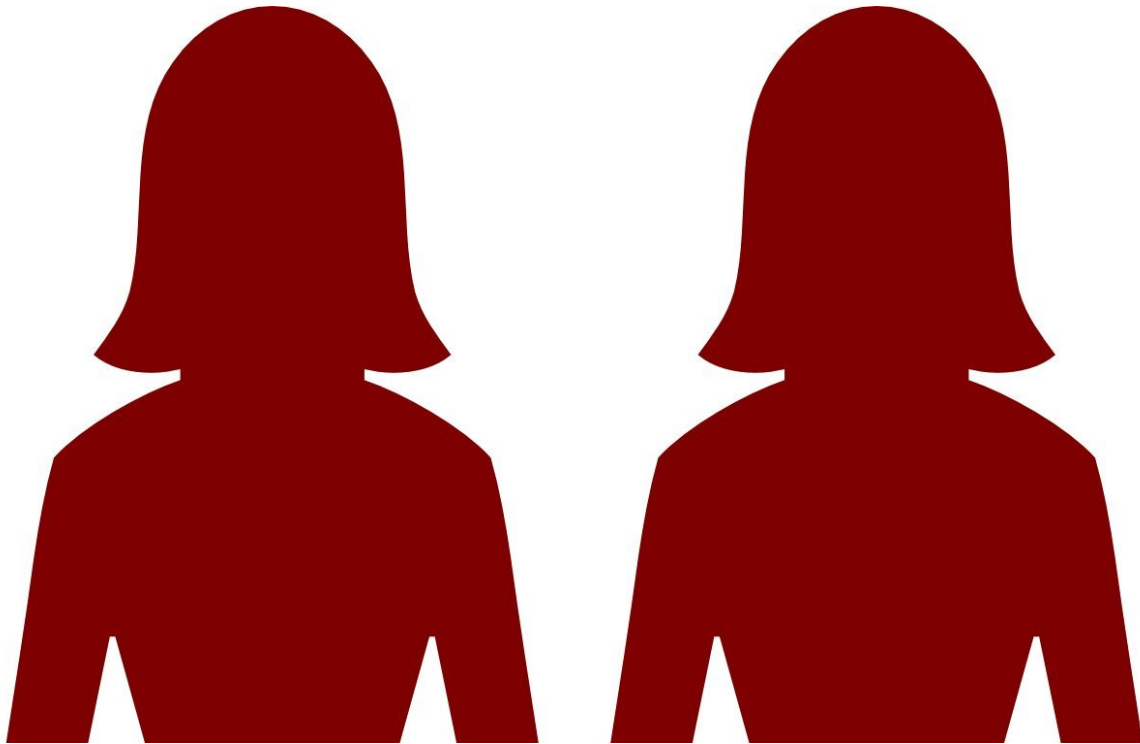


Same-sex couple makes medical history by physically carrying the same embryo

October 31 2018, by Danielle Cinone



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They both helped carry their baby—and made medical history in the process.

Ashleigh Coulter, 28, and her wife Bliss Coulter, 36, of Texas, took turns carrying their baby boy, thanks to the help of two fertility

specialists.

They are believed to be the first same-sex couple to take turns physically carrying their baby's embryo.

While Bliss wanted a child that was biologically hers, Ashleigh wanted to carry the baby.

"I've always wanted my own child but I didn't want to give birth to my own child. I didn't know anything like this existed," Bliss Coulter told the Daily News in a phone interview recently.

Determined to make the couple's wishes come true, Dr. Kathy Doody and her husband Kevin—fertility specialists at CARE Fertility Clinic in Bedford, Texas—decided to try Effortless Reciprocal In Vitro Fertilization (IVF).

In the procedure, the eggs and sperm are introduced in an INVOcell device, which is inserted into the vagina during an incubation period.

The INVOcell device—a small plastic capsule—was put into Bliss, allowing the egg to be fertilized with donor sperm.

It's held in place with a small diaphragm and has holes in it to allow secretions to come out.

"We harvest the egg, put it with the sperm for five minutes and then place it directly into the vagina with the INVOcell device," Dr. Doody told The News. "The vagina works as a very good incubator."

After five days, the embryo was removed from Bliss and frozen.

Prior to the embryo being inserted into Ashleigh, her body had to be

prepped with hormones—estrogen by mouth and progesterone injections—which took about three weeks.

"They placed the embryo in my body and they did a blood test 10 days later—and we got pregnant on the first try," recalled Ashleigh, who carried the baby for nine months.

Stetson Coulter was born in June 2018 weighing 8 pounds, 4 ounces.

"He's healthy, happy, and we had no complications," Ashleigh said.

The women, who married in 2015, have faced many questions about the risks of the unique process, but the dangers are no different than traditional IVF.

"In fact, it's more natural because everything is happening inside the body rather than inside a lab," Ashleigh Coulter said.

The Coulters hope to inspire other same-sex couples to go through Effortless IVF—which is about half the cost of traditional IVF.

In Texas, traditional IVF costs could reach as high as \$20,000, which is significantly higher than effortless IVF, which could cost up to \$6,500.

"In the LGBT community, it seems like there's always one person in a couple that more so wants to carry the child ... with this procedure it will open up a huge window for those that are like me," Bliss said.

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