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IVF Mistakes: Making Sure The Baby Is Yours

Monday, March 26, 2007

FOX NEWS

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A New York couple is suing their fertility clinic for giving them the wrong sperm – resulting in the wrong child. The couple, Thomas and Nancy Andrews, of Commack, N.Y., claims that their daughter is too dark to be their child. They are suing [New York Medical Services for Reproductive Medicine](#) for medical malpractice and other offenses after multiple genetic tests have confirmed that Thomas is not the father of the baby.

[Click Here to Read More About the Lawsuit](#)

The [Center for Disease Control](#) (CDC) estimates 1.2 million women had an infertility-related medical appointment in 2002. More and more couples are seeking out infertility treatments such as [in vitro fertilization](#) (IVF). As the business for [assisted reproduction technology](#) booms, especially IVF, this lawsuit highlights the chance for mix-ups.

In 2002, a white British couple gave birth to black twins after an IVF mix-up. While this is not a common occurrence, [clearly](#), mistakes do happen. It is difficult to quantify how often these mistakes happen when babies are of the same race – because it is more difficult to detect.

Dr. Randy Morris, a **board certified reproductive endocrinologist** and medical director of **IVF1 Chicago** notes, "Each year in the us there is something like 150,000 procedures performed. Generally a story makes the news, once a year, once every other, so the risk is an estimated 1 in 150,000. If you add to this to the fact that we don't have statistics for how many times women have an intra-uterine performed, this is an exceedingly low number of these incidences."

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Dr. Susan Lobel, a reproductive endocrinologist at America Fertility Services adds, "All reputable programs have a very careful system so that mixing up of eggs and sperm doesn't happen. While something like this happens and gets reported, in all the cases where this happens, there is a breach in the protocol. Labs have very careful systems set up. Most of the time when this happens its because someone has breached the system, and there isn't a problem with the system."

For couples concerned about [genetic testing](#) while undergoing IVF, there are options.

-- **Preimplantation Genetics Diagnosis** (PGD) – This technique identifies genetic defects in embryos created through IVF before they are transferred to the uterus. Collecting genetic material before implantation can ensure a couple that the embryo is, in fact, a genetic match. Ask your [fertility clinic](#) in advance if they offer this testing.

-- **Amniocentesis** – This is a common pre-natal test where doctors take a small sample of the amniotic fluid around the fetus for examination. It is used to diagnose chromosomal and genetic birth defects. Like PGD, this allows a couple to know if the fetus is a genetic match, however then decision must be made about continuing the pregnancy.

The Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority, which oversees [IVF treatment](#) in the United Kingdom, is also looking into 'tagging' embryos. The process would involve using a RFID tag, or barcode, on the sperm, eggs and embryos. The tags can set off an alarm if two Petri dishes that do not have compatible material get too close to each other. The safety and logistics of this method is still under investigation in the United Kingdom, but could offer another level of protection for patients.

For Orthodox Jewish couples, there are **embryo watchers**. A Rabbi oversees the process in the lab. Dr. Lobel says that this is not an option for everyone. She says this is a religious consideration "analogous to if a restaurant is kosher, a Rabbi comes in to inspect and make sure they're followir the rules. Likewise with IVF a Rabbi, or someone who has training, comes in and observes the process. The reason is not to double check the doctors, or to imply there isn't a system set up, bu they're there observing the process with regard to Jewish law. It is a very involved process, that is done with insemination as well as with IVF."

So while the risk may be relatively small for a mix-up in the lab, anyone undergoing IVF should as their doctor about the clinic's safety procedures. Also, the fertility doctor should be a board certifie reproductive endocrinologist, and the clinic should be registered with the **Society of Assisted Reproductive Technologies** (SART). Any assisted reproduction procedure can be a costly and emotional journey for a couple, so they deserve every precaution to deliver the baby that represer the two parts that invested in that creation.

FoxNews.com health editor Katherine Tweed contributed to this report.

*For more great information on living healthy through every decade of life, click here to check out L Manny's book **The Check List** (Harper Collins, 2007).*

Dr. Manny Alvarez is the managing editor of health news at FOXNews.com, and is a regular medical contributor on the FOX News Channel. He is chairman of the Department of Obstetrics at Gynecology and Reproductive Science at Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. Additionally, Alvarez is Adjunct Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at New York University School of Medicine in New York City.

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