



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Object 9: IVF



What is it?

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is a medical technique that involves fertilisation of an egg outside the body. It is most commonly used in the treatment of infertility. IVF involves eggs and sperm being mixed, usually in a glass or plastic dish. This has resulted in the babies born from the procedure being referred to as 'test tube babies'. Fertilised eggs develop into embryos, which are returned to the mother's uterus, where they implant and develop in the same way as a natural pregnancy.

History

IVF was developed in the 1970s by obstetrician Patrick Steptoe and biologist Robert Edwards. The first successful IVF pregnancy resulted in the birth of Louise Brown in Manchester in 1978. Edwards was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2010.

Pathology

Clinical embryologists are the pathology scientists who work in the field of assisted conception, which includes IVF. It is estimated that over 2 million babies worldwide have been born as a result of IVF treatment. Approximately 2% of babies in the UK are now born following IVF or similar fertility treatments.

Find out more

The [Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority](#) oversees IVF in the UK.