

Infertility is a disease that will affect 1 in 6 couples in the UK ¹



Difficulty conceiving is a widespread problem. It is the second most common reason for women of child-bearing age to visit their GP, the most common reason being pregnancy.

The World Health Organisation classifies infertility as a disease and, as with any other medical condition, it is deserving of treatment. If left untreated infertility can result in stress, anxiety, depression and the breakdown of relationships.

About this report

Data in this report has been compiled from Freedom of Information requests sent to all 208 CCGs across England – 100% of which responded.

IVF provision in the NHS in England

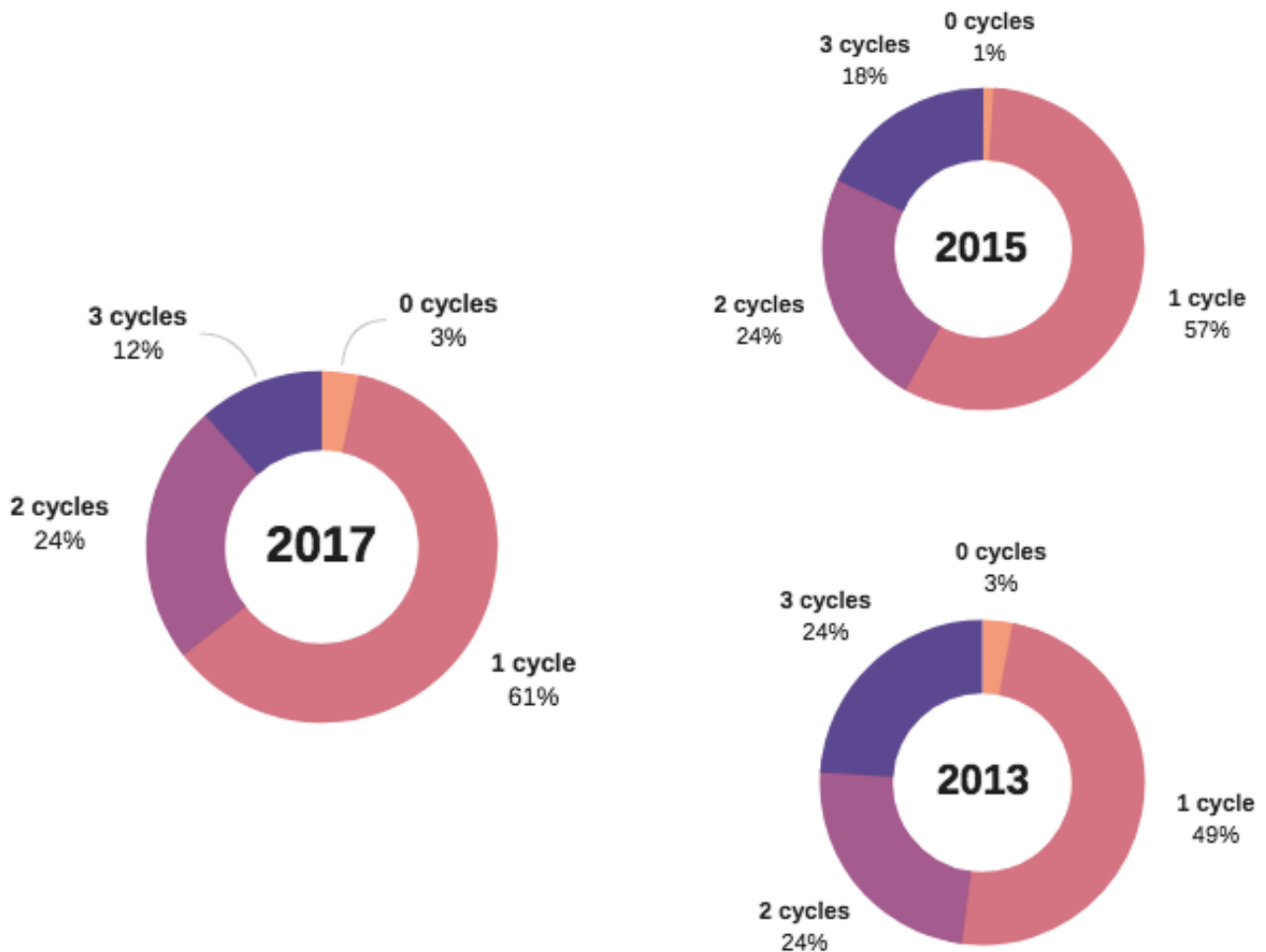
The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the expert body responsible for issuing evidence-based recommendations on the provision of health services.

In 2004 NICE issued a clinical guideline on infertility, which recommended that all eligible couples should have access to **3 full cycles of IVF** where the woman is aged under 40. An update in 2013 further recommended that women aged between 40-42, meeting specific criteria, should have access to 1 full cycle. According to NICE **a full cycle of IVF treatment should include 1 round of ovarian stimulation followed by the transfer of any resultant fresh and frozen embryos.**

Despite this clear and long-standing guidance, IVF provision across England has remained consistently below the NICE recommendations and is subject to considerable regional variations.

This 'postcode lottery' stands in stark contrast with the rest of the UK. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, access criteria and provision are standardised and patients within each of the devolved nations have equality of treatment.

Number of IVF cycles provided by CCGs



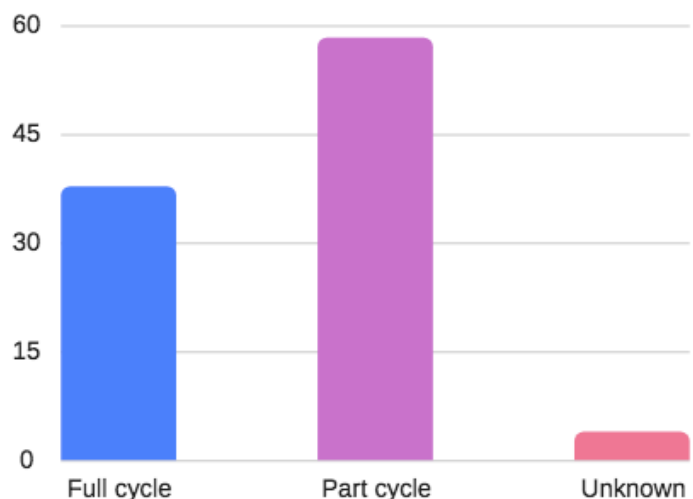
The diagram above shows that just 12% of CCGs offer the NICE recommended 3 cycles of IVF. This figure has halved since 2013. The percentage of CCGs offering 1 cycle has increased by a quarter since 2013 (from 49% to 61%). This is a hugely worrying trend of disinvestment and reduction in fertility services.

% CCGs offering 1 cycle that correctly define that cycle

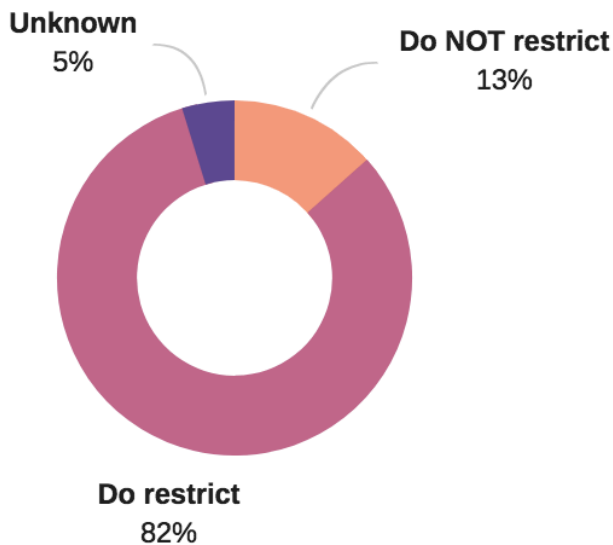
A full cycle should include one episode of ovarian stimulation and the transfer of any resultant fresh and frozen embryo(s).

This is to enable people to have multiple attempts at achieving a pregnancy with each cycle.

In 2017, 58% of CCGs claiming to offer one cycle restrict access by only offering a partial cycle.



% CCGs that restrict on childlessness



Department of Health endorsed guidelines state that IVF should be provided if at least one partner has no living children. However only 13% of CCGs use this definition of childlessness. This means most couples where one partner has a child from a previous relationship have no access to NHS IVF.

Age and IVF

NICE recommends that women between the age of 40 and 42 should be offered one cycle of IVF on the NHS, however only half of CCGs (51%) offer this.

Some CCGs limit the age ranges for IVF with no clinical evidence to support them, for example Wiltshire CCG only offers IVF to women between the age of 30 and 40. Bristol CCG, North Somerset CCG and South Gloucestershire CCG are currently consulting on reducing the age women can receive treatment to 30-35 years old. This would essentially amount to a decommissioning of IVF for many patients in these areas.¹

Philip Dunne, the Minister of State for Health states that: “The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline on the assessment and treatment of people with fertility problems provides evidence based best practice guidance for clinicians. There is, therefore, no need for clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to undertake their own evidence reviews.”

With the age of first time mothers continuing to rise² this is likely to become a much greater issue in years to come and, given that it is recommended by NICE, is one that should be addressed immediately.

¹ <https://www.bristolccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/nhs-service-proposals/fertility-treatment-eligibility/>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2015>

The Cost of IVF

Data from this audit shows that the average cost of one full cycle of IVF is £3,483. This is the mean average of a wide range of prices offered by service providers to CCGs – from £1,343 to £5,788. Promises were made by former Minister for Public Health and Innovation, Nicola Blackwood, for the Department of Health to work with NHS England and professional and stakeholder groups to develop benchmark pricing for fertility services to ensure that CCGs get the best value for their money.

This promise is being honoured by the current Minister of State for Health, Philip Dunne: “NHS England and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), together with professional and stakeholder groups, are working together to see how in vitro fertilisation commissioning could be improved. One element of this is the ongoing work to develop a benchmark price that the National Health Service pays for infertility treatments.” Such a benchmark price would be the first step towards NHS England’s longer-term work to develop a national tariff.

Ongoing consultations

Fertility Fairness is aware of 14 CCGs that are consulting to reduce NHS IVF provision.

- Southend CCG and West Essex CCG – proposing to reduce from 2 to 0 cycles.
- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire CCGs CCG – proposing to reduce access only to women aged 30-35.
- The eight CCGs across Lancashire: Lancashire North CCG; East Lancashire CCG; Blackburn with Darwen CCG; West Lancashire CCG; Blackpool CCG; Fylde and Wyre CCG; Chorley and South Ribble CCG; and Greater Preston CCG are proposing to harmonise policies which could mean decreased provision for some of the eight CCGs (proposals are to decrease number of embryo transfers within a cycle).
- St Helens CCG – considering suspension of all non-essential operations and IVF services to balance the books.

Golden CCGs

There are only *four* CCGs that follow NICE fertility guidance in full *and* do not restrict access to couples who have children from previous relationships. These are **Bury CCG, Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale CCG, Oldham CCG** and **Tameside and Glossop CCG**. These CCGs lead by example and show it is possible to have quality and effective fertility services in NHS clinical commissioning groups.

CCGs that do not offer any IVF services

The CCGs that have decommissioned IVF services are **Croydon CCG, South Norfolk CCG, Mid Essex CCG, North East Essex CCG, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CCG, Herts Valley CCG** and **Basildon and Brentwood CCG**. Patients with residency in these areas have *no* access to IVF services; Fertility Fairness believes this to be completely unacceptable.

WHAT IS FERTILITY FAIRNESS ASKING FOR?

- **Full implementation of the NICE guidelines including the provision of 3 full cycles of IVF to all eligible couples regardless of locality.**
- **Standardisation of eligibility criteria across England.**
- **The development of a national tariff in England for tertiary fertility services.**

About Fertility Fairness

Fertility Fairness is an umbrella body, which has the support of a number of organisations working in the field of infertility, from professional bodies to patient support groups.

For more than 20 years Fertility Fairness has campaigned for people to have comprehensive equal access to a full range of appropriate NHS investigations and treatments for infertility.

We are supported by the following organisations:

This briefing document was drawn up by the Fertility Fairness secretariat. The views expressed within do not necessarily represent the views of the supporting organisations listed below.



British Fertility Society



fertilitynetworkuk

