

Frozen Future

A new method offers the hope of motherhood to young women with cancer.

By Jen Uscher



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Young women with cancer often face the agonizing possibility that the treatments that can cure their disease may also leave them infertile. [James Goldfarb, MD](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/staff_directory/staff_display.aspx?doctorid=3864) (http://my.clevelandclinic.org/staff_directory/staff_display.aspx?doctorid=3864), and his team have frozen the eggs of more than 30 patients over the past two years, in the hope of offering them a family-filled future.

But first Dr. Goldfarb needed to know if he could use the eggs for a successful pregnancy. In 2008, he and his team used frozen eggs from a donor and frozen sperm to impregnate two healthy women in their early 40s. The babies were born in July and August 2009.

"Now we feel when we're talking to patients, we can tell them our system works," says Dr. Goldfarb, Director of Infertility Services at Cleveland Clinic.

The researchers used a new rapid-freezing method called vitrification to freeze eggs from a donor in her early 20s. After the eggs were thawed, a single sperm was injected directly into each egg. The resulting embryos were transferred into the uterus of the mother-to-be. The procedures were sponsored by Partnership for Families, a philanthropy board administered by Cleveland Clinic.

Although egg freezing is still considered experimental, Dr. Goldfarb says that data from hundreds of babies born worldwide from frozen eggs show that the children do not have more birth defects or chromosomal abnormalities than the general population. His goal now is to make more doctors and cancer patients aware of the availability of egg freezing. "Oncologists don't always tell their patients about the potential for this," he says.

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