

FAIRFAX CRYOBANK

A Genetics & IVF Institute Cryobank
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Dear Editor:

Your story, *The Truth about Donor 1084* (October 2006), discusses some of the complex issues that arise when a child conceived through donor sperm manifests a medical issue, but the story does not fully explain how our Cryobank responds to those situations. For more than twenty years, Fairfax Cryobank has been committed to providing donor sperm that produces healthy babies. Fairfax Cryobank's screening and testing of its donors exceeds the testing required by the FDA. For example, Fairfax Cryobank is the first and only sperm bank that protects its female patients by using DNA genetic analysis to test sperm donors for high risk strains of HPV (Human Papillomavirus) known to cause cervical cancer, the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women in the US. But since more than 30,000 genes have been identified, it simply isn't possible to test for every possible genetic problem that could occur. And, frankly, no couple conceiving naturally could test for every possible genetic issue, either. Most couples that conceive a child without donor sperm know less about their genetic histories and possible outcomes than our clients know about their donors. Consider this fact -- in the general population, every pregnancy has about a 3%-4% risk of producing a child with a birth defect or mental deficiency. Our procedures reduce this risk, but cannot eliminate it.

We ask physicians and clients to notify us whenever they believe a child born by donor sperm has any medical condition. In the rare cases when we receive such notice, we immediately remove that donor from sale and investigate the report. We carefully gather as much information as we can on any reported condition, asking for a physician's diagnosis. Unfortunately, in many cases, we never receive a physician's diagnosis.

Fairfax Cryobank's Medical Director is a physician who is a board certified pediatrician and clinical geneticist. He evaluates all adverse clinical reports, and if it appears to be useful, he orders additional testing of the donor in order to help clarify a donor's role. (We are, of course, dependent upon the mother for information about her medical history.) If our Medical Director determines that using a donor could raise the risk of occurrence of a significant medical condition or birth defect above the risk in the general population, we will restrict that donor, meaning that his sperm is no longer available for sale to the general public. In certain circumstances, however, we will allow this donor to remain available only to clients who already have a child by the same donor, allowing them a biological sibling. We will ship such a donor's sperm only after the client understands the risks, as best can be determined with the information given us, has an opportunity to discuss these issues with our medical staff, and has signed an informed consent. Clients and their physicians can then evaluate if it is appropriate to use the restricted donor.

Fairfax Cryobank is an industry leader in the screening and testing of its donors. We will continue to do everything possible to provide information to prospective mothers and mothers of babies conceived through donor sperm to ensure that they and their physicians can make the best decisions about their use of donor sperm.

William W. Jaeger
Director
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Fairfax, VA
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