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# Some Call for Regulation of Sperm Banks

Reports of donors with 50 to 150 offspring spur calls for more scrutiny

By Kimberly King | Wednesday, Oct 26, 2011 | Updated 1:03 AM CDT



Kimberly King, NBC 5 News

Some people are calling for stricter regulation of the sperm bank industry, citing health concerns.

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[News reports of a sperm donor with 150 offspring](#) have prompted discussions on how to

better regulate the sperm bank industry.

Every year, tens of thousands of children are born with the use of donor sperm. North Texas families looking to conceive must go online because Texas does not have a sperm bank.

"You order online, and you can have it shipped to your home or doctor's office and go from there," said Shannon Carrigan, who used a sperm donor to conceive her daughter, Kate.

Carrigan, of Dallas, has connected with five other families that used the same donor.

Some of the children look alike. Many have blond hair and blue eyes, and some share a similar jawline.

Carrigan shares stories and pictures in a Facebook group with the other parents.

"I do believe there are a few more out there that aren't in contact with us yet," she said.

[The New York Times](#) reported last month on a group of 150 half-siblings conceived with sperm from the same donor.

Some have called for tighter regulation of the industry, citing health concerns.

"If you have a donor who has 150, 200 children, you may have 100 with kidney disease or Huntington's chorea [disease]," said Dr. Kevin Doody, a fertility expert at [the Center for Assisted Reproduction in North Texas](#).

Advocates for regulation also say they are worried about the potential for incest among adults who do

Advocates for regulation also say they are worried about the potential for incest among adults who do not know they are half-siblings.

Doody said recent revelations about donors with 50 to 150 offspring have him taking a closer look at the sperm banks he refers his patients to. His patients use a number of sperm banks across the country.

Carrigan recently watched a documentary about children conceived using donor sperm that featured a man who had 70 offspring.

"I just hope they regulate the industry better, because that's just too much," she said.

Other countries, such as Britain and France, restrict how many times an individual donor's sperm can be used. The United States does not have limits, although the [American Society for Reproductive Medicine](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to reproductive medicine, has guidelines.

"So we don't know how many kids are born for any one donor, who they are, where they are, if they have any sicknesses, any genetic illnesses," said Wendy Kramer, the founder of the [Donor Sibling Registry](#). "There's no way to upload and share medical information amongst people who have used the same donor."

She has run the Donor Sibling Registry for 11 years. It has connected more than 9,000 donor offspring with their half-siblings or donors.

In the United States, sperm donors are paid for their donations. Men can donate at more than one sperm bank, and there is not a national system to cross-check if a donor has donated elsewhere.

"The problems are, the sperm banking industry is not keeping accurate records, so you can't limit the number of offspring until you actually keep track of how many offspring there are for any one given donor," Kramer said.

Kramer, an advocate for more regulation of the industry, said profit is a big reason why sperm banks allow repeat sales.

Sperm banks largely work online. Some banks say they cap numbers on donors above what is recommended by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

"We take a more conservative approach than what is suggested by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine," said Tammy Zimmer, managing director of [NW Cryobank](#). "The ASRM recommends no more than 25 pregnancies per 800,000 populous. We limit our donors to no more than 25 reported pregnancies, regardless of geography."

One of the largest sperm banks in the country, [California Cryobank](#), has stepped up its methods to limit donor offspring to 25 to 30 families.

Spokesman Scott Brown said it did so because births to the bank were being under-reported or not reported in a timely manner.

"We limit the [sperm] vials we distribute as an additional method of controlling the number of donor conceived children," he said. "Every donor is re-evaluated every six months for donor eligibility, where reported pregnancies are also considered."

The bank contacts patients who have bought sperm if the bank hasn't heard from the patient in three months.

California Cryobank has also made changes to its website so it's [easier for families to report pregnancies and births](#).

The term "families" refers to an individual purchasing sperm to conceive a child. Though the limit is 25 to 30, a family can purchase multiple vials from the same donor and have several children.

Despite the controversy, Carrigan said she is at peace with her decision to use donor sperm.

"If I ever envisioned what being a single mom is like, this is it -- the good, the bad, the ugly -- but I wouldn't change it for anything," she said.

Carrigan said she does not have a problem with the fact that her daughter has genetic half-siblings

across the United States. She said she doesn't consider them actual brothers or sisters but is open to her daughter connecting with them as she grows older.

Carrigan said the sperm donor she used originally wrote on his profile that he was open to meeting offspring when they became adults but has since changed his mind.

"It could be the recent publicity about this issue, or that he's learned he has many offspring, or it could be he's just in a relationship," she said.

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