

# UK lesbian couple welcome world's first two-womb baby in major breakthrough

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A British lesbian couple has become the first to benefit from a brand new "shared motherhood" procedure, with the fertilised egg incubated in both women's wombs during the course of their pregnancy.

IVF experts at the London Women's Clinic first launched the concept of "shared motherhood" in 2011, with one partner contributing the egg while the other partner carries the pregnancy. More than 100 babies have been born to lesbian couples using this approach which involves artificial incubation prior to the transfer of the embryo into the womb.

The Clinic has now gone one step further with the fertilised egg being incubated in one partner's uterus – rather than in an artificial environment – for the first 18 hours following fertilisation, before being transferred to the second partner's womb for the duration of the pregnancy. This not only gives both partners a practical and emotional stake in the pregnancy, but also provides the embryo with important nutrients and other components in a natural, maternal environment.

The London Women's Clinic can now report that Britain's first baby born as a result of this intrauterine incubation approach was born in July. Both partners, Donna and Jasmine Francis-Smith, were thus involved in creating the embryo during the first days of its development, before the capsule was removed from the uterus, the embryo grown into a "blastocyst", transferred back to the uterus to implant and a pregnancy began.

"The procedure really made me and Donna feel quite equal in the whole process," said Jasmine, "and has emotionally brought us closer together. Now with baby Otis born safe and well, we feel a true family. If we had to go through the process again there is nothing we would change."

The incubation capsule, known as AneVivo, allowed Donna as the egg provider and capsule carrier to take a major role in the whole process before transfer of an embryo to Jasmine for implantation and pregnancy.

Dr Giuseppina Lamanna, the Consultant Gynaecologist who supervised the couple's treatment at the London Women's Clinic, paid tribute to Anecova, the Swiss company behind this remarkable development, for developing this new technology for IVF. "The AneVivo method neatly brings together the contributions of the biological and birthing mothers in creating their baby, a source of tremendous satisfaction to many of the lesbian and heterosexual couples we see at our clinic" said Dr Lamanna. "In this case Donna was very happy with the idea that she was creating their own embryos at home."

The AneVivo procedure is now available to all same-sex and heterosexual couples, and to single women having IVF and related treatments at the London Women's Clinic.

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