



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 23, 2014

U.K. Moving Toward Creation of “Three Parent” Babies

A Christian, pro-family group in England is warning of the dire consequences of a decision by the U.K. government to move ahead with a controversial plan that would allow for the creation of “three parent” babies through in vitro fertilization. In February U.K.’s Parliament released a health department-created proposal that would make the U.K. the first country to legalize the use of eggs from two women in IVF procedures for the purpose of reducing the number of babies born with genetic problems, such as heart and liver defects and muscular dystrophy caused by mitochondrial diseases.



Public consultation over the draft regulations closed May 22, and the measure will now move back to Parliament for consideration within the next two months. If legislation is passed, fertility clinics in the U.K. would be able to transfer the nucleus of an egg from one woman to the egg of another, which, when fertilized by a man’s sperm, would contain the genetic material of three individuals.

There are estimates that [one in 200 babies in the U.K.](#) is born with mitochondrial disorder, which is inherited from the mother, so the proposed IVF procedure would allow an affected woman to have a baby without passing on mitochondrial disease.

“Mitochondrial disease, including heart disease, liver disease, loss of muscle coordination, and other serious conditions like muscular dystrophy, can have a devastating impact on the people who inherit it,” said the U.K.’s chief medical officer, Dr. Sally Davies, in defense of the controversial proposal.

But the pro-family group Christian Concern has raised both ethical and health concerns over the procedure, known as mitochondria replacement, and is asking the government to back off from passage of the legislation until more research can be done to determine long-term impact.

“There are widespread concerns about the profound, adverse effects on a child’s physiological well-being, including the impact on his or her sense of identity, which could arise from a genetic, parental connection with three, instead of two, individuals,” the group said in a press release after the conclusion of the government’s required public consultation.

Christian Concern’s CEO Andrea Williams pointed out that the U.K.’s Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority “has recommended that further research should be undertaken before proceeding with these proposals. The government should have waited for the conclusion of these further tests before publishing the Draft Regulations.”

While the U.K. government insisted that the consultation showed “overall support” for legalizing the procedure, Dr. David King, director of a London-based monitoring group called Human Genetic Alert, questioned the claim while warning that moving ahead with the procedure could open the door to the creation of “designer babies” in the country. “These techniques are unnecessary and unsafe and were in



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fact rejected by the majority of consultation responses,” King said in a statement. “It is a disaster that the decision to cross the line that will eventually lead to a eugenic designer baby market should be taken on the basis of an utterly biased and inadequate consultation.”

King noted that a mother can already use conventional egg donation to avoid passing on mitochondrial disorder to her child, so that the only benefit of the new procedure would be to allow a baby to be genetically related to one woman while being carried to term by another. “While I can understand that, that’s not a medical benefit to anybody,” he told CNN, “and you have to weigh it against the risks of invasive techniques that will clearly carry a risk to the child.”

Earlier this year King noted to the U.K.’s [Telegraph](#) newspaper that if the legislation is passed by Parliament, it would be “the first time any government has legalized inheritable human genome modification, something that is banned in all other European countries. The techniques have not passed the necessary safety tests so it is unnecessary and premature to rush ahead with legalization.”

He added that there is also the “risk to society at large” of normalizing such a procedure, noting that once scientists cross the ethical line of modifying human DNA, the door will be opened to “the next step and the next step after that. That’s why governments around the world over the last 20 years have said ‘we won’t allow you to genetically engineer human beings.’”

While mitochondria replacement has been given an approving nod by the U.K.-based Nuffield Council on Bioethics, in the United States, Notre Dame law professor and bioethicist O. Carter Snead warned that “unresolved safety and ethical questions” require the U.K. to “proceed slowly and cautiously” concerning the procedure. “Little is known about the short- and long-term genetic effects of this procedure on children born with its aid,” he said in a statement. “It would be an ironic tragedy if this procedure were rushed from bench to bedside, only to harm the very children it was meant to help.”





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