

## Test tube babies, 25 years later

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**(CNN) --When Louise Brown was born on July 25, 1978, in England, she was the world's first test tube baby, the result of a now-common procedure called in vitro fertilization (IVF).**

Considered a pioneering fertility treatment 25 years ago, IVF has now been responsible for an estimated **114,000 babies born in the United States alone**, according to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

"It's hard to look back and remember how surprising and shocking that was -- that human beings can actually be made outside the body," said Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist with the University of Pennsylvania.

IVF is a procedure that involves retrieving the eggs from the mother and mixing them in the lab with sperm from the father. The resulting embryo is then placed back into the mother's uterus to develop normally until delivery.

IVF is usually the treatment of choice for a woman with blocked or absent fallopian tubes, through which the egg travels from the ovary to the uterus.

"[At first] the general medical community was a little unsure and a bit skeptical about exactly what this meant and whether it would be a viable procedure," explained Dr. Sandra Ann Carson with the American

Society for Reproductive Medicine. But she said the technique changed how doctors treated infertility almost overnight.

Initially, the procedure offered a 3 to 6 percent chance of pregnancy, but medical and technological advances over the years have increased the rate to nearly 23 percent, according to the reproductive society.

And as the technology continues to grow, sperm donors, egg donors and surrogates have all become common.

"You can't buy a baby in the United States," said Caplan. "... But you can buy the sperm, you can buy the egg and you can rent the uterus."

Because multiple embryos are planted in the uterus to increase the odds that one will result in a pregnancy, the number of twins, triplets and other multiple births has increased. Statistics of IVF births show 24 percent are twins and 5 percent are triplets or more.

**Studies have also shown that IVF babies have a higher risk of birth defects and low birth weight, but researchers aren't sure why.**

The cost is another obstacle. IVF is rarely covered by insurance and treatments can range from \$5,000 to \$8,000, with an additional \$2,000 for drug costs.

Even so, many infertile couples hoping to have a family are finding it worth the risk.

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