



West Australian
21/05/2009
Page: 5
General News
Region: Perth
Circulation: 192964
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 396.07 sq.cms
MTWTFS-

IVF study backs use of single embryo

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Perth researchers have found that twins born as a result of in-vitro fertilisation are more at risk of dying, being born early or suffering health problems in their first three years of life compared with naturally conceived twins.

They say the findings support a

shift away from multiple embryos being implanted in women by fertility clinics.

The Telethon Institute for Child Health Research study, published in the international journal Human Reproduction, was based on all twin children born in WA between 1994 and 2000. It found that IVF twins had a higher risk of medical complications specifically related to their parents' fertility treatment.

Study leader Michele Hansen said that while couples undergoing assisted reproduction technology or ART should not be alarmed because most babies were delivered healthy or with problems that could be easily treated, the findings supported transferring only a single embryo at a time.

"We found that twins conceived following ART treatment had a greater risk of preterm birth, low birth

weight and death compared with spontaneously conceived twins," she said. "ART twins stayed in hospital longer after delivery and were 60 per cent more likely to be admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit. They were also more likely to be admitted to hospital in their first three years of life."

Ms Hansen said she hoped the research could help reduce risk.

"More research is needed to establish whether it could be due to the underlying causes of parental infertility or components of the ART procedure," she said. "However, in order to reduce the problems associated with twin births, clinicians and couples should consider the benefits of opting for single embryo transfer."

The research was funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.



Thriving: Michele Hansen, from the Telethon Institute for Child Health, with one-year-old IVF twins Amy and Joel Hansen who were born healthy. Picture: Sandie Bertrand