

## Mini 'body incubator' may halve cost of IVF

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By Fiona McRae [Comment on this story](#)



(File photo) An embryologist works on an embryo at a

health fertility clinic in London. Picture: AP

London - A mini incubator that nurtures fledgling embryos inside a woman's body could halve the cost of IVF, American doctors believe.

The clear plastic device, which is the shape and size of a champagne cork, could give many more women the chance of fulfilling their dream of motherhood because conventional IVF is too expensive for many.

In a pilot study of 33 infertile women, those treated using the INVOcell incubator were just as likely to become pregnant as others.

Nine babies have been born so far.

Almost half of the 50 000 women who have IVF in Britain each year, for example, pay for it themselves, spending as much as £15 000 (R264 000) a session.

South Africans seeking help with infertility can also find the costs sky-rocketing.

But the new technique aims to cut costs by simplifying the process.

In a conventional IVF lab, fledgling embryos are kept in incubators for up to five days before the best ones are put into the woman's body – an expensive process.

The incubators cost hundreds of thousands of rands each and have to be constantly monitored to make sure they are at the same temperature and contain the same mix of gases as the womb and Fallopian tubes so the delicate embryos can grow.

The INVOcell technique does away with the incubators and the need for constant monitoring. Early-stage embryos are instead nurtured inside the device which is placed inside the woman's vagina. This provides the right temperature, and because the plastic is semi-permeable, it allows surrounding gases inside, therefore emulating conditions in the womb.

After three to five days, the device is removed and the best embryos transferred to the woman's womb as usual.

Costs are also cut by giving lower doses of the powerful drugs used to boost egg production ahead of IVF, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's annual conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, heard.

Researcher Dr Kevin Doody, of the Centre for Assisted Reproduction in Bedford, Texas, said: "My anticipation is that it will probably halve the cost of an IVF cycle." His wife, Dr Kathleen Doody, said: "We definitely had feedback from patients that it seemed more natural to them."

Dr Doody, who has shares in the device's manufacturer, Massachusetts-based INVO Bioscience, said while it won't be suitable for all women, it could help up to two thirds of patients.

The device could also make IVF more acceptable to the Catholic Church, which disapproves of IVF because fertilisation takes place outside the body and in a dish. With INVOcell, fertilisation takes place once the device is inside the woman's body.

INVO Bioscience hopes to have the device on sale in the US by the end of this year. It is seeking a partner for a European launch. British doctors have, however, raised safety concerns, including the potential for infection. – Daily Mail

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