



Progress Educational Trust

informing debate on assisted conception and genetics

PRESS RELEASE

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#ExtendTheLimit – a Progress Educational Trust campaign

to extend the 10-year storage limit on eggs frozen for non-medical (social) reasons

Fertility and genetics charity the Progress Educational Trust (PET) today launches its #ExtendTheLimit campaign calling on the Government to extend the 10-year storage limit for eggs frozen for non-medical (social) reasons, and asking the UK public to show its support by signing and sharing the #ExtendTheLimit petition at

<https://tinyurl.com/extendthelimit>

PET's director Sarah Norcross said: 'Women deserve reproductive choice yet increasing numbers of women in the UK are facing the stark choice of having to destroy their frozen eggs or become a mother before they are ready to do so because of an outdated and unscientific law. PET's #ExtendTheLimit campaign aims to improve women's reproductive options and extend the 10-year storage limit for social egg freezing by gathering 100,000 signatures to our online petition at <https://tinyurl.com/extendthelimit> At 100,000 signatures the Government will be forced to debate a change in the law at Westminster.'

'Today is the start of Fertility Week 2019: we urge the UK public to sign and share PET's petition to #ExtendTheLimit for social egg freezing, and the Government to be compassionate and make the small change necessary to remove this cruel and pointless legislation. Just a minor amendment would give so many women hope for a fertile future.'

In what way is the current legislation unfair?

If a woman wants to try to preserve her fertility, the best time to freeze her eggs is in her 20s but, under current UK law, women who freeze their eggs for non-medical reasons can only store them for 10 years. This means if a woman freezes her eggs when

she is 22 she has to be ready to use them before she is 32; if she isn't she faces a limited number of distressing and potentially financially-crippling options: to have her eggs destroyed, and with them perhaps her best or only chance of becoming a biological mother; to become a parent before she is ready to do so, either with a partner or as a solo mum via sperm donation, or to try to fund the transfer of her eggs to a fertility clinic overseas and have fertility treatment abroad at a later date.

Ms Norcross said: 'The 10-year storage limit for social egg freezing is a very clear breach of human rights: it curtails women's reproductive choices, harms women's chances of becoming biological mothers, does not have any scientific basis (eggs remain viable if frozen for longer than ten years) and is discriminatory against women because of the decline in female fertility with age. It is an arbitrary and outdated piece of legislation that does not reflect improvements in egg freezing techniques and changes in society which push women to have children later in life; that's why it is time for change now.'

Why change is needed now

The proportion of women affected by the egg freezing legislation is increasing rapidly: in the UK, the number of women freezing their eggs more than tripled in the last five years. However, the current 10-year storage limit acts as a perverse incentive for women to delay freezing their eggs until their mid-to-late 30s when egg quality is declining and a woman's chance of becoming a biological mother has reduced – latest UK figures show two-thirds of women freezing their eggs are over 35. In this way, the 10-year storage limit promotes poor clinical practice – women seeking fertility preservation treatment in their late 30s or 40s typically need more ovarian stimulation and fertility treatment cycles to have a chance at success.

Baroness Ruth Deech QC, whose Private Member's Storage Period for Gametes Bill calling for a change in the gamete storage legislation was due to be introduced in the House of Lords on Thursday 24 October, said: 'The storage period of 10 years for frozen eggs was set when little was known about the science. We are calling on the Government to enact a simple change in the law which will end this interference with private and family life under human rights law and give hope to numerous women. We urge the public too to add their support and sign the #ExtendTheLimit petition at <https://tinyurl.com/extendthelimit>.'

Professor Emily Jackson, specialist in medical law at the London School of Economics, said: 'At the moment, the law mandates the destruction of a woman's frozen eggs after 10 years, unless she is prematurely infertile. This is a clear and unjustifiable breach of a woman's human rights. It is also unintentional and would be easy for the government to solve, if it had the will to do so. Please sign this petition and help to persuade the government to make a small change that would make a very big difference to some women's lives.'

ENDS

Case studies

TV presenter and scientist Dr Emily Grossman, 41, went through 4 cycles of egg freezing at age 38 in a bid to preserve her fertility; she supports the #ExtendTheLimit campaign. She says: 'There is no medical reason for eggs to be destroyed after 10 years. The 10-year storage limit is completely arbitrary. It is ludicrous that women who had the courage to break taboos and freeze their eggs 10 years ago are now facing the destruction of potentially their best chance of becoming a biological mother. I would be devastated if my eggs were destroyed at 48, if I wasn't in a position to be able to use them by then.'

Sharon, 34, is single and froze her eggs a year ago in the hope of preserving her fertility for the future. She had considered freezing her eggs in her 20s but was put off from doing so because of the 10-year storage limit for social egg freezing. She says: 'I definitely want to be a mum, in fact I'd love a big family. I'm not scared of doing it on my own but it would be nice to meet someone... but how long to hold off for before using my frozen eggs is a question that the 10-year storage limit has too much say in – just as the 10-year limit put me off freezing my eggs when I was younger in fear my eggs would be destroyed before I was ready to use them. It is a scandal that an outdated, unscientific rule is forcing women to take risks with their fertility and their chances of becoming biological mums. Please sign the #ExtendTheLimit petition and help change the law and women's reproductive choices.'

Carolyn froze her eggs 10 years ago when she was 37. She is now a mother after becoming pregnant naturally but was forced to move her frozen eggs abroad earlier this year to avoid them being destroyed because of the 10-year storage limit. She says: 'The current situation doesn't make any sense: it's better for women to freeze their eggs when they are younger but then you are being forced to use them before you're ready or to destroy them. The 10-year storage limit for social egg freezing is deeply unfair and needs to change.'

Jane (a pseudonym), 45, froze over 20 eggs in 2009, and earlier in 2019 faced the destruction of her frozen eggs. She says: 'Being told my eggs would be destroyed was heart-breaking, heartless and massively upsetting. This was my only chance left of having a biological family. Then I got the stay of execution [she was diagnosed with premature infertility, so her eggs can now remain frozen beyond ten years]; I wept and wept. I really feel for other women in this situation facing these terrible decisions – being forced to look at sperm donation or their eggs being destroyed; it's brutal. Signing the #ExtendTheLimit petition is vital to give all women affected the chance to be a biological mother. Please sign and share the #ExtendTheLimit petition today.'

Sarah, 42, froze her eggs when she was 38 after a long term relationship ended; she supports a change in the law to extend the 10-year storage limit for social egg freezing and blogs about her egg freezing experience at <https://lifeloveandme.co.uk/> She says: 'I

had thought and hoped that the relationship would lead to having children, so when it broke down freezing my eggs seemed like the most sensible thing to do. I have thought long and hard about whether using a sperm donor and becoming a single mum is the right choice for me, but I'm still of the belief that I don't want to do it on my own. I am a strong believer that if you freeze your eggs, it should be your choice when you use them.'

Caroline (a pseudonym) had to use donor eggs to become a mum, after the age at which she froze her eggs (39) impacted on their quality and IVF using them when she was 42 was unsuccessful. She says: 'If younger women have the foresight to freeze eggs when they still have quality, it's outrageous that they might be forced to use them before they are ready, potentially pushing them into solo motherhood to avoid the eggs being destroyed. I wouldn't change my situation now; I love my daughter to bits, but it is a big adjustment to make – moving from using your own eggs to donor eggs – and women who freeze their eggs are obviously hoping to have a genetically-related child. Freezing eggs at a younger age is the best way to achieve this: I strongly believe the 10-year storage limit needs to be extended and urge the public to support PET's #ExtendTheLimit campaign and sign the petition at <https://tinyurl.com/extendthelimit> !

Elizabeth (a pseudonym), 43, has direct experience of how age affects fertility. She wholeheartedly supports a change in the law to extend the 10-year storage limit for eggs frozen for non-medical reasons, saying: 'There are so many factors that affect women's decisions on when to try to start a family: finding a partner prepared to commit to parenthood, finding the right time in your career, having the finance in place to support a family and home. Women need to successfully achieve all of this within a relatively short time frame because of the impact female fertility has on age. That's why having the ability to preserve one's fertility in order to focus on building a successful career is of enormous value to young professional women; extending the storage limit on social egg freezing would give women greater flexibility on when they can use their eggs and improve their reproductive choices.'

Notes for editors

For media interviews and case studies, contact PET head of communications Catherine Hill at chill@progress.org.uk 07305-091466. #ExtendTheLimit campaign images can be downloaded from <https://www.progress.org.uk/extendthelimit>

1. The Progress Educational Trust (PET) is a UK charity working to advance public understanding of, and engagement with, science, law and ethics in the fields of human genetics, human reproduction, embryology and stem cell research. Funded by grants

and public donations, PET aims to improve the choices for people affected by infertility or genetic conditions. <https://www.progress.org.uk/>

2. PET organises free-to-attend events debating the responsible application of reproductive and genetic science and publishes BioNews, a free comment and news service. Subscribe to BioNews at <https://www.bionews.org.uk/subscribe>

3. Follow PET on twitter @BioNewsUK

Find PET on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ProgressEducationalTrust/>

4. Fertility Week is 28 October – 3 November 2019.