

Danish sperm donor passes rare genetic disorder to at least five of the 43 babies he is thought to have fathered in ten countries

- Sperm bank in Copenhagen said five children conceived using the donor's sperm have NF1 nerve disorder
- Condition can cause benign tumours, bone deformity, learning difficulties and even cancer
- Clinic was informed that a child born to the donor had developed NF1, but continued to use his sperm
- Unidentified donor understood to have fathered up to 43 children in 10 different countries

By [Kerry McDermott](#)

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A sperm donor has passed a rare genetic disorder to at least five of the 43 babies he is thought to have fathered, after screening measures at a fertility clinic failed to detect the mutation.

The man transmitted the nerve disorder Neurofibromatosis type I (NF1), known as Von Recklinghausen's disease.

The disease, which affects 4,000 babies a year in Britain, can cause high blood pressure, bone deformity, scoliosis, learning difficulties and eye problems, including tumours on the optic nerve.



Insemination: Five children conceived using sperm from the donor have been diagnosed with Neurofibromatosis Type 1

Nordisk Cryobank, the Copenhagen clinic where the Danish man donated his sperm, refused to say whether any British babies have been affected.

However, a spokesman said the donor had fathered 43 children in ten different countries, including 18 in Sweden and Denmark.

Who is eligible to donate sperm?

Regulations governing sperm donation vary from country to country, but prospective donors are generally required to:

- Be aged under 41 years (Some clinics assess suitability of older donors on a case by case basis)
- Undergo genetic screening tests
- Consent in writing to the use of donated sperm

Donor screening carried out at Nordisk Cryobank tests for conditions including:

- Cystic Fibrosis
- Thalassaemia
- Sickle Cell disease

Peter Bower, the clinic's director general, added: 'In the case of these five, we know the disorder came from the donor even though the disorder is not always transmitted by a person's parents.'

He added that the clinic could not release details about where and when the babies were born because of confidentiality rules.

Its website states that all sperm is tested for illnesses including HIV and cystic fibrosis. It does not say whether it is screened for Von Recklinghausen's disease.

Denmark is introducing new rules around sperm donation as a result of the case. From October sperm from a single donor will only be used in a maximum of 12 inseminations.

NF1 is caused by a genetic mutation. In half of all cases it is passed on from parent to child, and in the other half the mutation appears to develop on its own.

A type of cancer known as malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumours affects around 10 per cent of people with NF1.

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