



## More rural couples driving to the city for high-risk pregnancies

A Melbourne obstetrician says there is a growing trend of regional mothers travelling to the city for their pregnancy, with women making the journey from all corners of the state.



**[Robyn Riley](#)** Medical Editor

Follow

@rileyrobyn08

2 min read

August 17, 2023 - 5:00AM

**9 comments**

The arrival in June of Tex Herbert was a journey, in so many ways.

His parents had been trying unsuccessfully for a baby for 13 years and he was their second last [IVF](#) embryo.

He carried their dreams.

“We had pretty much given up hope,” new mum Marnie Doupain-Herbert said.

Added to this was the fact they live in the small town of Tyers, just outside Traralgon and, because the pregnancy was high risk, they decided to travel 150km up and down the Princes Highway to Melbourne for regular appointments with Epworth obstetrician Dr Stephen Cole.



Dr Stephen Cole with baby Tex. Image: Supplied.

The [Epworth Freemasons](#) hospital says there is a growing trend of parents travelling from regional Victoria to give birth with families now willing, or needing, to travel further to access expertise for high risk pregnancies and private healthcare.

Dr Cole says there are a many reasons women from the country travel to the city for obstetric care.

“We are seeing an increasing complexity with our patient population, including more advanced maternal age ... and the problems that come with that,” he said.

“The number of women undergoing fertility treatment and giving birth in their 40s is substantial now. Our patients are willing to travel for expert care.”



Dr Stephen Cole with new parents Lincoln Herbert and Marnie Doupain-Herbert and baby Tex. Picture: Andrew Henshaw

Dr Cole says in some regional centres there is often limited choice and fewer obstetricians providing care.

“I had one patient travel down from Robinvale (460km away) to have her twins at Epworth Freemasons. That was very successful,” he said.

Mrs Doupain-Herbert, 44, says giving birth to her son so far from home was difficult on her and husband Lincoln Herbert, 44.

“He is also the first grandchild on my family’s side,” she said.

“So, there was a lot of excitement, but I had to leave our home and family the week before his birth. This was my first baby, and I was anxious, so it was hard being away.”

The couple rented an apartment near the hospital and were together when Tex was delivered uneventfully on 19 June.

She said as the pregnancy was high risk, the city was best for her.

Mrs Doupain-Herbert turned to IVF as she was born with a rare genetic condition, which meant she only had half a uterus, with one fallopian tube.

She said they spent more than \$70,000 on six rounds of IVF and underwent nine embryo transfers to achieve their dream of a family.



Baby Tex arrived at Epworth Freemasons on June 19. Image: Supplied.

“The travel was hard work. I had to see Stephen (Cole) every two weeks; the long drives meant a whole day out each time. But I wanted the best care and took no chances,” Mrs Doupain-Herbert said.

In a statement the hospital said maternity patients from the Goulburn Valley were becoming common at Epworth Freemasons, with women from Shepparton and surrounding Kialla regularly making the 200km drive. In the last two years, the furthest a maternity patient has travelled to deliver at the hospital was 540km from Mildura.

“This was a precious pregnancy,” Mrs Doupain-Herbert said. “We still have one [embryo](#) left and we plan to do it all again, sooner rather than later. We went through so much to get those embryos, I couldn’t stand the thought of not trying one more time.”