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## Two girls complete the family set

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After seven boys, one mum turned to a US clinic to conceive daughters.

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All together now: The McMahon family. Photo: Addison Hamilton

Jodi McMahon yearned for a daughter. The feeling intensified with each of her seven boy pregnancies, but it was never about princess dresses over footy socks.

"It wasn't because he was a boy, it was just that I had tried so hard and believed it would work," Mrs McMahon says.

After Australia banned using IVF to select the sex of your unborn child, Jodi and her husband Andrew travelled in August 2010 to a Los Angeles clinic where they were lucky enough to get pregnant on their first attempt with Addison. They froze another female embryo and returned last year to conceive Evie, spending \$40,000 to get the two girls.

"I didn't want to be sitting in my rocking chair in my 80s saying I should have tried it," says Mrs McMahon, who now has eight children (one boy twin died) aged between six months and 19 years.

US gender selection specialist Daniel Potter sees 15 to 20 Australian patients a month at his LA clinic, a figure he says is growing at 20 per cent a year: "There is huge demand."

Fertility specialists said others are circumventing the ban locally by citing sex-specific genetic medical conditions, or genetically testing embryos under the guise of screening for Down syndrome.

In response to the demand, Sydney fertility practice Genea has an affiliate clinic in Thailand to which it refers patients for gender selection at a cost of about \$10,000. Others, like the McMahons, prefer to pay double or triple that price at US clinics for the more advanced technology and higher success rates, reportedly 80 per cent pregnant on the first cycle versus 40 per cent elsewhere, on offer.

One in 10 IVF cycles performed in the US are done for gender selection, and about half of those are for patients from overseas, Dr Potter says. Eighty-five per cent of the Australians Dr Potter sees want girls.

The National Health and Medical Research Council allows gender selection via IVF to screen out certain sex-specific medical conditions like haemophilia and dystrophy. Some women have exploited the grey area that exists with certain conditions such as autism (which research says affects more boys than girls) to circumvent the ban on social sex selection.

"What's a medical condition is up for debate," Michael Chapman, vice-president of the Fertility Society of Australia, says. "There is a variation in interpretations of diagnosis." People on internet forums say "you just have to ask the right questions" and some fertility specialists will do sex selection for you.

Dr Potter argues gender selection is a "reproductive freedom issue" for women like abortion. Yet critics say permitting sex selection for social reasons is a slippery slope to designer babies.

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