

UK researchers call for national debate on ethics of genetically modifying embryos

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

Leading UK research funders are calling for an urgent national debate on the ethics of genetically modifying human embryos and other tissues to prevent serious diseases.

The plea has been prompted by scientists' rapid progress in developing a powerful tool called genome editing, which has the potential to transform the treatment of genetic conditions by rewriting the DNA code of affected cells.

In a position statement published on Wednesday, five leading biomedical funders declare support for genome-editing research and certain therapies that might follow, such as infusions of modified immune cells that are tailor-made to attack patients' tumours.

But they add that [altering the DNA](#) of human sperm and eggs, known as "germ cells", and human embryos should become the focus of a broad ethical debate that fully explores the potential benefits and pitfalls of the procedure.

The prospect of modifying human embryos is deeply controversial because the DNA changes, and any potentially unintended harmful effects, would be passed on from generation to generation. The risks of altering the human germ line, as it is called, has troubled ethicists for decades. Without proper regulation, the procedure also raises the spectre of "designer babies", where embryos are genetically modified to enhance them in the eyes of their parents.

Read full, original post: [GM embryos: time for ethics debate, say scientists](#)