

Decision to regulate editing genome of human embryo puts UK ahead of rest

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UK fertility regulators have given the green light to gene editing in viable human embryos—a controversial first step toward what some see as a future of designer babies. Cue the dystopian think pieces.

But hold up. The approval—which applies to only one research project—doesn't go nearly that far. Kathy Niakan, a biologist at the Francis Crick Institute, will use the Crispr/Cas9 gene-editing system to study donated embryos in the first seven days after fertilization, then discard them. Tweaking the genes in those cells will help her team understand how an embryo develops into a healthy baby, research that could lead to improved success rates for in vitro fertilization.

So the UK's decision, handed down by its Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, won't immediately lead to free-market eugenics. But it does have a lot to say about how different countries will regulate research as science inches closer toward that possibility. While the UK might be pushing the boundaries of fertility research, at least it has a regulatory body devoted to answering the tough questions surrounding human gene editing—and in that way, it's light years ahead of other countries.

Last year, Chinese scientists announced, to the consternation of global observers, that they had edited nonviable human embryos to correct a gene that causes a blood disorder. Embryology research in China operates largely under a don't ask, don't tell system: The government doesn't ban any particular type of research and everything's fine.

Read full, original post: [The UK just green?lit CRISPR gene editing in human embryos](#)