

Dark side of CRISPR: Rogue scientists could design something nastier than the coronavirus

When we've emerged on the other side of the pandemic, Covid-19 will someday make a good story. But I worry that CRISPR could make Covid-19 look like child's play.

CRISPR is a new genetic tool that lets scientists cut out a DNA sequence in an organism's genome and replace it with another. The hope is that this ingenious scissors-and-glue system will be used to treat devastating genetic diseases like sickle cell anemia and beta thalassemia.

But there's a dark side to CRISPR. A scientist or biohacker with basic lab know-how could conceivably buy DNA sequences and, using CRISPR, edit them to make an even more panic-inducing bacteria or virus. What's to stop a rogue scientist from using CRISPR to conjure up an even deadlier version of Ebola or a more transmissible SARS?

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Covid-19 rightfully dominates the media. But we should be talking about CRISPR, too. Before the first reports of the novel coronavirus [began surfacing in the U.S.](#), none of the Democratic presidential candidates said a word about CRISPR, and President Trump has never uttered its name. But it's here, just as present, unpredictable, and powerful as Covid-19, unless we act now to control it.

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