

Next Congress might steer course of CRISPR revolution by setting ethical limits on gene editing of human sperm and eggs

[W]hat if geneticists could sidestep the [human embryo genome editing] controversy by editing sperm and eggs instead?

According to a new paper co-written by a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign legal expert who studies the ethical and policy implications of advanced biotechnologies, how the next Congress decides to handle the issue will affect the science, ethics and financing of genome editing for decades to come.

Although there are a number of statutes and federal appropriation riders that take as their bioethical center the human embryo, none exist that govern the editing of ‘gametes’—that is, sperm and [eggs](#), said Jacob S. Sherkow, a professor of law at Illinois.

“The current federal funding ban is predicated on a concept of bioethics that focuses on the embryo, and that’s because there’s widespread recognition in U.S. society that [embryos](#) have a certain moral salience that other biological components don’t,” he said.

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“This is particularly timely for two reasons,” he said. “One, genome-editing technology is getting more effective, cheaper and safer to use every day; and two, this is an election year. We’re going to seat a new Congress in January, and whether to continue down this path is something that the new Congress is going to have to decide.”

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