

'CRISPR babies': What does this mean for science and Canada?

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In the wake of the announcement in China last November of the first 'CRISPR babies', Prof. Bartha Knoppers and researcher Erika Kleiderman from McGill's Centre of Genomics and Policy (CGP) have published a commentary article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* on the use of CRISPR gene-editing techniques.

In addition to the universal ethical condemnation of Dr. He Jiankui's CRISPR work involving [human embryos](#), the birth of the twin girls has wider legal and policy implications for gene-editing research and its potential clinical translation. This commentary groups the ethical critiques of human gene-editing into four broad categories:

- concerns about eugenics
- the [health risks](#) to children
- allegations of the failure of professional self-regulation
- a possible "chilling effect" on [scientific research](#).

Knoppers and Kleiderman contend that we need a renewed conversation about the criminal law ban on basic research on human germline gene modification in Canada. Moreover, they contend that our current hybrid model of statutory law plus codes of ethics for the governance of emerging biotechnologies is generally inadequate; it should be complemented by models based on a human rights approach. Finally, they propose that [basic research](#) using germline modification should be permitted if scientific standards are followed for preclinical evidence and accuracy.

More information: Bartha Maria Knoppers et al. "CRISPR babies": What does this mean for science and Canada?, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2019). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.181657](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.181657)

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