

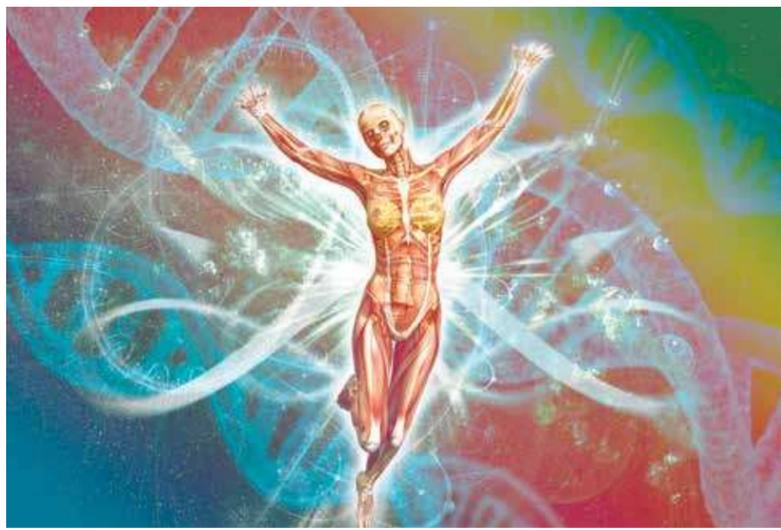
# Canadian Scientists Call Creation Of 'Designer Babies' A Premature Use Of Technology

TORONTO: Canadian researchers have added their voices to widespread international condemnation of a Chinese scientist who says he helped create genetically modified twin girls using a gene-editing tool known as CRISPR.

The unconfirmed claim was announced Monday by He Jiankui of China's Southern University of Science and Technology, who said he altered the DNA of embryos during fertility treatments with the goal of preventing the babies from becoming infected with HIV in the future.

Such genetic tinkering contravenes international ethical guidelines and some countries' laws regulating the use of gene-editing in human reproduction — which some call the slippery slope towards designer babies.

Dr. Janet Rossant, a senior scientist at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, cautioned that it's unclear if the research actually occurred, as it has not been published in a medical journal or verified by other scientists. "But at face value, this research has moved forward to the clinic way ahead of all the ethical consensus that has been going on internationally," Rossant said Monday. While the prospect of using CRISPR-Cas9 to remove or rearrange bits of DNA underpinning serious genetic diseases is exciting, the tool should only be used in humans once it is known to be completely safe and under strict ethical guidelines, she said. "The genetic modification that He made was not to prevent a



serious genetic disease, it's what we would classify as an enhancement, which is also something that the National Academies (of Science, Engineering and Medicine) thought was not appropriate," she added.

Manipulating the genes to prevent HIV infection, "we don't even know what the long-term consequences of that are. And anyway, there's no necessity to do that to those children."

The alteration of DNA in a human egg, sperm or embryo is what's known as germline editing, which would affect not only a resulting child, but also future generations. The risks of such tampering are unknown, and leading scientists and medical organi-

zations have called for a moratorium on its use except in laboratory studies.

Under Canada's Human Reproduction Act, such germ-line editing is illegal and could be punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Sohnee Ahmed, president of the Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors, said that if the Chinese scientist's claim is true, the birth of the world's first genetically altered babies has run way ahead of both scientific maturity and ethical considerations.

"Certainly this is something that the genetics world all thought would possibly happen one day, but I think we were hop-

ing it would happen with a lot more regulation," said Ahmed, a genetic counsellor at a private DNA testing lab in Toronto.

"I would hope that the international bodies that have stated quite firmly up until this point that we would not want this to happen would still stay firm regardless of someone going rogue," she said.

"And if anything (they) would really double-down to emphasize this is something that should not be happening at this time, not without any kind of oversight."

Tim Caulfield, a professor of health and law at the University of Alberta, said that while the advent of gene-editing is exciting, the use of the technology to reshape human DNA is "premature."

"I think there is an emerging international consensus that this research should progress, that we need to be open-minded about how it could be applied in the future, but we're not at the state right now where we want to be using this technology in the clinic," he said from Edmonton.

"Using these technologies prematurely can really adversely impact the entire scientific field. I think it's very important that we move forward carefully and in a transparent manner." On Monday, more than 100 mostly Chinese scientists signed a petition calling for greater oversight by their country on gene-editing experiments, while Southern University said it planned to investigate He's claim, saying the work "seriously violated academic ethics and standards." - CP

## How To Just Say No To Seasonal Gift Exchanges

Your college roommate. Your current roommate. Your book club. Your brunch crew. Your office secret Santa. Your cousins. Your siblings. Your parents. Your partner. Their parents.

As your social circle expands, so does your holiday shopping list. But what happens when you can't really afford to buy gifts for everyone?

One option: Cut back on gift exchanges.

Opt out of the office secret Santa. Don't give your child's day care provider a present. Tell your roommate/cousins/friends that you can't exchange gifts this year.

This move may seem harsh, but if the alternative is going into debt, it could be the best move.

Last year, 65 per cent of millennial shoppers put gifts on their credit card. This year, roughly a third of them are still paying off that debt, according to an annual survey of holiday shoppers from NerdWallet.

### CONSULT YOUR BUDGET

Now is a good time to make a budget, if you don't already have one. Factor in your normal expenses — rent or mortgage, groceries, bills, LaCroix and commuting costs — plus things like holiday travel and that ugly sweater bar crawl. Now you know what you have to spend on gifts this year.

### PRIORITIZE YOUR GIFT LIST

Your budget may allow for some gifts, but there's a good chance you'll need to make some cuts.

### WORK SECRET SANTA

This is a tricky one to navigate. One school of thought is to make the office exchange a priority.

"If there's a work setting where everybody's participating, you must participate," says Jennifer Porter, a manners teacher and gift shop owner. "It shows goodwill. These are your colleagues. Pony up for that and feel good about it."

But office size and dynamics come into play. If your office is large enough, you may be able to opt out without anyone noticing. Just don't sign up. End of discussion.

It's harder to bow out in a smaller office



or team, especially if the whole group gets together for the gift giving. If it's simply not in your budget, talk to the person organizing your office exchange.

"Let them know, so you don't have to make a campaign about it," says Elaine Swann, an etiquette expert and founder of The Swann School of Protocol. You can spare them any extra details, Swann says, and spare yourself the need to tell all of your office mates.

Another option: Consider regifting that candle you got last year — you know, the one in your closet. (Fun fact: 82 per cent of millennials regift holiday presents, according to the survey from NerdWallet.)

### FRIEND AND FAMILY GIFT EXCHANGES

Your immediate family is likely on your must-gift list, but extended family may not make the cut. The same is true for your closest friends versus your larger friend group — book club, brunch club, bros club and so forth. It's OK to ask to scale back things to fit your budget.

You don't need to put up a front with your nearest and dearest. Remember, these are the people who know you best.

"You can be a little more frank and transparent," Swann says. "If there's anyone who's going to understand, it will be

those you have a close relationship with. They will understand and almost expect it."

### CHILD'S TEACHER, DAY CARE PROVIDER

In this instance, less is more. There's no need to tell the teacher they won't get a present from junior this year. A heartfelt note from you and your child will be cherished as much as another gift card or cof-

fee mug, if not more.

### HAVING 'THE TALK'

If you decide to end or opt out of a gift exchange, be honest and considerate. You want to halt the presents, not the relationship.

Don't make up excuses or put off the conversation until a week before Christmas, Swann says.

"Be brutally honest, without being brutal," she says. "Frankly say, 'Thank you for thinking of me and wanting to include me, but I will not be able to participate.' Resist the urge to over explain."

You'll likely find people understand. In fact, they may even be relieved. Because, let's face it, most of us are strapped for cash over the holidays. But if they're not OK with it, give them some space.

"Don't try to fix it in that instance. Allow that person to go through the process of being disappointed," Swann says. "Your role is not to get them over to your side. Your role is just to inform them of your intentions."

*This column was provided to The Associated Press by the personal finance website NerdWallet. Kelsey Sheehy is a writer at NerdWallet. Email: ksheehy@nerdwallet.com. Twitter: @KelseyLSheehy.*

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