For first time: human embryos genetically engineered

Publication triggers ethical questions and shows risks of new genetic engineering methods

23 April 2015 / According to a new scientifc publication, researchers from China for the first time have genetically engineered human embryos for experimental purposes. They were using new methods, so-called nucleases or DNA scissors (CRISPR/Cas). The result ring alarm bells: Several side effects were observed within the human genome, indicating severe health risks. The scientists are warning that the new methods might be introduced too fast and also demand a broader ethical debate.

This publication sheds a light upon recent campaign of industry and scientific organisations in Europe that are trying to declare the new methods for genetic engineering to be without any risks if applied in plants and animals. Several stakeholder are claiming that the new methods should not even be regulated as genetic engineering.

The new methods of synthetic genome technologies (or genome editing) are supposed to enable faster and more targeted intervention in the genome than so far. It also allows for radical changes of the DNA of humans, animals and plants. Testbiotech is of the opinion that plants and animals that are genetically engineered with these methods, should be subjected to in-depth risk assessment as requested by EU regulations. Furthermore there is need not only to to discuss ethical implications in humans, but also in regard to plants and animals and to take measures to protect the genetic integrity of plants and animals. To discuss this issue in public, Testbiotech will hold a conference on 17 of June in Berlin. The program will be published in near future.

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Further information: Link to the new publication [2]
Report in Nature journal [3]
Testbiotech background on synthetic genome technologies (genome editing) [4]

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