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Fetal tissue ban blocks study of potential coronavirus therapies

NIH researcher asks for relief from restrictions imposed last year

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A scientist at the federal Rocky Mountain Laboratories wants relief from recently imposed restrictions on fetal tissue research in order to conduct a study related to coronavirus disease 2019. NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ALLERGY AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES/NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (CC BY-NC)



The Trump administration's 2019 ban on the use of human fetal tissue by scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is preventing a leading researcher from using special mice to test potential therapies for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), [The Washington Post](#) reports.

According to the *Post*, Kim Hasenkrug, an immunologist at NIH's Rocky Mountain Laboratories, has spent nearly 1 month appealing to the Trump administration to grant him an exemption to the administration's strict policy. [Federal restrictions imposed in June 2019](#) ban NIH scientists from using human fetal tissue donated after elective abortions.



Hasenkrug recently proposed using mice with humanlike lungs created using human fetal tissue by University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill, researchers and reported last fall in [Nature Biotechnology](#). Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the novel coronavirus that is sweeping the globe, invades the lungs, causing pneumonia. The UNC researchers found that the new mice, unlike normal mice, could be infected with Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus, a human-sickening coronavirus from the larger virus family of which SARS-CoV-2 is a member. That made the new mice promising vehicles for testing potential therapies for COVID-19, the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2.

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Caitlin Oakley, a spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services, NIH's parent department, told the *Post* that "no decision has been made" about Hasenkrug's request.

Hasenkrug's work using mice created using fetal tissue was [first disrupted in 2018](#), when the Trump administration suspended an HIV experiment while it conducted a 9-month review of NIH's funding of research using human fetal tissue.

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