

# China orders halt to research on gene-editing in response to scandal



He Jiankui spoke at the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing in Hong Kong on November 28. *China News Service*

Chinese authorities on Thursday ordered a halt to all research activities by scientists caught up in gene-edited babies scandal.

The National Health Commission of China announced that it would resolutely investigate the case and punish any individuals that had violated laws or regulations.

Chinese Vice Minister of Science and Technology (MOST) Xu Nanping told Xinhua, China's state-backed news agency, that his ministry was strongly opposed to the research and described the medical team's actions as illegal and unacceptable. According to Xu, MOST has requested that the relevant units halt all scientific research.

In addition, the China Association for Science and Technology stated that it would further improve ethical education for scientists. It has also banned He Jiankui, the scientist who says he successfully edited the genes of twin girls, from participating in the China Youth Science and Technology Innovation Awards.

He Jiankui said on Monday that he had used a gene-editing technology known as CRISPR-Cas9 to alter the embryonic genes of the twin girls, who were born earlier this month.

He's announcement, which has not been verified, sparked international outrage about the ethics and safety of such research.

While attending an international conference on gene editing in Hong Kong on Wednesday, He announced that he was "proud" of his work and believed he was helping people with HIV (the twins' father is HIV positive). However, he declined

to reveal the babies' identities, citing China's policy regarding privacy in cases involving HIV/AIDS.

On Thursday, 14 conference leaders issued a joint statement announcing that it was irresponsible to carry out the procedure on eggs, sperm or embryos, except under laboratory research conditions, because not enough is known about its risks or safety.

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China's National Health Commission announced it will investigate the scientist who claims to have created the first gene-edited babies and handle the issue in accordance with law.

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