

# UK urged to pioneer designer babies

By Sarah Knapton  
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BRITAIN should lead the way on genetically editing human embryos, the Government's chief scientific adviser has said.

Last week more than 150 scientists and campaigners called for a worldwide ban on the practice, claiming it could "irrevocably alter the human species" and lead to a world where inequality and discrimination were "inscribed on to the human genome".

But at a conference in London yesterday, Sir Mark Walport said he believed there were "circumstances" in which the genetic editing of human embryos could be "acceptable".

He said Britain should be at the forefront of the research. "We are

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**Puppies have been born through IVF for the first time, raising hopes of a cure for inherited diseases**

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good at the science, we're very good at the regulation and we're very good at the public discussion," he told delegates at the Institute of Child Health at University College London. "Is it a generically good thing or not? It's

a silly question. You need to ask for what particular gene, for what purpose, and for what potential benefits and risks.

"It's absolutely clear that more research is needed. We need to know you are modifying the gene

you want to and you aren't modifying other things as well; whether this is a magic bullet or whether there will be off-target effects.

"But are there circumstances where that might be acceptable? I think many people would say that there are."

Many campaigners fear that tweaking the DNA of human embryos will usher in an era of eugenics where the richest can pay for "designer babies" who are fitter, stronger and smarter.

On the other side, scientists argue that gene editing will prevent devastating inherited illnesses and that prohibiting research will only drive the practice underground to black markets and unregulated medical tourism. Earlier this year China was accused of *Continued on Page 4*

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