

SPOTTED

Spotted: Newt's plea; CRISPR caution

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Newt's plea

The National Institutes of Health has an unlikely friend in Newt Gingrich. The Republican former House speaker has called for **a doubling of the agency's budget**, which has hovered **around \$30 billion** for the past five years. "Even as we've let financing for basic scientific and medical research stagnate, government spending on health care has grown significantly. That should trouble every fiscal conservative," Gingrich wrote in an op-ed published Wednesday in *The New York Times*. "We are in a time of unimaginable scientific and technological progress. By funding basic medical research, Congress can transform our fiscal health, and our personal health, too."

CRISPR caution

Chinese scientists have used CRISPR to edit the genomes of **human embryos**. The unsettling news, detailed 18 April in *Protein & Cell*, comes one month after the creators of the gene-editing tool **called for a ban** on using CRISPR to alter genes in people. George Daley, a stem-cell biologist at Harvard Medical School, called the study "a cautionary tale," as CRISPR **had unpredictable effects** in many of the treated embryos. "Their study should be a stern warning to any practitioner who thinks the technology is ready for testing to eradicate disease genes," Daley told *Nature*.

Case closed

A new study of more than 95,000 children **found no link** between the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine and autism, even among so-called '**baby sibs**,' who have an increased risk for the disorder. The findings, reported 21 April in *JAMA*, should help put to rest lingering public confusion about the long-debunked link. About a dozen studies have now shown that the risk of autism —

unlike the risk of measles — is the same in vaccinated and unvaccinated children.

Pursuing ‘precision’

A review last week in *The Lancet Neurology* explores the idea of ‘**precision medicine**’ in autism. The term is usually reserved for conditions such as cancer, in which tailored treatments target the faulty gene at the heart of a tumor. But as the list of **genes linked to autism** grows, researchers are looking for **common molecular pathways** that could be boosted, blocked or otherwise altered to ease autism symptoms.

Navigating autism

Researchers from Florida State University College of Medicine have **launched an online tool** aimed at helping families, teachers, primary care doctors and therapists deliver effective early interventions to toddlers with autism. The tool, called the Autism Navigator, uses videos to highlight the signs of autism in young children and showcase **evidence-based therapies**. The site also offers courses for clinicians and therapists.
