

SPOTTED

# Spotted: Sticking point; embryo ethics

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## Sticking point

In California, back-to-school checklists may soon include more than backpacks and binders. According to an article in Monday's *Los Angeles Times*, Governor Jerry Brown is contemplating a bill that would make vaccines for measles, whooping cough and other diseases a must for nearly all schoolchildren in his state. Only children with certain medical conditions would get a pass.

The bill, not surprisingly, is contentious. One naysayer is actor and anti-vaccine activist Jim Carrey. Carrey tweeted a photo of a 14-year-old boy with autism earlier this week along with a message implying that vaccines caused the boy's condition. An [article published Wednesday in BuzzFeed](#) reports that Carrey did not have permission from the family to post the picture. The boy's mother says that her son's autism is, in fact, rooted in a genetic disorder called tuberous sclerosis. Carrey "is misrepresenting my son's image by attaching it to his anti-vax rant," she told BuzzFeed. Carrey has since deleted the photo, but not before it was retweeted some 600 times.

Governor Brown's deadline for making a decision on the bill is 13 July.

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## Brain law

From the lowliest rat to the mightiest elephant, what do all mammals have in common? The formula behind their brain folds, [according to a study](#) published yesterday in *Science*. Regardless of the number of neurons or connections in these organs, all mammalian brains follow a simple folding rule, a team of Brazilian researchers reported. The degree of folding is a function of surface area and the square root of the thickness of the cerebral cortex, the brain's outer rind. The universal pattern behind brain folding, the team adds, is surprisingly similar to a scaling law that presides over the folding of paper into fractals, which are never-ending, repeating patterns.

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## Second chance

The National Children's Study was designed to sequence the genomes and follow the progress of 100,000 babies from pre-birth until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Yet the project was **plagued with scientific disagreement and mismanagement** from the time the U.S. Congress proposed it back in 2000. It squandered \$1 billion and never really got off the ground. But now, the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate are resurrecting a version of the study. The project is set to begin in 2016, with \$165 million per year in funding for 'reforming and refocusing' the original study, **ScienceInsider reported** on 26 June.

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## Embryo ethics

Should we allow human embryos to be edited? The U.S. House of Representatives seems to think that people of faith might have the answer.

An **article in Nature News** last week describes a proposed U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) bill that would require a committee of religious experts to review an upcoming medical report from the U.S. Institute of Medicine. The bill concerns the ethics of creating embryos with **three genetic parents** — a medical first that could help some parents bypass certain genetic diseases. The bill would also ban the FDA from evaluating or conducting research that involves genetically modified embryos, sperm or eggs.

U.S. federal law already prohibits government involvement in any research that harms human embryos, the article points out, although privately funded research on editing human embryos is fair game — at least for now.

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