

# PRESS RELEASE

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### **Ethics Council: germline interventions currently too risky, but not ethically out of the question**

Last year, the birth of the first genetically modified babies shook the world. The German Ethics Council now presents a comprehensive ethical investigation into possible interventions in the genome of human embryos or germ cells. The Council does not deem the human germline to be inviolable. It does, however, consider germline interventions to be ethically irresponsible at the present time because of the associated incalculable risks. The Council, therefore, calls for an application moratorium and recommends that the Federal Government and the Bundestag work towards a binding international agreement.

A prerequisite for any future application of germline interventions would be their adequate safety and efficacy as well as the establishment of appropriate oversight procedures and accompanying governance structures. To this end, the German Ethics Council unanimously renews its call for a broad national and international discourse on the subject. It also recommends the establishment of an international institution that should develop standards for germline interventions in humans and address their medical and social implications.

The German Ethics Council also states that any appropriate assessment of germline interventions must go beyond a mere risk-benefit analysis and consider the following ethical concepts: human dignity, protection of life and integrity, freedom, non-maleficence and beneficence, naturalness, justice, solidarity and responsibility.

In its Opinion, the Ethics Council applies these concepts to different areas where germline interventions might be used. These include the research process that must precede any clinical application, interventions to avoid serious monogenic hereditary diseases, interventions to reduce multifactorial disease risks, and the targeted improvement of human characteristics and abilities (enhancement).

Despite the consensus on the current need for political action, different positions exist with regard to some of these issues - within the German Ethics Council, too. For example, whilst all members agree that the human germline is not inviolable, not everyone agrees that germline interventions should be pursued. A large majority sees the further development and use of the technology as a legitimate ethical goal when aimed at avoiding or reducing genetically determined disease risks. For a few members, however, germline interventions do not offer sufficiently high-ranking benefits that could justify their potential disadvantages.

In order to render the essential questions, arguments and positions transparent and accessible for public and international discourse, the German Ethics Council has summarised them in a novel analytical

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toolkit. Possible decision pathways and their consequences are visualised in a decision tree.

Further information can be accessed at [www.ethikrat.org](http://www.ethikrat.org).