

## **Obama to End Stem Cell Ban Monday**

**Researchers applaud his action, which is expected to kick-start efforts to unlock therapeutic potential**

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SATURDAY, March 7 (HealthDay News) -- President Barack Obama will lift the eight-year ban on embryonic stem cell research on Monday, the White House has announced.

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A White House ceremony is scheduled for late morning, when Obama will issue an executive order formally removing the federal funding limits imposed by his predecessor, President George W. Bush, in 2001.

And while *The New York Times* reports that it may take many months for the [National Institutes of Health](#) to develop new guidelines for research, researchers were already applauding the president's actions.

"The availability of federal funding for research on cell lines that had been off-limits during the Bush administration, coupled with billions of newly available dollars in federal stimulus money, could set the stage for a tidal wave of support that could propel stem cell research well into the next decade -- if things move quickly," said a prepared statement from Stanford University researchers in California.

"This action is both welcome and overdue," added Dr. Philip Pizzo, dean of the Stanford School of Medicine and a governing board member of the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine, in the statement. "This vote of

confidence from President Obama in the promise of embryonic stem cell research validates and extends CIRM's mission to help millions of people suffering from currently incurable medical conditions. It is also a powerful signal that advances in [medical research](#) must be pursued even in times of economic difficulty."

Peter T. Wilderotter, president and CEO of the Christopher And Dana Reeve Foundation in Short Hills, N.J., said in a prepared statement, "With a stroke of his pen, President Obama acknowledged the will of the majority of Americans and harnessed the power of the federal government to move research forward. By removing politics from science, President Obama has freed researchers to explore these remarkable stem cells, learn from them and possibly develop effective therapies using them."

The general enthusiasm followed a wave of similar sentiments last month when initial

reports of the new policy came out of a closed-door meeting between Obama and House Democrats.

"It's going to remove an embarrassment for American science," said Dr. Darwin Prockop, director of the Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine Institute for Regenerative Medicine at Scott & White Hospital in Temple, said in February. "It's a statement that we're going to again believe in science."

Stem cell research received a big boost in January, when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the first-ever human trial using embryonic stem cells as a [medical treatment](#).

Geron Corp., a California-based biotech company, was given the OK to implant embryonic stem cells in eight to 10 paraplegic patients who can use their arms but can't walk.

In 2001, then-president Bush limited federal funding for stem cell research only to human embryonic stem cell lines that already existed.

The decision prompted some scientists to worry that the United States would fall behind other countries in the drive to unlock the potential of stem cell research.

Embryonic stem cells are the most basic human cells, believed to be capable of growing into any type of cell in the body. Working as a sort of repair system for the body, they can theoretically divide without limit to replenish other cells. The scientific hope is that stem cells may, at some point in the future, become capable of treating a variety of diseases and conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, diabetes, [heart disease](#) and spinal cord injuries, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

National polls continue to find that the majority of Americans favors embryonic stem cell research, although some surveys have found that that support has declined somewhat in recent years.

Many people object to the use of embryonic stem cells, contending that the research requires the destruction of potential life, because the cells must be extracted from human embryos.

The stem cells being used in the recently approved Geron trial were obtained from one of the Bush administration's approved stem cell lines. And no federal funds were used in the development of this treatment.

Since the restrictions on embryonic stem cell research took effect, many research institutions have redirected their focus to other types of stem cells. Prockop's institution, for instance, deals only with adult stem cells.

Adult stem cells can give rise to all the specialized types of cells found in tissue from which they originated, such as skin. But, scientists don't agree on whether adult stem cells may yield cell types other than those of the tissue from which they originate, according to the National Institutes of Health.

### **More information**

To learn more about stem cells, visit the [U.S. National Institutes of Health](#).

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