

NSABB to Meet on Gain-of-Function Studies to Talk Risks, Benefits, Ethics, and Policy

In [September 2015](#), I wrote about the U.S. government's deliberative process to re-evaluate the risks and benefits associated with certain "gain-of-function" studies involving pathogens. Such studies are undertaken to better understand how pathogens infect people and spread through the population. These studies help assess the risks associated with emerging pathogens, particularly those like new influenza strains that may have pandemic potential.

However, these studies can also generate pathogens with enhanced characteristics, such as pathogenicity (ability to cause disease) or transmissibility (ability to spread) in mammals. Concerns have been raised about whether a modified laboratory pathogen could be accidentally or intentionally released from a lab, threatening local or even global populations. Some have questioned whether such studies are worthwhile.

The National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) has been examining the issue and on January 7 and 8, on the NIH campus, the Board will convene to discuss the risks and benefits, as well as ethical and policy issues. To inform NSABB deliberations, NIH commissioned a thorough risk and benefit assessment and an ethical analysis—the results of both will be presented for the first time at the upcoming meeting. NSABB will also begin discussing its preliminary findings and a potential path forward for funding and conducting gain-of-function studies in pathogens with pandemic potential.

The meeting is free and open to the public. It will also be webcast and questions during the meeting can be submitted to the NSABB inbox at NSABB@od.nih.gov.

Written comments on the topic can also be submitted to NSABB at the same address. See [here](#) to register for the meeting and to learn more.

The gain-of-function debate comes at a time when we are having similar [discussions](#) about how to rapidly and







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responsibly advance new biomedical technologies to promote public health and well-being. It raises difficult policy questions about how to maximize the potential benefits of some areas of scientific research while mitigating potential risks. I hope you can join us for what should be a very interesting meeting.

Posted by Dr. Carrie D. Wolinetz, January 5, 2016

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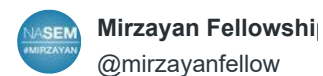
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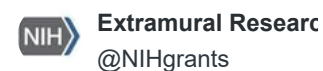


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