



Potential Risks and Benefits of Gain-of-Function Research: Summary of a Workshop

Frances Sharples, Jo Husbands, Anne-Marie Mazza, Audrey Thevenon, India Hook-Barnard, Board on Life Sciences, Division on Earth and Life Studies, Technology, and Law Committee on Science, Policy and Global Affairs, Board on Health Sciences Policy, National Research Council, Institute of Medicine

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On October 17, 2014, spurred by incidents at U.S. government laboratories that raised serious biosafety concerns, the United States government launched a one-year deliberative process to address the continuing controversy surrounding so-called "gain-of-function" (GOF) research on respiratory pathogens with pandemic potential. The gain of function controversy began in late 2011 with the question of whether to publish the results of two experiments involving H5N1 avian influenza and continued to focus on certain research with highly pathogenic avian influenza over the next three years. The heart of the U.S. process is an evaluation of the potential risks and benefits of certain types of GOF experiments with influenza, SARS, and MERS viruses that would inform the development and adoption of a new U.S. Government policy governing the funding and conduct of GOF research.

Potential Risks and Benefits of Gain-of-Function Research is the summary of a two-day public symposia on GOF research. Convened in December 2014 by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, the main focus of this event was to discuss principles important for, and key considerations in, the design of risk and benefit assessments of GOF research. Participants examined the underlying scientific and technical questions that are the source of current discussion and debate over GOF research involving pathogens with pandemic potential. This report is a record of the presentations and discussion of the meeting.

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