

How Aborted Children Are Used in Medical Research in 2020

At a fundamental level, life-saving research ought to preserve human dignity.

[Stacy Trasancos](#) December 15, 2020



This 3D-rendered medically-accurate illustration depicts a child in the 20th week of gestation. (photo: SciePro / Shutterstock.com)

You don't need to go undercover and follow around employees from Planned Parenthood like David Daleiden at the Center for Medical Progress to find out how the remains of aborted children are used in research. All it takes is a look at scientific reports. The methods are detailed in the words of the scientists themselves, who depend on abortion to design experiments.

With the focus lately on the use of aborted fetal cell lines in vaccines, I thought it would be helpful to walk through what is really going on, to show why some pro-life Catholics are so concerned about the passive acceptance of aborted children in research. We are not denying that vaccines serve a common good. We are, however, encouraging Catholics to unite a protest against the evil of abortion, to demand that university, government and industrial scientists stop using the remains of electively-aborted children in the research of *anything*, vaccines or otherwise. Actually, vaccines are only the beginning.

In the last few decades, scientific literature has reported new technologies such as single-cell transcriptomics, humanized mice and organoids, to name a few. What follows is a summary of three new research reports published in just the last half of 2020. There are many more.

Fetal Scalps and Back Flesh Grafted Onto Rats and Mice

In September, researchers at University of Pittsburgh published their work on the development of humanized mice and rats with "[full-thickness human skin](#)." Human skin protects an individual from infection, but there is no way to study the effects of pathogens on individuals without subjecting them to disease. Full-thickness human skin from fetuses was grafted onto rodents while simultaneously co-engrafting the same fetus's lymphoid tissues and hematopoietic stem cells from the liver, so that the rodent models were humanized with organs and skin from the same child. These "human Skin and Immune System (hSIS)-humanized" mouse and rat models are meant to aid the study of the immune system when the skin is infected.

To make the hSIS-humanized rodent models, full-thickness fetal skin was taken from humans [aborted at the gestational age of 18 to 20 weeks](#) of pregnancy at the Magee-Women's Hospital and the University of

Pittsburgh Health Sciences Tissue Bank. The mothers provided written consent for the fetuses to be used in research.

From the aborted fetuses, thymus, liver, spleen and full-thickness skin were transplanted and grafted onto the rodents and allowed to grow. Then the rodent models were given a staph infection on the skin to study how the internal organs responded.

The human skin was taken from the scalp and the back of the fetuses so that grafts with and without hair could be compared in the rodent model. Excess fat tissues attached to the subcutaneous layer of the skin was cut away, and then the fetal skin was grafted over the rib cage of the rodent, where its own skin had been removed. The grafts lasted up to 10 weeks post-transplantation. Multiple layers of human keratinocytes and fibroblasts were observed in the grafts, and the human skin grew blood vessels and immune cells.

Human hair was evident by 12 weeks but only in the grafts taken from the fetal scalps. In the scalp grafts, fine human hair can be seen growing long and dark surrounded by the short white hairs of the mouse. The images literally [show a patch of baby hair growing on a mouse's back](#).

The work was [funded by the National Institute of Health](#) (NIH) and supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)-National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the same branch that Moderna collaborates with for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fetuses Used to Study Racial Differences in PBDE Exposure

In July, also in the journal *Scientific Reports*, a team in the United States published their findings on [racial differences in fetal exposure to flame retardants](#). Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) are flame retardants,

and they are a public health concern because they interfere with hormone activity, immune function and fetal brain development during pregnancy.

In North America, high flammability standards correlate to high PBDE exposure — especially in California, where safety regulations are highest. The fetus becomes exposed to PBDEs as the chemicals transfer through the placenta from the mother, but since their liver cannot metabolize the chemicals as readily, PBDEs collect in the developing child and continue to build in infancy and childhood, all critical times for the development of the endocrine, immune and neural systems.

To assess exposure in unborn children, researchers at the University of California and the California Environmental Protection Agency conducted a study from 2008 to 2016. In four study waves, they recruited [a total of 249 women](#) scheduled for a second-trimester abortion.

The women gave written or verbal consent for their blood, the placenta and the child's liver to be dissected from the dead body so scientists could make mother-child comparisons of PBDE levels. The authors note, that until this study, sample collection had been "largely constrained to labor and delivery rather than earlier in gestation" when the chemicals transfer and begin to build up during "critical prenatal windows of vulnerability."

The work was [funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) and the National Institute of Environmental Health Services. All study protocols were approved by the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF) institutional review board prior to recruitment of women scheduled for abortions. The aborted children were collected by the clinical staff at the San Francisco General Hospital Women's Option Center. This is the largest study of its kind to date.

As expected, [fetal levels of PBDE were higher](#) than that of the mothers. The evidence also suggested that Black women may be

disproportionately exposed to the chemicals in flame retardants. The paper emphasized the need for further study of fetuses in this gestational range. These second-trimester fetuses essentially lived their short lives in utero as analytical machines and then were used to provide information to keep children living in society safe.

Fetal B-Lymphocytes Used to Study Autoimmunity

In July, a team at Yale University's Department of Immunology reported in the journal *Science* on the [development of immunities in newborns](#). When bacteria and viruses attack the body, it fights back by producing three types of white blood cells — macrophages, B-lymphocytes and T-lymphocytes. It has been assumed, due to competing biochemical mechanisms among lymphocytes, that antibody production is limited in early fetal development, leaving newborns vulnerable to infection. However, newborn blood samples show abundant auto-antibodies.

To investigate this unexpected immunity, the team at Yale dissected the bodies of aborted children to remove their liver, bone marrow and spleen. Then they collected B-lymphocyte cells and produced hundreds of antibodies. The 15 fetuses, all of whom were aborted in the second trimester of pregnancy, were obtained from the Birth Defects Research Laboratory at the University of Washington. Blood, bone marrow and stool samples from healthy adults were compared to assess antibody production and gut microbiota.

The study found that incomplete B-lymphocyte tolerance mechanisms in fetuses favor the accumulation of similar cells that also have the properties to bind bacteria and promote colonization in the gut, thereby encouraging an alternative development path for antibodies in newborns. This work was funded, again, by the NIH, a fellowship at Yale and Pew Charitable Trusts.

Biomedical Research Ought to Preserve Human Dignity

In his encyclical [*Evangelium Vitae*](#), Pope St. John Paul II declared that “the use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person” (63).

At a fundamental level, life-saving research ought to preserve human dignity. The fetal specimens described in these scientific papers — the children who were killed and dissected like the best kind of lab rats — all deserved to be named and counted in the human family.

They were more than a statistic in a table of chemical exposure levels, or a chart of PBDE levels across maternal-placental-fetal biological matrices, or a chunk of scalp grafted grotesquely onto a rodent. They were unwanted children who were killed by an industry that exploited them to make the lives of the wanted humans better. Catholics have a duty to demand better from scientists.

[Stacy Trasancos](#) Stacy Trasancos is the Executive Director of Bishop Strickland’s St. Philip Institute in Tyler, Texas. She has a doctorate in chemistry, a master’s in dogmatic theology, and seven children. She worked as a chemist for DuPont before converting to Catholicism and radically restructuring her life. She left her career to stay home with her kids, from there becoming a writer, speaker, and educator. She also teaches online theology courses for Seton Hall University and is a Fellow of the Word on Fire Institute. She is the author of *Science Was Born of Christianity: The Teaching of Fr. Stanley L. Jaki* and *Particles of Faith: A Catholic Guide to Navigating Science* (Ave Maria Press), which has also been published as a textbook for Catholic high schools and colleges. Dr. Trasancos lives with her family in Hideaway, Texas. With over three decades of scholarly pursuit and parenting experience, she is passionate about leading souls to Christ while keeping it real.