

NASA, NIH to advance space health research

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NASA and the National Institutes of Health have signed a memorandum of understanding to formally continue advancing U.S. space health research.

The two agencies said the agreement will help U.S. scientists use the International Space Station for research into human health and diseases.

"The congressional designation as a national laboratory underscores the significance the American people place on the scientific potential of the space station," National Aeronautics and Space Administration head Michael Griffin said. "Not only will the station help in our efforts to explore the moon, Mars and beyond, its resources also can be applied for a much broader purpose -- improving human health."

NASA sent Congress a plan in May describing how the U.S. segment of the International Space Station can be used as a national laboratory. The report outlined possible partnerships with other government agencies and the Wednesday signing marked the first such agreement between NASA and another agency.

Officials said the space station provides a virtually gravity-free environment in which the cellular and molecular mechanisms that underlie human diseases can be explored.

As part of the agreement, the NIH and NASA will encourage space-related health research by exchanging information and providing technical expertise in areas of common interest.

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