

US court lifts ban on state-funding for stem cell research

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A researcher is seen feeding stem cells at the University of Connecticut's Stem Cell Institute in Farmington. A US appeals court on Thursday suspended a ban on publically-funded embryonic stem cell research to give the judge more time to consider the case.

A US appeals court suspended Thursday a ban on state-funding for embryonic stem cell research pending a full appeal of the case, in a major boost to President Barack Obama's administration.

A three-judge panel lifted the temporary injunction barring the federal government from funding the research, giving a major boost to supporters of the work, including the Obama administration.

"It is ordered that the district court's August 23, 2010 order be stayed pending further order of the court," read the order from the appeals

court for the District of Columbia.

In March 2009 Obama reversed the ban on federal funding for research on embryonic stem cells, a move lauded by many who believe the field has huge potential for treating serious diseases, including Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes.

It came after his predecessor George W. Bush banned federal funding for research on embryonic stem cells, which is opposed by religious conservatives on the basis that life begins at conception and the research involves the disposal of embryos.

In August, district court judge Royce Lamberth ordered a temporary injunction halting federal funding after ruling in favor of a coalition of groups, including several Christian organizations, seeking the action.

If Lamberth's ruling is upheld, only private money will be allowed to fund stem cell research. It could take several weeks for an appeals court to schedule a hearing, and then several months before it makes its decision.

Both sides can then appeal the case to the US Supreme Court.

Researchers believe that stem cells, so-called because they are the foundation for all human cells, provide two promising avenues for scientists.

First, they can be used for research that cannot be performed inside the body. But scientists believe they can also coax the foundational cells into cardiac, pancreatic or brain cells to replace damaged or infected cells and allow tissue or organs to reconstitute themselves.

There are three types of stem cells currently being examined for their

potential medical research value.

Embryonic stem cells, which are extracted from human embryos; adult stem cells, which are taken from the body or from elements discarded after birth, such the umbilical cord; and induced pluripotent stem cells -- adult stem cells that have been genetically modified to resemble embryonic stem cells.

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