

Timeline of events ...a brief history of what made news this year

Feb 6

The US National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute halted a major component of the Action to Control Cardiovascular Risk in Diabetes (ACCORD) trial because subjects placed on intensive therapy to **lower blood sugar** had a higher death rate than those in the standard treatment group (*N. Engl. J. Med.* 358, 2630–2633; 2008).

Feb 14

The largest-ever clinical trial of **HIV microbicides** ended in disappointment, with the principal investigator declaring that Carraguard does not effectively prevent male-to-female HIV transmission.

Mar 6

US officials conceded that **vaccines** might have contributed to a nine-year-old girl's autism-like disorder, but maintained that girl's case was exceptional and that childhood immunizations are safe.

Apr 21

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials said they had evidence linking dozens of deaths and hundreds of adverse reactions to a contaminant in Chinese-made **heparin**. Some batches of the blood thinner were found to have been tainted with a chemically modified form of chondroitin sulfate, made from animal cartilage.

Apr 28

The FDA announced it would abandon the **Declaration of Helsinki**, the global ethical framework for protecting research subjects. Critics argue that the FDA's replacement guidelines might allow exploitation of subjects in foreign clinical trials.

Apr 30

Europe's **Innovative Medicines Initiative** —a six-year, €2 billion (\$2.5 billion) effort by the European Commission and pharmaceutical companies to accelerate drug development—initiated its first call for research proposals.

May 21

US President George W. Bush signed the **Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA)**, a law designed to prevent employers and insurance companies from discriminating against individuals on the basis of personal genetic information.

Jul 17

The US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases announced it would not proceed with the large-scale HIV vaccine trial **PAVE 100** as originally planned, opting to consider a smaller, more targeted trial instead.

Jul 19

Bruce Ivins, the 62-year-old vaccine researcher identified as a suspect in a US government investigation of the 2001 lethal **anthrax** mailings, died in an apparent suicide.



Feb 6

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Jul 26

Researchers at the International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease in Chicago presented disappointing trial results on therapies targeting beta-amyloid plaques, the protein deposits found in the brains of individuals with **Alzheimer's** disease.

Jul 30

President Bush signed legislation allotting \$48 billion over five years to fight worldwide **HIV, tuberculosis and malaria**—tripling funds previously set aside for the program, known as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Aug 14

A report by the Austrian government concluded that urologists from the Medical University of Innsbruck had failed to attain proper subject consent and ethics clearance before launching a clinical trial of a **stem cell** therapy for urinary incontinence. *The Lancet* subsequently retracted its publication of the study (*Lancet* 372, 789–790; 2008).

Sep 11

The deadline closed for grant applications for drug discovery projects under a major new **funding system in China** that some insiders have estimated to include 6 billion yuan (\$880 million) for drug discovery and 3 billion yuan for infectious disease research.

Sep 13

Three months after a South African high court ruled that German physician **Matthias Rath** had been conducting unlawful clinical trials on HIV vitamin remedies, Rath dropped his libel lawsuit against a UK newspaper that had criticized his campaign.

Sep 17

The US National Institute of Mental Health cancelled clinical trials on chelation therapy for **autism**, a treatment approach based on the premise that exposure to mercury in vaccines can provoke the disorder.

Sep 25

World leaders and philanthropists pledged \$3 billion to reinforce the battle against **malaria** through a Global Malaria Action Plan.

Oct 8

The US National Institutes of Health announced that it would act on recommendations issued earlier in the year to streamline the review of grant applications: from 25 January 2009, biomedical researchers whose **grant proposals** are rejected will have only one opportunity to resubmit a revised version.

Nov 13

The UK's **Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill**, which was passed by the House of Commons earlier in the fall, received Royal Assent. The new legislation allows research involving 'cybrids', composite embryos made with cellular elements from humans and other animals.



Feb 14

Magee-Womens Institute/University of Pittsburgh



Jul 19

Sam Yu



Sep 13

Sebastian Wefmann