

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## RESEARCH

### Views of science

Most people in the United States are in favour of science, but few are knowledgeable about how research is conducted, according to a survey by the advocacy group Research!America, based in Arlington, Virginia. The survey, released on 2 January, asked 1,005 people about their views of science and scientists. Although 82% of respondents thought that scientists were trustworthy, 81% could not name a living scientist and 67% could not name a research institution. About half of the respondents said they believed that great science will continue under US President Donald Trump's administration, and 67% agreed that public policies should be rooted in the best available science. Research!America's surveys have found similar results over the past decade.

## HEALTH

### A costly treatment

A gene therapy to treat hereditary blindness will cost US\$425,000 per eye, pharmaceutical company Spark Therapeutics announced on 3 January. The US Food and Drug Administration approved the treatment, called Luxturna (voretigene neparvovec), in December; it was the first US approval for a gene therapy that targets disease-causing mutations. Observers were keen to see what Spark, based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, would charge for the treatment, which is administered only once in each eye and could set a precedent for future gene therapies. At \$850,000 for a full, two-eye treatment, the cost is below the predicted price tag of \$1 million — but

has still raised eyebrows, given widespread concern over high drug prices.

## EVENTS

### Congress postponed

Organizers of the 105th Indian Science Congress have delayed the country's largest gathering of scientists until March amid concerns over the venue. At an emergency meeting on 27 December, the Indian Science Congress Association in Kolkata postponed the conference, which was scheduled for 3–7 January at Osmania University in Hyderabad. The association said in a statement that the event was postponed because

the university was no longer in a position to host the event "due to certain issues [on] the campus". No further details were given. The congress will now be held at Manipur University in northeast India on 16–20 March.

### Dementia pull-out

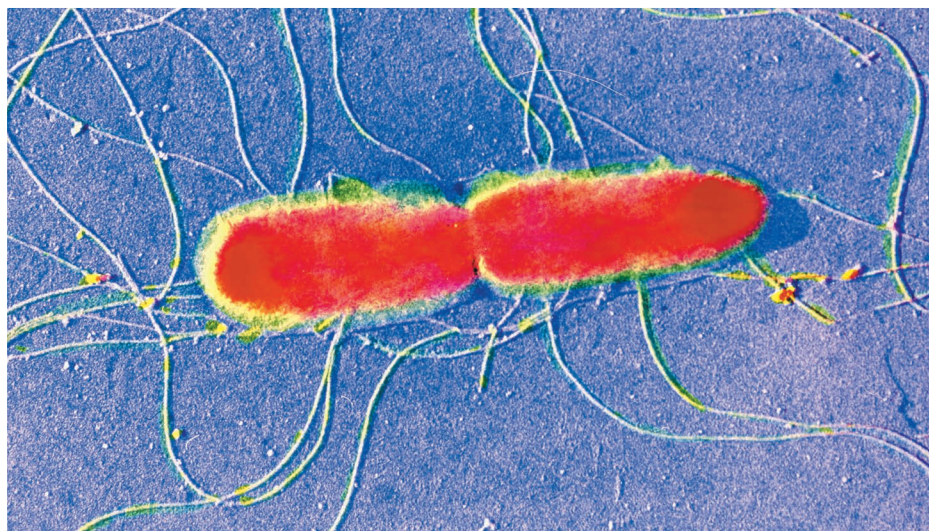
The multinational drug firm Pfizer will abandon research on dementia treatments, joining a stream of major pharmaceutical companies that have fled the high-risk research field in the past decade. On 6 January, the company said that it expects to shed 300 US jobs from its neuroscience discovery and early stage drug-development programmes

in Andover and Cambridge, both in Massachusetts, and in Groton, Connecticut. In 2012, Pfizer stopped a clinical trial of an antibody therapy for Alzheimer's disease because it demonstrated no clinical benefit. No therapies for Alzheimer's are yet available.

## FACILITIES

### AI industry hub

China will invest 13.8 billion yuan (US\$2.1 billion) in an industrial park devoted to artificial intelligence (AI). The park in western Beijing is expected to host 400 companies and a national laboratory to house collaborations between



CNRI/SPL

## Improved typhoid jab gets go-ahead

A new vaccine against typhoid fever will be rolled out to millions of children in low-income countries, after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced its endorsement on 3 January. The product — developed by Bharat Biotech in Hyderabad, India — is a typhoid conjugate vaccine, which means that it provides longer-lasting protection and requires fewer doses than do other typhoid immunizations. The WHO's endorsement allows the vaccine to be

procured by United Nations agencies. Gavi, an organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, that funds vaccines for low-income countries, said it would spend US\$85 million on deploying the vaccine, with child immunizations likely to begin in 2019. Typhoid bacteria (*Salmonella Typhi*; pictured), which spread through contaminated food and water, cause an estimated 11 million to 20 million infections and 128,000–161,000 deaths each year.