

# Pioneering gene therapy restores UK girl's hearing

SURGERY MARKS NEW ERA IN TREATMENT OF DEAFNESS

LONDON

An 18-month old British girl who was born completely deaf is believed to be the youngest person to have their hearing restored after undergoing groundbreaking new gene therapy.

Several medical teams around the world including in China and the United States have been trialling similar treatments with good results for hereditary deafness that focuses on a rare genetic mutation.

But UK ear surgeon Manohar Bance said the toddler, Opal, was the first person in the world to receive therapy developed by US biotech firm Regeneron and "the youngest globally that's been done to date as far as we know".

Opal was treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, part of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, in eastern England.

## Spectacular results

Bance called the results of Opal's surgery "spectacular — so close to normal hearing restoration. So we do hope it could be a potential cure".

He said it came on the back of decades of work and marked "a new era in the treatment of deafness".

The little girl, from Oxfordshire in south central England, has a genetic form of auditory neuropathy, which is caused by the disruption of nerve impulses travelling from the inner ear to the brain.

Auditory neuropathy can be caused by a fault in the OTOF gene, which is responsible for making a protein called otoferlin. This enables



Reuters

Opal, who was born completely deaf and can now hear unaided for the first time, reads with her mother Jo at their home in Eynsham, Oxfordshire.

cells in the ear to communicate with the hearing nerve.

To overcome the fault, the "new era" gene therapy from Regeneron delivers a working copy of the gene to the ear.

Bance said that following surgery last September, Opal's hearing was now "close to normal" with further improvement expected.

Opal was the first person to take part in a gene therapy trial being carried out in Cambridge by Bance.

"My entire life, gene therapy has been 'five years away' ... to finally see something that actually worked in humans... It was quite spectacular and a bit awe-inspiring really," he said.

—AFP

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# Israel strikes Rafah despite US warning

Latest round of ceasefire talks in Cairo ends without a deal

## RAFAH

Smoke rose from strikes on Gaza's crowded southern city of Rafah yesterday after US President Joe Biden vowed to stop supplying artillery shells and other weapons to Israel if a full-scale offensive into the city goes ahead.

It was the starkest warning yet from the United States, Israel's main military provider, over the civilian impact of its war against Hamas Palestinian militants.

An AFP correspondent and witnesses yesterday reported strikes on several parts of Rafah, where the United Nations said 1.4 million people were sheltering.

"The tanks and jets are striking," Tarek Bahlul said on a deserted Rafah street. "Every minute you hear a rocket and you don't know where it will land."

Israel has already defied international objections by sending in tanks and conducting

what it called "targeted raids" in eastern Rafah, the city it says is home to Hamas's last remaining battalions.

Meanwhile, a senior Israeli official said that the latest round of indirect negotiations in Cairo to halt hostilities had ended with no deal and Israel would proceed with its operation in Rafah and other parts of the Gaza Strip as planned.

Israel has submitted to mediators its reservations about a Hamas proposal for a hostage release deal and the Israeli delegation was returning from the Egyptian capital, the official added.

—Agencies  
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