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UM Starts A Top Stem-Cell Database

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The state's life science leaders launched yesterday what is believed to be the world's most comprehensive database of embryonic stem-cell lines.

The International Stem Cell Registry was created at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and is supported by the Massachusetts Life Science Center, the quasi-public entity that provides economic support to the state's life-science companies.

Proponents of the controversial science say the new registry, and a forthcoming stem-cell bank, will position Massachusetts as a world leader in stem-cell science.

"The registry serves as the database of information on all the stem-cell lines that are available," said Harvard Stem Cell Institute Executive Director Brock Reeve, who called the registry a critical first step in the two-part development.

"The stem-cell bank will house the lines that will then be distributed around the world," he said.

Critics, however, point out that acquiring embryonic stem cells requires either destroying a human embryo or therapeutic cloning. But supporters say the fast-multiplying cells obtained in a human embryo could result in medical advances that save lives.

The online database is housed at UMass' Shrewsbury campus and is available to the public. Researchers might use it for their studies, while patients may search for new stem-cell advances.

The state's Life Science Center provided the registry with a \$570,000 grant to pay for its first year of operation.