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THE WORLD

Genes injected into toddlers' brains to slow disease NEW ZEALAND



Reuters

First steps in science... genetic researcher Professor Mathew During holds 19-month-old Lindsay Karlin while her parents, Helene and Roger, look on.

AUCKLAND: In a world first, two American infants were to have synthetic genes inserted into their brains yesterday in a bid to slow a deadly rare disease, the *New Zealand Herald* reported.

Lindsay Karlin, 19 months, and Alyssa Mushin, two, suffer from Canavan disease, which destroys the sheaths of nerve cells in the brain.

Both girls have a life expectancy of six.

The gene therapy was developed by Professor Mathew During and a team of researchers at the Yale University Medical School in the United States.

Professor During, a New Zealander, is now on the staff of the Auckland Medical School.

Under the treatment, healthy genes take over from faulty ones and halt deterioration of the nerve cell sheaths.

Researchers have successfully injected healthy copies of human genes into rats and monkeys to gauge the safety of the treatment.

Professor During could not predict an outcome: "The best we can hope for is that the procedure is safe, anything over and above that will be a bonus."

Parents Mark and Eileen Mushin said they were cautiously optimistic for their daughter.

Agence France-Press