# Hope for preemies as artificial womb helps tiny lambs grow

Researchers are creating an

artificial womb to improve care for extremely premature babies — and remarkable animal testing suggests the first-of-its-kind watery incubation so closely mimics mom that it just might work.

Today, premature infants weighing as little as a pound are hooked to ventilators and other machines inside incubators. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia is aiming for a gentler solution, to give the tiniest preemies a few more weeks cocooned in a womblike environment — treating them more like fetuses than newborns in hopes of giving them a better chance of healthy survival.

The researchers created a fluid-filled transparent container to simulate how fetuses float in amniotic fluid inside mom's uterus, and attached it to a mechanical placenta that keeps blood oxygenated.

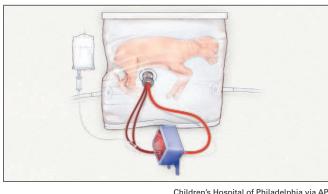
In early-stage animal testing, extremely premature lambs grew, apparently normally, inside the system for three to four weeks, the team reported Tuesday.

"We start with a tiny fetus that is pretty inert and spends most of its time sleeping. Over four weeks we see that fetus open its eyes, grow wool, breathe, swim," said Dr. Emily Partridge, a CHOP research fellow and first author of the study published in Nature Communications.

"It's hard to describe actually how uniquely awe-inspiring it is to see, she added in an interview.

Human testing still is three to five years away, although the team already is in discussions with the Food and Drug Administration.

"We're trying to extend normal gestation," said Dr. Alan Flake, a fetal surgeon at CHOP who is leading the



In this drawing provided by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, an illustration of a fluid-filled incubation system that mimics a mother's womb, in hopes of one day improving survival of extremely premature babies.

project and considers it a temporary bridge between the mother's womb and the outside world.

Increasingly hospitals attempt to save the most critically premature infants, those born before 26 weeks gestation and even those right at the limits of viability 22 to 23 weeks. Extreme prematurity is a leading cause

**Wednesday Morning** 

STATION 6 AM 6:30

Power

of infant mortality, and those who do survive frequently have serious disabilities such as cerebral palsy.

The idea of treating preemies in fluid-filled incubators may sound strange, but physiologically it makes sense, said Dr. Catherine Spong, a fetal medicine specialist at the National Institutes of Health.

7:30 8 AM

Nature Cat | C.George | D.Tiger | D.Tiger

One of the biggest risks for very young preemies is that their lungs aren't ready to breathe air, she explained. Before birth, amniotic fluid flows into their lungs, bringing growth factors crucial for proper lung development. When they're born too soon, doctors hook preemies to ventilators to keep them alive but risk lifelong lung damage.

Flake's goal is for the womb-like system to support the very youngest preemies just for a few weeks, until their organs are mature enough to better handle regular hospital care like older preemies who have less risk of death or disability.

The device is simpler than previous attempts at creating an artificial womb, which haven't yet panned out.

How the "Biobag" system

—The premature lambs were delivered by C-section

SplashB.

9:30 10 AM

Sesame St. DinoTrain | Peg + Cat | SuperW!

and immediately placed into temperature-controlled bag filled with a substitute for amniotic fluid that they swallow and take into their

"We make gallons of this stuff a day," said fetal physiologist Marcus Davey. It's currently an electrolyte solution; he's working to add other factors to make it more

like real amniotic fluid. —Then the researchers attached the umbilical cord to a machine that exchanges carbon dioxide in blood with oxygen, like a placenta normally does.

—The lamb's heart circulates the blood, without the need for any other pump.

The researchers tested five lambs whose biological age was equivalent to 23-week human preemies, and three more a bit older. All appeared to grow normally, with blood pressure and other key health measures stable.

**April 26, 2017** 

10:30 | 11 AM | 11:30

In this March 13 photo, students and teachers gather for an all-school meeting called "circle" at Hope Academy in Indianapolis.

# Overcoming opioids: Special schools help teens stay clean

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) When Logan Snyder got hooked on pills after a prescription to treat pain from a kidney stone, she joined the millions already swept up in the nation's grim wave of addiction to opioid painkillers.

She was just 14.

Youth is a drawback when it comes to kicking drugs. Only half of U.S. treatment centers accept teenagers and even fewer offer teen-focused groups or programs. After treatment, adolescents find little structured support. They're outnumbered by adults at self-help meetings. Sober youth drop-in centers are rare. Returning to school means resisting offers to get high with old friends.

But Snyder is lucky: Her slide ended when her father got her into a residential drug treatment program. Now 17 and clean, she credits her continued success to Hope Academy in Indianapolis, a tuition-free recovery school where she's enrolled as a

"I am with people all day who are similar to me," she says. "We're here to hold each other accountable."

The opioid epidemic, which researchers say is the worst addiction crisis in U.S. history, has mostly ensnared adults, especially those in their 20s, 30s and 40s. But teens have not been spared: Each day, 1,100 start misusing pain pills. Opioids killed 521 teens in 2015, federal data show.

Not enough is known about opioids and teen brains. But getting hooked early is trouble — the vast majority of adults in treatment report they started using as teen-

Researchers say young recovering addicts do better at places like Hope, special schools that use peer communities to support sobriety. There are only about three dozen such schools in the U.S., but interest is growing among educators and health officials because of the opioid epidemic.

"I get a phone call every day from somebody who wants to start a recovery high school," says Rachelle Gardner, an addiction counselor who helped found Hope in 2006 as a charter school through the mayor's office. "It's horrible to watch young people die. And who wants

that to be our legacy?" Hope's 41 teenagers have abused marijuana, alcohol, painkillers and heroin. Most, like Snyder, have been through residential treatment, some more than once.

Others, like 17-year-old Aiden Thompson, arrive with no treatment after a crisis.

"I was really pissed off because I didn't want to be here," says Thompson, who came to Hope last year after his mom discovered his vodka and pill stash. "Everything they said, I was like: 'That can't be true. No. No way."

A week later, though, he found himself talking in group meetings.

Now, he said, "I don't even want to think about where I would be" without

the school. Teens like Snyder and Thompson can change in these settings, even after years of drug abuse, in part because social acceptance is a fundamental need for

people their age.

The sway of positive peer pressure — what students at Hope call "the community" is quiet, almost intangible. It's as simple as two teens passing in the hall: "You all right?" says one boy. The other nods, "Yeah, I'm all right."

A student council plans events like coffee-andmusic mornings. To join the council, a student must have 30 days of sobriety.

Random drug tests keep it real. Failing a urine test prompts a meeting with recovery coach Brad Trolson, who employs a technique called motivational interviewing, using open-ended questions and reflective listening to encourage students to think for themselves.

"They're not used to anyone saying, 'What do you think you should do next?" Trolson says.

It's a daily fight, he says. Many have addicted parents histories of abuse or neglect, key risk factors for addiction.

'Their wounds will start to heal and they'll come open again," he says. "You end up addressing those wounds over and over again."

Thompson, who relapsed over winter break, says he's learning to focus on one day of recovery at a time. "I'm clean for today and that's all that matters," he says. "I don't want to put all this weight on my shoulders to feel like I have to stay clean forever. I can just take it a day at a time and not be freaked out by it."

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### **AFTERNOON**

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#### **EVENING**

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