Stem cell therapy for autism allowed only in approved trials

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News

Following the Supreme Court's judgment of 30 Jan 2026 in Yash Charitable Trust vs Union of India, stem cell therapy for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can no longer be offered as a routine clinical service; it is allowed only inside approved, monitored clinical trials. The National Stem Cell Research Regulation Committee (NSRC), set up on 24 Mar 2026 under the Department of Health Research (DHR), is now consulting doctors, parents and caregivers on who may join an ICMR-funded randomised controlled trial (RCT) at AIIMS, New Delhi and Amrita Hospital, Kochi.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Legal basis	Supreme Court, Yash Charitable Trust vs Union of India (30 Jan 2026)
Regulator	NSRC, Department of Health Research
Trial	ICMR-funded RCT at AIIMS New Delhi and Amrita Hospital, Kochi
Rule	Stem cells for autism only in approved trials

Background

- Stem cells are unspecialised cells that can divide and turn into specialised cells. Totipotent cells can form a whole organism, pluripotent cells any body tissue, and multipotent cells a few related types.

Shinya Yamanaka won the 2012 Nobel Prize for induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs). Proven uses include bone-marrow (haematopoietic) stem cell transplants for blood cancers and disorders.

- Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition; it is one of the 21 disabilities in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and is also covered by the National Trust Act, 1999. World Autism Awareness Day is 2 April.
- A person who joins an approved trial is a research volunteer and cannot be charged a fee. Believing that a trial is a proven treatment is called "therapeutic misconception". India's National Guidelines for Stem Cell Research, 2017 were issued jointly by ICMR and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT); clinical trials must be registered with the Clinical Trials Registry – India (CTRI).

Tamil Nadu link: The Centre for Stem Cell Research at CMC Vellore, supported by the Department of Biotechnology, is one of India's leading stem cell research centres.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

Following the Supreme Court's judgment of 30 Jan 2026 in Yash Charitable Trust vs Union of India, stem cell therapy for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can no longer be offered as a routine clinical service; it is allowed only inside approved, monitored clinical trials.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Legal basis: Supreme Court, Yash Charitable Trust vs Union of India (30 Jan 2026); Regulator: NSRC, Department of Health Research; Trial: ICMR-funded RCT at AIIMS New Delhi and Amrita Hospital, Kochi; Rule: Stem cells for autism only in approved trials.

What is the background to this news?

Stem cells are unspecialised cells that can divide and turn into specialised cells. Totipotent cells can form a whole organism, pluripotent cells any body tissue, and multipotent cells a few related types.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which SC case restricted stem cell therapy for autism?

A) Puttaswamy case

B) Navtej Johar case

C) Yash Charitable Trust case

D) Common Cause case

Answer: C – Explanation: Judgment of 30.01.2026; Puttaswamy is on privacy, Common Cause on dying with dignity, Navtej on Section 377.

2. The stem cell regulator NSRC works under

A) Dept of Pharmaceuticals

B) Dept of Health Research

C) Dept of Science & Technology

D) Dept of Biotechnology

Answer: B – Explanation: NSRC was set up on 24 Mar 2026 under the Department of Health Research (DHR). It is seeking views on eligibility for the ICMR-funded trial at AIIMS Delhi and Amrita Kochi.

3. Stem cells that can give rise to an entire organism are called

A) Unipotent

B) Pluripotent

C) Multipotent

D) Totipotent

Answer: D – Explanation: The zygote is totipotent; pluripotent cells form any tissue but not a whole organism.

4. Which law lists autism among 21 disabilities?

A) Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

B) RPwD Act, 2016

C) RCI Act, 1992

D) PwD Act, 1995

Answer: B – Explanation: The 1995 Act covered only 7 disabilities; the 2016 Act raised it to 21.

5. One of Tamil Nadu's leading stem cell research centres is at

A) CMC, Vellore

B) Thanjavur Medical College

C) Madurai Medical College

D) Madras Medical College

Answer: A – Explanation: CMC Vellore's Centre for Stem Cell Research leads work on blood disorders and gene therapy.