

Scientists say Milky Way holds surprises

NEWYORK (AP) — After a year in which scientists discovered several apparent planets outside the solar system, a new analysis concludes that folks, you ain't seen nothin' yet. Hidden planets may be lurking around half the Milky Way galaxy's 100 billion stars, the analysis suggests.

"We'll see an explosion" in planet discoveries, said researcher Steven Beckwith of the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg, Germany.

He presented the evidence for his optimism Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature* with Amelia Sargent of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.

Scientists want to find distant planet systems not only for the tantalizing possibility of finding life, but also to test theories of how the solar system formed.

There's no direct way to tell now how many

ordinary stars like the sun have planets.

For years, astronomers have believed planets were rare. But the rush of reports in the past year has encouraged the belief that they are quite common, and Beckwith's 50 percent estimate fits in with that thinking, said Steve Maran, assistant director of space sciences at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md.

Not everyone is guessing that high. David Black, director of the Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston, said he wouldn't be surprised if the answer turned out to be 10 percent.

Since last fall, at least eight stars have been found to have a telltale wobble that suggests they're being pulled around by orbiting planets. Some researchers maintain, however, that at least some of these orbiting bodies may be failed stars called brown dwarfs instead.

In the *Nature* article, Beckwith and Sargent

analyze previous studies to argue that a lot more planets are out there. They note that in several regions of the cosmos, half or more of very young stars show signs that they're surrounded by disks of gas and dust that look like the forerunner of the solar system.

Scientists believe that when the sun was young, a disk of gas and dust surrounded it like a huge spinning pizza. Dust in this disk started to clump up, and some of these clumps grew into planets.

In all, it took maybe 10 million to a few hundred million years to build the solar system's planets, which sucked up material from the disk.

"If you look at other stars, you have evidence of enough material and enough time and the right conditions to make planetary systems," Beckwith said in a telephone interview.

Doctors find way to save premature babies with liquid ventilation

BOSTON (AP) — Doctors can rescue critically ill premature babies from almost certain death by filling their feeble, underdeveloped lungs with oxygen-rich liquid for a few days to restore their breathing.

The babies breathe through the liquid, which takes the place of air until it gradually evaporates.

A pilot study on 13 babies was remarkably successful: Seven survived without serious lung damage, mental retardation or any of the other ill effects common in extremely small infants.

Some of the babies were almost as young as we put the liquid in," said Dr. Corinne Lowe Leach of Children's Hospital of Buffalo, N.Y.

For others, we were at the limit of our current technology and concerned they might not survive."

The same experimental technique is being tested on children and adults with a variety of other life-threatening lung illnesses and injuries, including infections, near-drowning and smoke inhalation. In all, about 700 patients in hospitals across the United States are being enrolled in studies of the liquid, known as perflubron or LiquiVent.

Its developers, Alliance Pharmaceutical Corp. of San Diego and Hoechst-Roussel Pharmaceuticals Inc. of Frankfurt, Germany, are financing the stud-

ies as part of their effort to win Food and Drug Administration approval to sell the product for this use.

"This is a very exciting new frontier in medicine that we have explored. We have taken critical care management of patients with lung disease to a new level," said Leach, who directed the first human study of the approach.

In infant respiratory distress syndrome — also known as hyaline membrane disease — the lungs lack enough surfactant, a chemical that keeps the air sacs open so oxygen and carbon dioxide are exchanged.

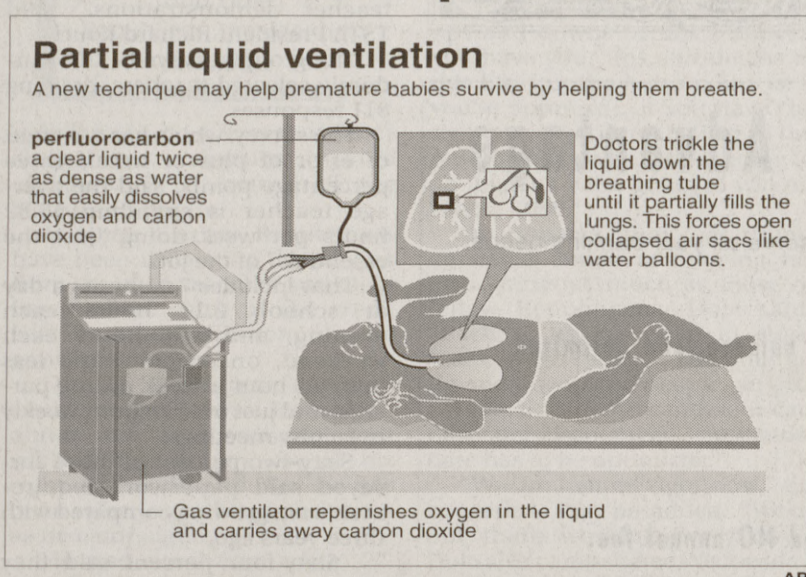
While artificial surfactant can often relieve breathing difficulties, the treatment sometimes fails. Babies must be placed on respirators, but the breathing machines can damage the lungs, and the tiny patients may die anyway.

About 3 percent of premature babies die of respiratory distress syndrome.

In the larger studies now under way, doctors will randomly assign patients to get either LiquiVent or ordinary care.

The new treatment involves a substance called a perfluorocarbon, a clear, oily liquid twice as dense as water that easily dissolves oxygen and carbon dioxide.

Doctors trickle the liquid down



the baby's breathing tube until it partially fills the lungs. This forces open the collapsed air sacs like water balloons. The respirator replenishes the oxygen in the liquid as the oxygen moves through the air sacs into the bloodstream. The liquid then carries away carbon dioxide.

The liquid also displaces water, mucus and other lung-damaging debris so they can be removed, and it seems to reduce inflammation. In a few days, the liquid is allowed to evaporate, and if all goes well, the babies are able to breathe air.

Of the eight surviving babies, seven were weaned to ordinary room air and showed normal physical and mental development after one year. One remained on a respirator and eventually died.

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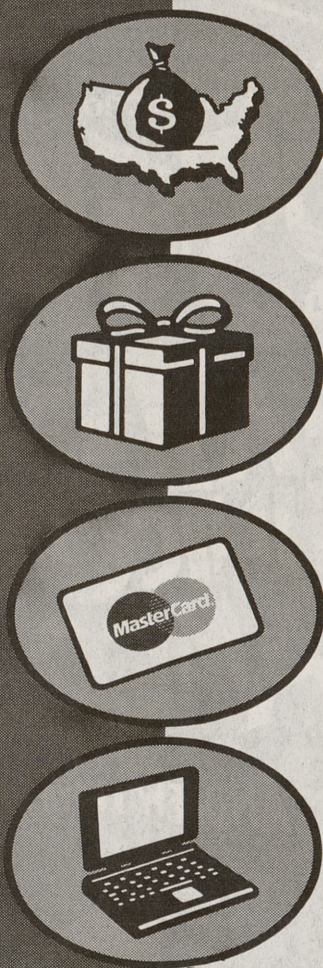
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