

Texas firm launches experiments to space

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A NASA space shuttle is carrying a series of experiments being conducted by Astrogenetix to discover vaccines against a number of diseases--including those caused by methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* microbes--by using the microgravity environment in space.

The space shuttle Atlantis, which lifted off Nov. 16, will be the setting for a study Astrogenetix is conducting with MRSA, according to a story in the *Austin Business Journal*. Information gained from the experiments build on research from an August space flight that allowed Astrogenetix to hone in on a specific group of genes that show promise for identifying a vaccine candidate, the company says in a statement.

MRSA is becoming more prevalent, leading health experts to predict a steady rise in infections and mortality. Previous space flight studies of the bacteria demonstrated that growth of this organism in the microgravity environment elicits unique interactions in biological systems that do not occur on Earth, specifically changes in virulence, according to the company.

"Through our unique approach of conducting experiments in microgravity at the International Space Station, years may be eliminated from research and development to allow for fast-tracking of promising results," Astrogenetix CEO John Porter says.