Medical Research UK

Medical Research Council

Festive Science Image Competition

2026

Summary

The Festive Science Image Competition, run by Medical Research UK and the Medical Research Council (MRC), is now in its fifth year! We had some excellent entries in 2025, and you can view the winners on the Medical Research UK website.

The aim of this competition is to give members of the medical research community an opportunity to play a role in designing Medical Research UK and MRC's joint Season's Greetings Card for 2026.

We are asking entrants to produce a design which combines **scientific imagery** with a **festive theme**, alongside a title and description written for a non-scientific audience, to demonstrate their science communication skills and creativity. The winner will be awarded a prize and have their image seen by BBC science presenter and journalist Caroline Steel, as well as numerous senior stakeholders across the medical research community.

This competition is open to all Medical Research UK and MRC-funded researchers, staff and students (more on this in the 'who can enter' section below).

The competition is intended to recognise outstanding science images and science communication, raise awareness of medical research, and convey a festive message to key Medical Research UK and MRC stakeholders.

The deadline for submission is
11:59pm on Monday 16 November 2026

We are committed to making this competition accessible to all, by offering assistance where needed. Please contact press.team@medicalresearchuk.org if you have any questions or concerns about the entry process or would like assistance.

Overview

The Prize

Medical Research UK will award the winning entrant a cash prize of **£350**, with **£150** awarded to the second-place design. The winning image will feature on Medical Research UK and MRC's 2026 Season's Greetings Card, which is sent to over 1,000 key stakeholders across the research community, as well as Medical Research UK's supporters, to thank them for their efforts and support during the year. The card is also shared via Medical Research UK and MRC social media channels.

Who can enter?

The competition is open to:

- Current or past Medical Research UK or MRC-funded researchers (including studentships, fellowships, research grant-holders), technicians, or support staff
- Medical Research UK or MRC Head Office staff
- MRC unit, centre, or institute staff.

What we're looking for

Your image should have direct relevance to medical research and it must be festive! We are keen for creative submissions produced using a wide variety of media; your image could be a digital design, drawing, painting or a photograph. It could also be a digital image produced by microscopy or imaging equipment.

Images with AI-generated elements will be accepted, but this should be clearly labelled in the submission. Images entirely generated using AI are not permitted.

We encourage creativity when relating your image to the festive theme. Your image could be aesthetically linked, e.g., a bacterial culture which resembles a snowflake or thematically linked, e.g., an exchange of molecules between cells which represents gift-giving.

Please provide an image title (maximum of 100 characters, not including spaces) and a short description (maximum of 100 words) written for a non-scientific audience. explaining:

- what the image shows
- how it relates to medical research
- how it relates to the festive period
- how it was created.

How your image will be assessed

Submitted images will be assessed anonymously and names/affiliations won't be shared until a winner is decided. A panel of judges with a science, medical research, communications and public engagement background will select a winner and any highly commended entries.

This year we are delighted that BBC science presenter and journalist Caroline Steel will be a guest judge on the panel!

The panel will assess the images using the following criteria:

- Aesthetics: the image needs to be eye-catching and visually appealing.
- Image quality: the image needs to be of a high quality, in order to be reproduced on the greetings card.
- Festivity: the image needs to be related to festive imagery or share a thematic link with how people celebrate during the festive period. We welcome submissions from members of the research community from all backgrounds depicting what 'festivity' means to you.
- Communication: the image description needs to clearly explain the research or science in a way that is easily understood by a non-scientific audience. There is no expectation for the image description to be festive.

How to enter

Please ensure you only submit **one** image. It should meet the following criteria:

- Still image, in JPG, PNG or HEIC/HEIF format.
- Image resolution: at least 300dpi.
- Uploaded ahead of the deadline via WeTransfer: https://wetransfer.com (Email to: press.team@medicalresearchuk.org).
- Labelled clearly in the WeTransfer title/file name with your full name, job title and institution.
- Submitted with your title/description in the WeTransfer 'Message' box.

Please be aware that your image will be viewed by the judging panel, may be shared on Medical Research UK/MRC social media channels and, if chosen as the winner, will be used on the 2026 Season's Greetings Card.

Full copyright is retained by the creator of any entry, and wherever the winning image is used, it will be credited to the entrant.