

Press Release

Geneva, 8 June 2023

Emerging viral diseases

CENTRE FOR EMERGING VIRAL DISEASES DESIGNATED WHO COLLABORATING CENTRE

The World Health Organization (WHO), the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), yesterday formalized the designation of the University Hospital Centre for Emerging Viral Diseases as a WHO collaborating centre for epidemic and pandemic diseases. The latter forms part of the long-standing partnership between HUG, UNIGE and WHO, as reflected by six joint collaborating centres. This follows its extensive work in recent years as a WHO reference laboratory for the diagnosis of COVID-19, as well as for other activities.

The [Centre for Emerging Viral Diseases](#) provides unique public health expertise in Switzerland for the preparedness and response to viral epidemics and pandemics. It is equipped to carry out analysis of the most dangerous viruses for human beings. At the forefront during the last pandemic, its interventions focus on diagnosis, clinical management and the use of specific treatments for viral infections. The centre will provide WHO with technical support for clinical management and the development of recommendations. It will contribute to the sharing and evaluation of diagnostic tools to better prepare for future epidemics. In addition, the centre carries out basic and translational research aimed at improving the understanding of viral infections. The centre coordinates the viral disease expertise of the [Infectious Diseases Department](#), the [Virology Laboratory](#), the [Laboratory Medicine Department](#), the [Vaccinology Centre](#) and the [Tropical and Humanitarian Medicine Department](#) of the HUG.

For Bertrand Levrat, CEO of the HUG, ‘this new partnership further strengthens the excellent collaboration between the HUG and the WHO, which has built up over the years based on very concrete experience. It is an honour for the HUG to thus be closely associated with an essential mission of the World Health Organization.’

‘This designation by the WHO highlights the level of expertise of our institutions’ researchers. It also represents international recognition and unparalleled visibility for our academic research,’ says Cem Gabay, Dean of the UNIGE Faculty of Medicine.

Centre for the management of highly pathogenic viral infections

The centre houses the P3 and P4D high biosafety laboratory, an essential tool for the national reference laboratories for influenza (CNRI) and emerging viruses (CRIVE). The latter benefits from the support of the Federal Office of Public Health (OFSP) and, thanks to the infrastructures of the HUG, make it possible to have the only diagnostic laboratory available 7 days a week for the entire Swiss confederation. The centre played a key role in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland, the mpox epidemic, and is on the front line for the diagnosis of avian influenza (H5N1). It was involved in the diagnosis and clinical management of patients suffering from the Ebola virus disease in Switzerland and West Africa, as well as in

the investigation of the first approved vaccine against this disease. It is one of two centres in Switzerland authorized to take charge of patients suspected of or suffering from highly pathogenic viruses and viral haemorrhagic fevers.

The centre is under the responsibility of Prof. Laurent Kaiser, head physician of the Infectious Diseases Department and Prof. Isabella Eckerle, assistant associate physician, specialist in microbiology, virology and epidemiology of infectious diseases. Both teach in the Department of Medicine of the UNIGE Faculty of Medicine.

Research projects

The Centre for Emerging Viral Diseases also has a basic research laboratory affiliated with the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Medicine of the UNIGE Faculty of Medicine, which carries out numerous projects in cooperation with international and non-governmental organizations active in low- and middle-income countries. The centre also works on complex viral syndromes such as chronic viral infections or infections in people with immunodeficiency. One of the major areas of research relates to the laboratory assessment of the risk of new and emerging zoonotic viruses by molecular and viral methods, using specific human cell culture models, or animal reservoirs.

Field missions as part of the response to epidemics

As part of its cooperation with NGOs, such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), or with international organisations such as the WHO, physicians from the Centre for Emerging Viral Diseases regularly take part in field missions. For example, in April 2023, one of its experts, staff physician, Dr Frédérique Jacqueroz Bausch, went on a one-month mission to Equatorial Guinea under the auspices of the WHO during an epidemic outbreak of Marburg virus disease.

For more information

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The HUG: Care, Teaching, and leading-edge Research

The Geneva University Hospital (HUG) comprises [eight public hospitals and two clinics](#). Theirs missions are to provide health care to the community in all medical specialties, to help train physicians and health professionals, and to conduct medical and clinical research. The HUG operate as a national reference centre for [influenza](#), [emerging viral infections](#), [meningococcus](#), and transplant immunology, and are the [national reference laboratory for histocompatibility](#). They are also a WHO Collaborating Centre [in six areas](#), as well as [Centres of Excellence](#) in a number of sectors. The HUG treat 240,000 patients each year, with a capacity of 2,000 hospital beds, and employ 12.788 people.

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About the University of Geneva

The University of Geneva, Switzerland, was founded in 1559 by Jean Calvin and Théodore de Bèze and ranks amongst the top 100 best universities in the world. It enjoys worldwide recognition and develops an ever-strengthening international network. The University of Geneva welcomes about 19'000 students in its nine faculties teaching Sciences, Medicine, Humanities, Economics and Management, Social Sciences, Law, Theology, Psychology and Educational Sciences, as well as Translation and Interpreting. The University of Geneva fulfils three missions: education, research and knowledge-sharing. It is a member of the League of European Research Universities since 2002 and is a founding partner of Campus Biotech, the life science hub for the Geneva Lake region.

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