Press Release

LEIBNIZ INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY (LIV)

Prof. Stephanie Pfänder receives funding from the Leibniz Programme for Women Professors

LIV professor awarded funding by the Leibniz Association

At its meeting on July 15, 2025, the Senate of the Leibniz Association decided to fund Prof. Stephanie Pfänder (Head of LIV Research Group *Emerging Viruses*) as part of the renowned Leibniz Programme for Women Professors. With this, the Leibniz Association supports excellent female scientists on their further career path and at the same time strengthens the strategic cooperation between Leibniz Institutes and universities.

Prof. Stephanie Pfänder researches how the human body reacts to novel and recurring viruses. Her work focuses on cellular factors that influence how viruses spread and can trigger diseases. The latest laboratory technologies and advanced model systems are used for this purpose, for example organoids - model systems that mimic human organs. The results of these investigations should enable new prevention and therapy approaches in the future.

“I am very pleased with the Leibniz Association's decision and the recognition of our research work,” says Prof. Stephanie Pfänder. “Our goal is to systematically decipher the mechanisms behind the development and defense against emerging viral infections - the funding from the Leibniz Programme for Women Professorships Program offers decisive perspectives for this.”

Prof. Stephanie Pfänder is also the coordinator of the EU-wide interdisciplinary project DEFENDER (IDEntification oF novel viral Entry factors aNd DevelopmEnt of antiviRal approaches), which aims to develop innovative approaches to combat new and re-emerging viruses. Inclusion in the Leibniz Programme for Women Professors strengthens their academic visibility and institutional anchoring and thus also contributes to advancing strategically important initiatives such as DEFENDER on a structural level.

Double success for the *Leibniz Center Infection*

The Leibniz Center Infection (LCI) research alliance, which includes the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNITM) and the Research Center Borstel - Leibniz Lung Center in addition to the LIV, will also benefit twice from the decision: Dr. Maria Rosenthal from the BNITM, who is developing inhibitors against virus-specific mechanisms with the help of her research on bunyaviruses, is also being funded.

Political signal for Hamburg as research hub

Senator for Science Maryam Blumenthal: "The Leibniz Association's decision to award two new grants in Hamburg is a strong signal for our science location. I am delighted that Maria Rosenthal and Stephanie Pfänder, two outstanding virologists from Hamburg, have been recognized for their excellent research. The selection shows how successful our long-standing strategy is: We are strengthening promising fields of research such as infection biology, consistently

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investing in infrastructure - especially in Science City Hamburg-Bahrenfeld - and specifically promoting gender equality."

The Leibniz Programme for Women Professors is part of the Leibniz Competition 2026-1. It serves to promote gender equality in science and at the same time to secure and further develop scientific excellence at Leibniz institutes.

Further information
https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/research/leibniz-competition/funded-projects

https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/research/leibniz-competition/leibniz-programme-for-women-professors

The Leibniz Institute of Virology (LIV)

Founded in 1948, the Leibniz Institute of Virology is a non-profit and independent research institution under civil law, which has been a member of the Leibniz Association since 1995.

The LIV researches human pathogenic viruses with the aim of understanding virus related diseases and creating new therapeutic approaches. Based on basic experimental research, new approaches are developed for improved methods of treating viral diseases such as AIDS, influenza and hepatitis, as well as emerging viral infections such as COVID-19 or West Nile and Dengue fever. With its research focus, the LIV covers a wide range of the world's most important viral pathogens.
The LIV is involved in regional and national research networks such as the Centre for Structural Systems Biology (CSSB), the German Center for Infection Research (DZIF), the Hamburg Leibniz ScienceCampus *Integrative Analysis of pathogen-induced Compartments* (InterACt), and the Leibniz Lab *Pandemic Preparedness: One Health, One Future*. Together with the neighboring Leibniz research institutes Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNITM) and the Research Center Borstel, Leibniz Lung Center (FZB), the LIV has founded the Leibniz Center Infection (LCI), a strategic alliance of the three complementary institutes.

More information: www.leibniz-liv.de

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