

Press release, 16.09.2020

## **Covid-19 research receives 8.4 million francs in national funding**

**The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) supports fifteen Bernese Covid-19 research projects totalling 6.5 million Swiss francs. These should contribute in helping to develop solutions to combat the pandemic in Switzerland. The projects deal with topics ranging from the effects of Covid-19 on the cardiovascular system to the use of artificial intelligence in the treatment of Covid-19 patients in hospital.**

As a result of the corona pandemic, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) has allocated substantial funds for research purposes: in spring it launched a special call for proposals on coronaviruses with an amount of 10 million francs, followed by a national research programme (NRP 78) endowed with 20 million francs. In both calls for proposals, research teams from the University of Bern and the Inselspital, Bern University Hospital, performed outstandingly. In NRP 78, for example, an international project under Bernese leadership was the only one in Switzerland to receive maximum funding of CHF 2 million. It investigates damage to the cardiovascular system which plays an important role in the mortality rates of Covid-19 patients as well as in the long-term effects of the disease. Another one focuses on the application of artificial intelligence and so-called multi-omics, a relatively new research approach, that uses larger data sets and could be used in hospital diagnostics and treatment.

### **Investment in networked research pays off**

In the highly competitive call for proposals by the National Research Programme NRP 78, seven projects from Bern were awarded funding worth around CHF 6 million (7 out of 27). In the special call for proposals on coronaviruses, which took place already in spring, eight teams were also able to secure project financing (8 out of 36 with a funding of around CHF 2.4 million). The high security lab of the Institute for Infectious Diseases of University of Bern, located at sitem-insel (the Swiss Institute for Translational and Entrepreneurial Medicine in Berne, co-founded by University of Bern and University Hospital Bern), is harbouring two Covid-19 research projects, including the largest in Switzerland. Regarding Covid-19 research, the medical location of Bern was able to display its strength. "We place great emphasis on interdisciplinary work and networked research, especially with the Inselspital, which is of great advantage for the complex topic related to Covid-19", says Prof. Daniel Candinas, Vice-Rector for Research, University of Bern. "In addition, the University of Bern has promoted methodological excellence in the basic subjects in particular, which has made it possible to apply and focus on a new research question flexibly and quickly."

Prof. Urs P. Mosimann, Director of Medicine, Insel Gruppe and head of the Covid-Taskforce at the Inselspital, Bern University Hospital, is pleased: "Covid-19 has once again motivated our teams to work closely together in research and services and to cooperate across disciplinary boundaries. The success in the allocation of national research funds shows that we are on the right track."

### **Broad thematic coverage**

Since Covid-19 is a disease that can affect practically all body systems, experts from different fields had to get together at short notice and submit interdisciplinary projects.

The Bernese teams are national and international leaders in certain disciplines, such as epidemiology and virology, in which they had earlier carried out important work on Covid-19. In addition, they were able to score points in the flexible composition of new research groups and in innovative approaches from translational research as well. A further strength is their international networking: researchers from Oxford, Yale and Tokyo are among those involved in the approved projects. The topics deal with urgent problems of the pandemic. They range from pneumological issues to epidemiological and social science topics.

An overview of the research projects can be found in the attachment.

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### **Links:**

- Project register SNSF:  
Introduction: <http://www.snf.ch/de/fokusForschung/newsroom/Seiten/news-200518-uebersicht-schweizer-forschung-zu-covid-19.aspx>,  
Register: <https://data.snf.ch/covid-19>

### **Image:**



Two of the approved projects, including the largest in Switzerland, will be carried out in the BSL-3 high-security laboratory of the Institute for Infectious Diseases of the University of Bern in the building of sitem-insel, the Swiss Institute for Translational and Entrepreneurial Medicine. © Pascal Gugler

**University of Bern**

Globally connected and regionally anchored, the [University of Bern](http://www.unibe.ch/) is focused on excellence in research and teaching. It was here that Albert Einstein qualified as a lecturer.

Internationally renowned for space research, dentistry, climate science and biomedical engineering, it also hosts several global research platforms in areas such as sustainable development.

With roots in the 1500s, this comprehensive university is based in the heart of Switzerland's capital, Bern, near its UNESCO-listed medieval old town. Some 19,000 students from more than 125 nations benefit from a full range of disciplines at all levels, ranging from medicine to mathematics, economics to world literature, archaeology to law and more.

<http://www.unibe.ch/>

**Insel Gruppe**

The Insel Gruppe is Switzerland's leading group of hospitals for university and integrated medicine. It offers comprehensive health care based on groundbreaking quality, research, innovation and education. The six Insel Gruppe hospitals (Inselspital, Aarberg, Belp, Münsingen, Riggisberg and Tiefenau) carried out around 864 000 outpatient consultations and treated about 65 000 in-patients in the financial year 2019. The Insel Gruppe employs almost 10 800 members of staff from 100 nations. It provides training for a large number of professions and is the most important institution for the further training of young physicians.