



LEIBNIZ INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY (LIV)

## Professor Marcus Altfeld is new director of the Leibniz Institute of Virology in Hamburg

**Hamburg, June 3, 2024 - On June 1, 2024, Professor Marcus Altfeld became Scientific Director of the Leibniz Institute of Virology (LIV), Germany's leading institute for research into human pathogenic viruses. After more than 14 years in office, former Scientific Director Professor Thomas Dobner is stepping down from the Board of Directors. He will remain with the LIV until his retirement in 2025 as Head of the Department *Viral Transformation*.**

**Katharina Fegebank**, Senator for Science and Second Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: "During Professor Thomas Dobner's term of office, the Leibniz Institute of Virology has established itself as a globally recognized center of excellence in virus research. He leaves behind a highly renowned institute with an international focus that has had a decisive impact on Hamburg as a center of science. The excellent cooperation with him was always characterized by mutual trust and I would like to thank him very much for his great commitment as Scientific Director. In Professor Marcus Altfeld, the LIV has gained a world-renowned top researcher with many years of experience. He brings with him the best prerequisites for further strengthening the excellent research at the LIV and setting new accents. I wish him much joy and success in his new position."

Altfeld, the new Scientific Director and Head of the Department *Virus Immunology* at the LIV, studies how the human immune system controls viral infections. In particular, he investigates the mechanisms that allow immune cells to recognize viruses and eliminate virus-infected cells. Altfeld brings many years of leadership experience from his previous work at the Ragon Institute of Mass General, MIT, and Harvard, as well as at the Institute of Immunology at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf (UKE).

**Professor Marcus Altfeld:** "The experience of recent years has clearly shown how important new discoveries from basic research are for the development of novel therapies and vaccines. At the LIV, internationally renowned scientists are investigating viruses that infect humans, starting from the smallest structures and host-pathogen interactions to new therapeutic approaches. As the new Scientific Director of the LIV, I am very much looking forward to the therefrom emerging synergies to decipher the pathogenesis of viral diseases for new drugs, vaccines and also for personalized medicine."

**Professor Thomas Dobner**, former Scientific Director and Head of the Department *Viral Transformation* at the LIV: "I am delighted that I was able

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to contribute to making the LIV one of the top institutes for virus research worldwide. With its unique research profile, the LIV complements the international research community and has been making important contributions to combat the world's most important viral diseases for many years. I would like to thank my team, all employees and my colleagues inside and outside the LIV for the great cooperation." After more than 14 years as Scientific Director of the LIV, it was time to initiate a generational change in the Board of Directors. He wishes his colleague Altfeld much success and joy in his new function.

## Background information

Prof. Dr. Thomas Dobner has been head of department at the LIV since 2006 and was a member of the Board of Directors shortly after taking up his post until he was appointed Scientific Director in December 2009, a year in which the Institute faced major challenges. Since taking over as Scientific Director, the Institute has undergone considerable change. These have included fundamental reforms, name changes, restructuring of the Institute and sharpening of the research mission statement. In 2013, this led to an extremely positive evaluation by an external expert commission as part of the regular review by the Senate of the Leibniz Association. The LIV was able to continue its dynamic development through pioneering strategic concepts, the recruitment of highly qualified and internationally renowned virologists and a reorientation of its focus areas. These measures have helped to strengthen the Institute's position in the scientific community and its location in infection research and to secure its future in the long term. The Institute's positive development and excellent research performance were once again confirmed by the Leibniz Senate in the summer of 2021 as part of the regular evaluation.

Prof. Dr. Marcus Altfeld has been head of the department of Virus Immunology at the LIV since 2013. From 1999 to 2016, he worked at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School in Boston, most recently as Professor of Medicine. He was a founding member of the Ragon Institute of MGH, MIT, and Harvard, where he served as Director of the Innate Immunity Program from 2009 to 2013, and was an associate member of the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. His research focuses on innate and acquired immune responses to viruses, particularly HIV-1, and the strategies viruses have evolved to evade immune defenses. He has made significant contributions to the identification of the receptors that allow natural killer (NK) cells to recognize and kill virus-infected cells. His group furthermore investigates the mechanisms that result in sex-specific differences in immune responses to viruses. Professor Altfeld serves as the Director of the Institute of Immunology at the UKE since 2017 and the Coordinator of the HIV Division at the German Center for Infection Research (DZIF) since 2019.

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## 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) and the Hamburg Leibniz ScienceCampus "Integrative Analysis of pathogen-induced Compartments" (InterACT). 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](http://www.leibniz-liv.de)

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