

Freiburg coordinates national early warning system on animal influenza viruses

Scientists from the University of Freiburg's Faculty of Medicine are playing a key role in the new Germany-wide research network FLU-PREP, which is receiving a total of 3.5 million euros from the federal government. Around one million euros of this funding will go to Freiburg. The goal of the project is to identify influenza viruses that can be transmitted from animals to humans at an early stage and estimate their pandemic risk. In this way, the scientists want to prevent or interrupt chains of infection before they lead to larger outbreaks – a goal that is highly significant for clinical care. The network took up its work in October 2025.

'With this early warning system, we want to understand more quickly which influenza viruses could be dangerous for humans', says Prof. Dr. Martin Schwemmler, research group leader at the Institute of Virology of the Medical Center – University of Freiburg. 'Our analyses provide the basis for better assessing the risks of particular viruses and reacting swiftly in a crisis situation.'

How easily are pathogens transmitted from animals to humans?

The Freiburg virologists in Schwemmler's team are developing and running the central laboratory platform of ELU-PREP together with their network partners. They will study different groups of viruses with the help of modern molecular biological and cell-based methods to assess their zoonotic potential – their ability to be transmitted from animals to humans. This includes genetic analyses, tests on virus multiplication, and studies on the reaction of the human immune system. The research is closely integrated into the structures of the university medical centre. In this way, the new findings can help to improve diagnoses and prevention in patients.

'With the coordination of FLU-PREP, the Medical Center – University of Freiburg is taking on a central role in the prevention of potentially pandemic pathogens', says Prof. Dr. Lutz Hein, Dean of the University of Freiburg's Faculty of Medicine and member of the board of directors of the Medical Center – University of Freiburg.

A common approach for humans and animals

FLU-PREP follows the one health principle, which views the health of humans, animals, and the environment together, requiring collaboration between various specialist fields. The network includes the Robert Koch Institute, the Friedrich Löffler Institute, Berlin University Medicine, the University of Münster, and the Bavarian State Office for Health and Food Safety.

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Further information

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