

# NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 8 - July 2020

## The 8<sup>th</sup> Edition of the EHVA NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the eighth edition of the **European HIV Vaccine Alliance (EHVA)** newsletter. EHVA is an alliance of 39 partners in Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and North America. We work collaboratively to contribute to the development of safe and effective vaccines aimed at stopping HIV infections and AIDS. Through a multidisciplinary platform, EHVA facilitates the development and evaluation of novel prophylactic and therapeutic HIV vaccines, with the aim to select at least two of the most promising vaccine candidates for clinical development.

We work closely with research partners across several Sub-Saharan African countries and with the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) to ensure that the vaccine candidates are relevant for and can be evaluated in countries where vaccines are most needed. The work of EHVA is funded through a 5-year grant from the European Union's Horizon 2020 program and the Swiss Government. To learn more about EHVA visit our website: <http://www.ehv-a.eu>

[EHVA Website](http://www.ehv-a.eu)

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## EHVA NEWS & UPDATES

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### COVID-19 update

The EHVA team is tremendously grateful to consortium partners and the extended community of researchers and healthcare workers who are working around the clock to care for patients impacted by COVID-19, to gain new scientific insights to guide medical practice, and to develop new tools to help fight this pandemic. EHVA has responded first and foremost to prioritize patient care, with hospital centres associated with EHVA having been reserved almost exclusively for the management of patients suffering from COVID-19, notably around the peak of the pandemic. Plans to initiate the first EHVA therapeutic HIV vaccine trial have been impacted, as new safeguarding measures for volunteers had to be considered. This includes the need to avoid exposing volunteers to unnecessary risks associated with regular hospital visits, as well as how to safely conduct and mitigate any potential risks due to COVID in a trial with an analytic treatment interruption. The initiation of the EHVA trial was halted and discussions within and outside EHVA, with researchers and communities representing people living with HIV, are currently underway to determine the appropriate trial design and timing for initiation. To continue to inform and support people living with HIV on new insights and impacts relating to COVID-19, the

European AIDS Treatment Group, a community partner of EHVA, has initiated a dedicated newsletter aimed at sharing new evidence and updates from medical practice and research, as well as initiatives and virtual meetings to support the European HIV Community to respond to the crisis. Please check out EATG's [newsletter](#) and [this list](#) where you can find additional resources, information and support.



Stay tuned for more details on these advances in the upcoming newsletters and on the EHVA website.

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## LATEST GLOBAL HIV NEWS

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### Highlights from AIDS 2020

The virtual AIDS 2020 conference presented many cross-cutting findings from HIV **researchers, advocates, implementers, funders, and policymakers, including on progress in PrEP, HIV cure, and HIV vaccine R&D. The need to step up on HIV prevention, including** achieving a safe and globally effective HIV vaccine, was strongly heard in light of the risk that important gains made in the global AIDS response could be reversed by COVID-19.

A [satellite session on HIV vaccine research](#) explored the diverse and promising HIV vaccines candidates in various stages of development and the exciting results from vaccine efficacy and passive immunization trials expected in the coming years. This session also highlighted the need for effectively communicating the wealth and



breadth of ongoing research, and the critical importance of steadfast commitments of funders, researchers, product developers, and communities to find a vaccine.

Dr. Carl Dieffenbach shared some [key highlights](#) from AIDS 2020, including those of vaccine research. Of note this week, the [Imbokodo](#), or HVTN 705/HPX2008, vaccine trial reached an important milestone, reporting that all the experimental vaccines have been administered to the trial participants. Launched in 2017, Imbokodo is evaluating whether an experimental vaccine regimen is safe and able to prevent HIV among more than 2,600 HIV-negative women between the ages of 18 to 35 years from five countries in sub-Saharan Africa: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia. Women and girls in these countries are disproportionately affected by HIV in comparison to men of the same age group. The [Mosaico trial](#), the other late-stage, NIH-supported HIV vaccine trial underway among men who have sex with men and transgender people in the Americas and Europe was also discussed, with enrolment anticipated to start in the coming months.

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## UNAIDS Global Report Update

While millions of lives, particularly in sub-Saharan African, have been saved during the last five years, notably thanks to increased access to antiretroviral therapy, a UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic shows that even excluding the impact of COVID-19, the world will miss the 2020 targets for HIV and AIDS. Missed targets have resulted in 3.5 million more HIV infections and 820,000 more AIDS-related deaths since 2015 than if the world was on track to meet the targets. If the COVID-19 pandemic results in severe disruptions to HIV services, the response could be set back even further, by 10 years or more.



Deeply unequal success plagues the global HIV/AIDS response, notably in expanding access to ARVs, with 12.6 million of the 38 million people living with HIV without access to treatment. Concerningly, eastern Europe and central Asia have seen a staggering 72% rise in new HIV infections since 2010. The report highlights the urgent need for countries to double down and act with greater urgency to reach the millions of people left behind. “The progress made by many needs to be shared by all communities in all countries,” said Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, further noting that “stigma and discrimination and widespread inequalities are major barriers to ending AIDS. Countries need to listen to the evidence and step up to their human rights responsibilities.” UNAIDS is calling for increased investments for both HIV and COVID-19. A decrease in HIV funding by 7% from 2017, to US\$ 18.6 billion in 2019 means that funding is 30% short of the US\$ 26.2 billion needed to effectively respond to HIV in 2020.

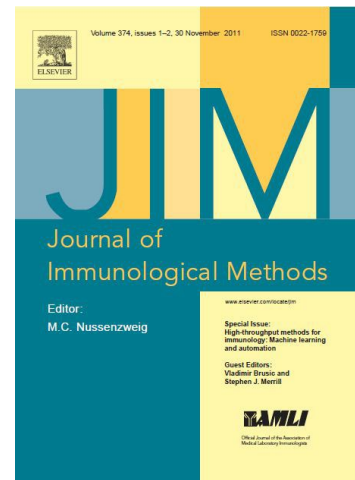
Read more on this [here](#).

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## HIV SCIENCE UPDATES

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A wealth of HIV vaccine-related and immunogenicity studies have been published in the last 12 months, continuing to deepen our understanding of what will be needed to develop an effective HIV vaccine. This year, [Lhomme et al.](#) developed a new modelling approach to enable more accurate interpretation of vaccine-induced response. Envelope protein-based vaccine candidates continue to be explored, with [Raman et al. \(2019\)](#) investigating an Env-based fusion antigen GP120C14K forming a hexamer-like structure which was shown to generate relevant anti-HV-1 immune responses in mouse model. Vector-based vaccine candidate continue to be investigated, such as an MVA vector expressing HIV-1 Env under the control of a potent vaccinia virus promoter, as utilized by [Pérez et al. \(2019\)](#). Further, VSV vectors are also under investigation, such as a recent study by [Perdiguero et al. \(2019\)](#) who employed a heterologous combination of VSV-GP and NYVAC vectors expressing HIV-1 trimeric gp145 Env to induce balanced B and T cell immune responses.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

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Three major conferences are scheduled in the next 12 months, all taking place in 2021. The conference formats are yet to be confirmed and will be determined by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The [4<sup>th</sup> HIVR4P](#), scheduled to take place in Cape Town, South Africa, on 17-21 January 2021, invites over 1,500 prevention researchers, advocates, implementers, funders, and policymakers to explore the many aspects of the biomedical research paradigm. Owing to the multiple overlaps between HIV prevention and COVID-19 research, HIVR4P will add a new abstract category, “COVID research: Applying lesson from HIV prevention to SARS CoV-2”. The final format of the conference will be announced in September 2020.



[CROI 2021](#) is slated to take place in March 2021 and has already been confirmed to include a virtual option to allow participation and networking for those who attend remotely. Confirmation on the final format is expected later this year. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID abstracts may also be submitted in the areas of basic science, clinical research, and epidemiology and prevention, among others.



Berlin is set to host the [11<sup>th</sup> IAS Conference on HIV Science](#) on 18-21 July 2021. It is expected to convene 6,000 scientists, clinicians, public health experts, and community leaders from over 140 countries. This will be the first time that Berlin has hosted the IAS Conference on HIV Science, having previously hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference in 1993.



If you have any feedback, questions or suggestions, please contact us! We look forward to hearing from you!