



News Announcement

The BRCCH and EDCTP partner on a new joint initiative

The two organisations are to support three multi-institutional, multi-country collaborations for research to mitigate COVID-19

Joint News Release by the Botnar Research Centre for Child Health (BRCCH) and the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP)

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The Collaboration Initiative:

Three collaborative projects are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting research to improve the surveillance and management of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact. The projects are a result of synergistic motivation by the [EDCTP](#) and the [BRCCH](#) to drive interdisciplinary efforts to combat global health challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, each organisation launched its own emergency mechanism to support research in COVID-19. The [EDCTP mechanism](#) focused on efforts in sub-Saharan Africa to manage and/or prevent the spread of COVID-19 and targeted four thematic research gaps: therapeutics, diagnostics, serological testing, and understanding of the natural history of infection. The BRCCH [Fast Track Call initiative](#) focused on research within diagnostics, immunology and medical interventions that will help mitigate medical and public health challenges in the short term, and to also contribute solutions that will lead to better preparedness and reduced global disease burden in the long term.

Realising the potential for collaborative efforts, the EDCTP and the BRCCH initiated dialogues between Principal Investigators (PIs) in their respective programmes. BRCCH-EDCTP consortia that wished to pursue a potential future collaboration were then invited to submit formal applications for external peer-review. The applications underwent evaluation in November 2020.

This joint BRCCH-EDCTP Collaboration Initiative will support three projects that range from immunology to diagnostics and health screening strategies for COVID-19 in low- and middle-income country (LMIC) settings. The projects, which are a complementary extension to the ongoing research activities being funded by BRCCH and EDCTP, will launch in early 2021 and will be supported with 900,000 CHF in total funding over a period of two years.

The Research:

Improving Access to SARS-CoV-2 Screening and Testing through Community-based COVID-19 Case-Finding and the Use of Digital Solutions in Lesotho and Zambia

In a collaboration between teams in Lesotho and Zambia, Dr [Klaus Reither](#) ([Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute](#), BRCCH grantee for the [Mistral](#) project) and Dr [Kwame Shanaube](#) ([Zambart](#), EDCTP grantee for the [TREATS-COVID](#) project) will investigate the effects of community-led interventions, rapid point-of-care diagnostics and swab self-collection in mitigating the COVID-19 epidemic in these African nations. The project will be carried out by 14-member consortium, including collaborators based at the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#), [SolidarMed](#), [FIND](#) and [KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation](#).

African-European Partnership for Development and Deployment of Rapid SARS-Cov-2 RNA and Antigen Detection Assays

Prof [Janos Vörös](#), Prof [Wendelin Stark](#) (both [ETH Zürich](#), BRCCH grantee for a [Rapid Diagnostic Test](#) project and for the [peakPCR](#) project, respectively) and Dr [Ahmed Abd El Wahed](#) ([University of Leipzig](#), EDCTP grantee for the [Suitcaselab project](#)) aim to advance novel and rapid COVID-19 diagnostic technologies tailored for poor-resource and emergency settings. Including partners in France and seven African countries, the 13-PI consortium will co-develop a rapid lateral flow diagnostic assay, a portable PCR device operated in a mobile suitcase lab for use in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The consortium includes collaborators from the [Institut Pasteur de Paris](#), [Institut Pasteur de Dakar](#), [Institute Pasteur de Madagascar](#), [KNUST](#), [University of Ibadan](#), [INRB](#), [University of Khartoum](#) and [Makerere University](#).

COVID-19 Antibody Repertoires in Infection and Vaccination

The project co-led by Prof [Andreas Moor](#) ([ETH Zürich](#), BRCCH grantee for a [B-Cell Immunity](#) project) and Dr [Julie Fox](#) ([King's College London](#), EDCTP grantee for the [COVAB project](#)) aims to investigate B cell-mediated immunity to SARS-CoV-2 infection in different health states. Specifically, the consortium will investigate and compare the effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection on the antibody repertoire in patients who contract the virus through natural means, in COVID-19 patients who also suffer from HIV and in vaccinated individuals. This consortium involves four researchers from institutions in the UK and Switzerland (in addition to the two named above, the [University Hospital Basel](#)).

Insight:

"The wide reach of this pandemic demonstrates, now more than ever, the value of cross-border cooperation. The BRCCH hopes these collaborative research projects will lead to synergistic results and tangible solutions that have global application." –BRCCH Directors Prof Georg Holländer and Prof Sai Reddy

"The protracted spread and evolution of COVID-19 has clearly unmasked the need for increased international collaboration with bidirectional sharing of knowledge and expertise. We expect this initiative to further strengthen research teams in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa (and elsewhere) to generate vital evidence and validate critical tools that will be essential to the tracking and control of COVID-19 across regions." – EDCTP Executive Director, Dr Michael Makanga

About the BRCCH:

The [Botnar Research Centre for Child Health \(BRCCH\)](#) was jointly opened in 2019 by the University of Basel and ETH Zurich and the additional partners University Children's Hospital Basel and Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute. Based in Basel, Switzerland, the Centre's mandate is to drive scientifically outstanding research and innovation in paediatrics. The BRCCH's vision is to advance global child and adolescent health by developing new translational and scalable solutions in paediatrics, especially for application in low- and middle-income countries. In addition to its focused research activities in paediatrics, the BRCCH launched for the first time a Fast Track Call to promote immediate and pragmatic approaches to mitigate COVID-19. The BRCCH currently supports 15 research consortia with members distributed across five continents. The BRCCH is generously supported by [Fondation Botnar](#).

More details on the [Fast Track Call](#) can be found on the [BRCCH website](#). Receive the latest BRCCH information by following us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Youtube](#) or subscribing to our [newsletter](#).

About EDCTP:

The mission of the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) is to reduce the social and economic burden of poverty-related diseases in developing countries, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, by accelerating the clinical development of effective, safe, accessible, suitable, and affordable medical interventions for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected infectious diseases, lower respiratory tract infections, diarrhoeal diseases and infectious diseases of epidemic potential, including Ebola and COVID-19 .

EDCTP is supported by the European Union under Horizon 2020, its Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. For more information, visit the [EDCTP website](#).

Contacts:

BRCCH: Project and Centre-related questions can be directed to general office (contact@brc.ch) and communication-related questions can be directed to Dr Maressa Takahashi (maressa.takahashi@brc.ch).

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