To the staff of the
Leibniz Institute for Natural Product Research and Infection Biology – Hans Knöll Institute

SARS-Cov-2 pandemic

Dear employees of the Leibniz-HKI,
dear colleagues

Our institute has now been in emergency operation for more than a week and is staffed on-site with only a few people who are indispensable for the maintenance of basic functions. By letting the majority of the staff work from home, we are complying with the Federal Government’s order to minimize direct contact between people as far as possible and to limit personal contact to family members. In our view, there is no alternative to this approach. Only by delaying the wave of infection we can avoid overloading our health care system, as we are unfortunately witnessing in some neighbouring countries at present.

Our full support goes to the colleagues of the Robert Koch Institute with its President Lothar Wieler, who are handling an enormous amount of work in this crisis and providing the scientific basis for political decision-makers to take measures to contain the pandemic. Together with numerous virologists and other scientists – many of them from Leibniz Institutes – they contribute decisively to communicating the current situation and new research results in a highly competent, factual and comprehensible manner for the entire public.

We are very pleased that many of you have volunteered to support the University Hospital Jena and other laboratories in carrying out tests. At present, the staffing level is still sufficient everywhere. As soon as we are informed of the need for additional personnel, we would be pleased to contact you at short notice and clarify all administrative questions. Many thanks also to all colleagues who have been involved in the production of disinfectants for internal use and the supply of ethanol to pharmacies. In this way, we can at least make a small contribution to eliminating supply bottlenecks.
We are all aware that we are now living through a time for which there is no precedent in the long history of the institute. The situation presents us with completely new challenges, many decisions have to be made quickly and implemented through unusual means. A high degree of improvisation is required. This requires each of us to act with a high degree of personal responsibility and to stay in close contact with our colleagues, especially in our own group. Only in this way can we maintain cohesion in the institute and disseminate information quickly.

We do not yet know when and how we will be able to resume our usual operations at the institute. Even after we return to our normal everyday life, we will have to discuss what conclusions we draw from the current situation and how we can better prepare for such situations in the future. The ideas and thoughts of all colleagues are needed here. Please continue to send your suggestions, questions and also criticism on how to deal with the pandemic to michael.ramm@leibniz-hki.de. This may concern the practical handling of the current situation, but also ideas for future research activities. We will not always be able to reply to your mails immediately, but would like to use them as a box of ideas that we can use later for the further development of our institute. Every contribution is therefore welcome.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff members for their calm and thoughtful actions and their intensive commitment to the interests of the institute over the past few weeks. We appreciate very much that you are pulling together with us in spite of many completely new challenges in the family, especially in the care of the children. Please continue to follow the events in Jena in the coming weeks and the information that we disseminate via email and the institute’s website. The bodies of the institute, especially the executive board and the department and group leaders are in close contact with each other and will be happy to answer your questions and suggestions.

We wish you and your family all the best, especially for the upcoming Easter holidays.

We look forward to seeing you soon and in good health.

Sincerely,

Axel Brakhage
Elke Jäcksch