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## Press Release



### **Influenza researcher awarded with Jürgen Wehland Prize Stephanie Bertram receives prize for junior scientists by the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research**

On 7 September, Dr. Stephanie Bertram, scientist at the German Primate Centre, was bestowed the Jürgen Wehland Prize. This honour acknowledges her outstanding research on influenza viruses and new therapies. The award ceremony took place during the third “North-Regio-Day on Infection”, briefly NoRDI III.

Every winter, when more people fall ill with flu, the causative agent, the influenza virus, is in the spotlight. Besides the seasonal influenza, pandemic influenza also emerges repeatedly: As influenza viruses change constantly, a virus may arise that only few people are immune against. “Current drugs target virus structures which change very fast during therapy. As a consequence, resistant viruses originate”, describes Stephanie Bertram the disadvantages of present therapies. Her research might now contribute to new influenza therapies circumventing the development of resistances. She and other scientists discovered that the process of infection not only requires virus molecules. Also some of the body’s own molecules, the so-called type III transmembrane serin proteases, are essential for effective infection. These molecular machines activate an important virus protein and make the influenza virus infectious. Bertram demonstrated that they occur in cells that are usually attacked by the viruses. She has thus found a component of the infection process that does not change as fast as the virus molecules. This opens up new possibilities in the therapy of diseases caused by viruses: Drugs targeting the body’s own, but dispensable molecules will not induce viruses to become resistant. The laureate feels encouraged by the appreciation: “To receive the Jürgen Wehland Prize is a big honour for me as a young scientist. It is also an acknowledgement for my research and motivates me to further study the fundamentals of virus-host cell interaction”, says Stephanie Bertram.

Bertram studied biology in Braunschweig and Hamburg. She focused on influenza viruses already during her PhD thesis at Hannover Medical School and continues to study them and their activation as a postdoc at the German Primate Centre in Göttingen.

The Jürgen Wehland Prize is awarded for the second time by the HZI and the Friends of the HZI. It acknowledges outstanding scientific achievements of young scientists. The prize, which is endowed with 5 000 Euros, is named after the former Scientific Director of the HZI, Prof. Jürgen Wehland, who very much supported young researchers.

The “North-Regio-Day on Infection” (NoRDI) was established in 2010 for scientists from universities and research institutes of Northern Germany to exchange new research results and recent technical developments. Today, the event also attracts interest beyond the region. It offers particularly young scientists the possibility to discuss their research with renowned infection researchers.

For further information, please visit:  
[www.helmholtz-hzi.de/nordi](http://www.helmholtz-hzi.de/nordi)

**The Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI):**

The Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research contributes to the achievement of the goals of the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres and to the successful implementation of the research strategy of the German Federal Government. The goal is to meet the challenges in infection research and make a contribution to public health with new strategies for the prevention and therapy of infectious diseases.

[www.helmholtz-hzi.de](http://www.helmholtz-hzi.de)