



Martin Ackermann appointed head of the Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force

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Topics: Organisation & Staff

The Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force has been mandated by various federal agencies to act as a national scientific advisory body in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current deputy head Martin Ackermann, head of Eawag's Environmental Microbiology Division and ETH Professor of Ecology of Microbial Systems, will take over as head of the task force from 1 August 2020.

Martin, you will take charge of the COVID-19 Science Task Force. What exactly is your role?

Together with the management team, i.e. the three vice-chairs Monika Buetler, Samia Hurst and Manual Battegay, I will lead the task force, coordinate activities and engage in dialogue with the authorities and other partners.

What are the responsibilities of the Science Task Force?

The function of the Task Force is to provide scientific advice to decision-makers at federal and cantonal levels on the subject of SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19. We accept enquiries from federal authorities - especially from the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH and the Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA - and cantonal authorities and provide scientific analyses. To this end, we also defined our own topics that we consider important and analyse them. We communicate the results to the authorities and discuss these with them. We also make them available to the public on our website "[Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force](#)".

How important is the voice of science in managing the pandemic?

A consensus has emerged in most countries that dialogue between governments and science is important in such crises and that science must have an independent voice. This has worked well in Switzerland - science has been directly involved in the relevant bodies, such as the Federal Council's Crisis Unit and now the FOPH Task Force. In addition, the scientific task force is also broad-based and offers a platform for dialogue between disciplines, from industry to immunology.

You have been deputy head of the Task Force since March. Now you are taking over the leadership. That surely takes up a lot of time. How has Eawag supported you on taking on these tasks?

Eawag and ETH Zurich have supported my involvement in the Task Force and have invested a lot of time in it. Eawag has allowed me largely to withdraw for a while from tasks within the institution. Frederik Hammes has taken over the management of the Environmental Microbiology Department for this period. He is doing an excellent job, so I can focus on the Task Force and work with my research group.

Can you use your Eawag know-how in your current role as head of the Task Force?

The work at Eawag is generally good preparation for the Task Force. As a department head I became familiar with inter- and trans-disciplinary work. This is now very valuable for working between disciplines and between science and stakeholders. I also discuss the scientific situation regarding Sars-CoV-2/COVID-19 from time to time with colleagues at Eawag. There is a lot of expert knowledge at our institute that I can draw on.

Cover picture: Ethan Oelman

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