

PRESS INFORMATION

Leipzig, February 11, 2011

EUROPE-WIDE PROJECT FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST WEST-NILE-FEVER

On February 8th, 2011 the EU collaborative research project "West Nile Integrated Shield Project" (WINGS), which aims to develop innovative strategies for the control of West Nile Virus, started with a kick-off meeting at the Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology in Leipzig.

In 2010 a severe outbreak of West Nile Fever in Greece left 34 dead and hundreds of persons were seriously affected. An increasing number of cases over the last years is also reported from Russia, Israel, Turkey and other mediterranean countries. Furthermore, West Nile Virus was recently identified in birds in Austria and England. The Virus primarily infects birds but can be transmitted to humans and other mammals by mosquito bites. Usually influenza-like symptoms are associated with this zoonotic infection, however, in some cases severe neurological complications are reported. Especially for older and immunocompromised people the virus can be dangerous. Due to the occurrence of transmitting mosquito species an emergence of the virus in Germany and other parts of Europe can not be excluded.

To date there is no vaccine which can protect humans against a West Nile Virus infection. In addition, an accurate diagnosis is complicated by the fact that existing methods often show cross reactivity with related viruses.

The European Union reacts to the need for the development of effective control measures by funding the collaborative research project "West Nile Integrated Shield Project" (WINGS) with three million euros. Dr. Sebastian Ulbert, coordinator and project manager at the Fraunhofer IZI, summarizes the goals of the project: "Our aim is to use novel and secure technologies for the development of an efficient vaccine and an improved detection system. These can be rapidly adjusted to emerging variants of the virus. Additionally we want to

Jens Augustin
Head of Press and Public Relations
Phone +49 341 35536-9320
Fax +49 341 35536-89320
jens.augustin@izi.fraunhofer.de

Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and
Immunology
Perlickstraße 1
04103 Leipzig
Germany
Phone +49 341 35536-1000
Fax +49 341 35536-9921
www.izi.fraunhofer.de

analyze the spread of West Nile Virus in Europe.” He will be coordinating the nine partner institutions from Europe and the USA to achieve these goals within the next three years.

On February 8, 2011, the project started with a kick-off meeting in Leipzig. All participating partners came together to discuss research strategies and work plans.

Further information:

<http://west-nile-shield-project.eu/>

Contact:

Dr. Sebastian Ulbert
Head of Vaccine Development Unit
Phone +49 341 35536-2106
Fax +49 341 35536-9930
sebastian.ulbert@izi.fraunhofer.de

Jens Augustin
Head of Press and Public Relations
Phone +49 341 35536-9320
Fax +49 341 35536-89320
jens.augustin@izi.fraunhofer.de

Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology
Perlickstraße 1
04103 Leipzig
Germany
Phone +49 341 35536-1000
Fax +49 341 35536-9921
www.izi.fraunhofer.de



The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft undertakes applied research of direct utility to private and public enterprise and of wide benefit to society. At present, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft maintains more than 80 research units in Germany, including 60 Fraunhofer Institutes. The majority of the more than 18,000 staff are qualified scientists and engineers, who work with an annual research budget of €1.65 billion. Of this sum, more than €1.40 billion is generated through contract research.

The Fraunhofer Institute for Cell Therapy and Immunology IZI is member of the Fraunhofer Group for Life Sciences. Its objective being to find solutions to specific problems at the interfaces between medicine, life sciences and engineering for partners active in medicine-related industries and businesses. The Institute's core competencies are to be found in regenerative medicine, or more precisely in cell-therapeutic methods of regenerating non-functioning tissue and organs through to the biological substitution with tissue cultivated in vitro (tissue engineering). In order for the living organism to accept the tissues without any difficulty, it is necessary to study cellular and immunological defense and control mechanisms and take these into account during process and product development. These core competencies entail a multiplicity of tasks to be solved by new products and processes. The Institute works especially closely with hospital institutions, performing quality tests and clinical studies on their behalf. Additionally it also provides assistance in obtaining manufacturing licenses and certifications.

**Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft
Press and Public Relations**

Hansastraße 27c
80686 München
Germany
Phone +49 89 1205-1301
Fax +49 89 1205-7513
fraunhofer.presse@zv.fraunhofer.de