

HKIAS Distinguished Lecture

COVID-19 Vaccination - A One Health No-Brainer

Professor Nikolaus Osterrieder

Dean, Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences and
Chair Professor of Virology and One Health, Department of Infectious
Diseases and Public Health, City University of Hong Kong

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Abstract

COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, first in the United Kingdom and the United States, started almost exactly 6 months ago, followed shortly thereafter by many other nations. Hong Kong introduced a vaccination programme in February 2021. Although first restricted to certain demographics, vaccination has been open for weeks to everybody 16 years and older. However, vaccine hesitancy is relatively widespread. We will make the case that it is of paramount importance for Hong Kong, the region and the world to reduce vaccine hesitancy – primarily by providing incentives and benefits to vaccinees. Only herd immunity will ultimately reduce the massive burden to the society and the economy because SARS-CoV-2 will not go away: the virus will become endemic. That means that we will have to live with it by mitigating its potentially devastating effects, very similar to how we live with other infectious diseases, e.g., measles, influenza, chickenpox etc. Given the remarkable efficacy and safety of licensed COVID-19 vaccines, vaccination is the only reasonable and responsible pathway to herd immunity, while the remaining alternative, i.e. natural infection, cannot be an option.

Biography

Klaus is currently Dean of the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences at City University. He previously served as Professor of Virology and Chair at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany (2007 – 2020), and Adjunct Professor of Virology at Cornell University (2007 – present). After finishing his veterinary degree in 1990, Klaus entered the field of virology, initially working with poxviruses. After his dissertation in 1993, his scientific focus switched to herpesviruses, specifically to work with equine herpesvirus type 1 (EHV-1). He completed his “Habilitation” in 1997. In the same year, Klaus started to work as a group leader at the Friedrich-Loeffler-Institute in Insel Riems, and began his investigations of an oncogenic herpesvirus, Marek’s disease virus (MDV) of chickens. He has continued to work on these two herpesviruses during his time on the faculty at Cornell and in Berlin. More recently his research extended into influenza and coronaviruses (SARS- and MERS-CoV, infectious bronchitis virus of chickens, and canine coronaviruses).

Klaus is an avid advocate of using natural virus-host systems, because of their unique model character and because they allow harnessing the strength of collaboration with clinicians and researchers from other disciplines. Using infectious clones and reverse genetics, his laboratory mechanistically studies viral pathogenesis and utilizes this knowledge for engineering of modified live virus vaccines. His research has been funded continuously since 1994 by public funding agencies including the European Union, the NIH, the USDA, the DFG and other public sources. He has also secured support for his work from pharmaceutical companies and philanthropists. Klaus has more than 230 scientific publications and his h-index currently stands at 51. He is editor and member of the editorial board of a number of journals, and his honors include membership in the Academy of Sciences of Thuringia since 2014, the Young Investigator Award of the Academy for Animal Health (2002) and the WVPA-Boehringer Ingelheim Vaccine Innovation Award (2017).



All are welcome

Enquiries:

Tel: 3442 6611

Email: hkias@cityu.edu.hk