



NETWORK **Biological Risk**

Activity report 2024

HIGHLIGHTS 2024

- **Expansion of the Network Biological Risk:** The network has expanded significantly in the direction of a national platform and has grown from the original 13 member institutions and 2 collaborations to 22 member institutions and 4 collaborations (p. 3).
- **Strategy development:** At a workshop, the vision, mission and guiding principles of the of the network were jointly developed. Two newly established working groups have begun to explore the key topics of 'Detection and 'Prevention' (p. 4).
- **Annual Symposium:** The symposium 'Detecting Biological Risks' on 29 November 2024 met with great interest with around 80 participants and facilitated stimulating discussions (p. 5).

1. Background and objectives

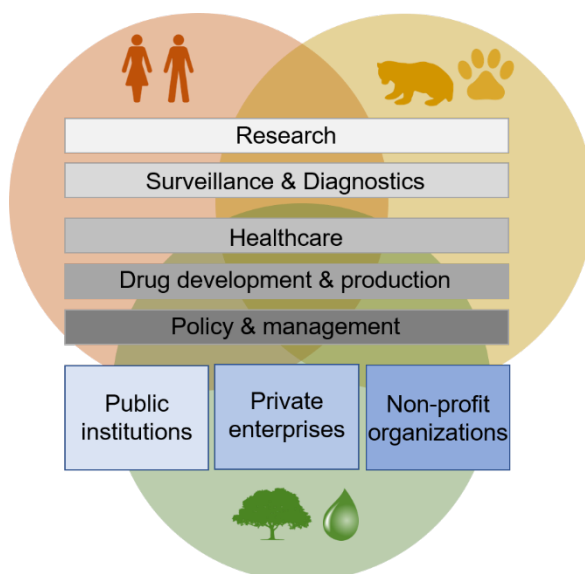
The Network Biological Risk was founded as an association at the beginning of 2023 and focuses on the prevention, detection and efficient management of biological risks. The association promotes the comprehensive networking of institutions and stakeholders with expertise and infrastructure in this area and bundles them into a national platform with an international reach. It pursues a One Health approach and thus combines the areas of human, veterinary and environmental health. This includes disciplines such as research, healthcare for humans and animals, drug development and production, diagnostics and surveillance as well as biosafety and biosecurity. The network extends to public institutions such as universities and authorities, private companies and non-profit organisations such as specialist bodies and think tanks (see illustration).

Through networking, the participating institutions get to know each other better, exchange knowledge and gain public visibility. Existing processes are to be strengthened, synergies utilised and gaps identified and closed through research and innovation. Together, the aim is to provide consolidated expertise and scientific evidence as a basis for decision by politicians, authorities and society.

In 2023, the association started with 13 founding members and two cooperation partners, mainly from the Bern region. The executive board and office were established and the network introduced itself to the public with a symposium.

The aim for 2024 was to anchor the network even more firmly at regional level, expand it into a

national platform and raise its profile among the key players and institutions. In addition, the strategies for positioning the network were to be concretised and initial thematic priorities were to be further developed.



The Network Biological Risk pursues a 'One Health' approach and connects disciplines and sectors in the areas of human, animal and environmental health.

2. Activities in 2024

2.1. Establishment and expansion of the network

In 2024, the network put substantial effort into expanding its reach. When it was founded, the network comprised 13 members and two cooperations. By the end of 2024, the network had increased its membership to 22 institutions (+9) and 4 cooperations (+2). The regional network in the Bern area was further strengthened and important steps were taken towards a national platform.

The network comprised the following members at the end of 2024:

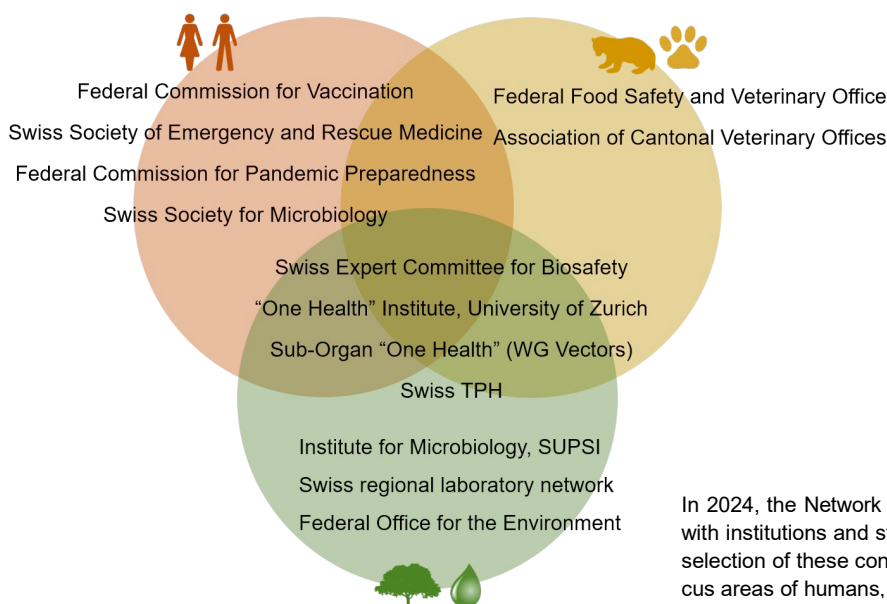
- Abbott AG
- Veterinary Office Canton Bern
- Bavarian Nordic Berna GmbH
- Berna Biotech Pharma
- CSL Behring AG
- Dr. E. Graeb AG
- Dr. Risch AG
- Fondation ADMED
- Geneva Center for Emerging Viral Diseases
- Swiss Veterinary Society
- Interregional Blood Donation SRK AG
- Cantonal Medical Service Bern
- MCL Medizinische Laboratorien AG
- Medics Labor AG
- Pour Demain
- Roche Diagnostics (Schweiz) AG
- Swiss Society for Infectious Diseases
- Swiss Biosafety Network (SBNet)
- sitem-insel AG

- University of Bern with, in particular, the Institute for Infectious Diseases (ifik), the Department of Clinical Research (DCR), the Multidisciplinary Center for Infectious Diseases (MCID), the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) RNA & Disease and the Veterinary Public Health Institute (VPHI)
- Department of Emergency Medicine, Inselspital Bern
- University Hospital for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy Bern

In addition, the network formalized collaborations with the following federal institutions:

- Communicable Diseases Division, Federal Office of Public Health
- Competence Center for Supply Security, Federal Office of Public Health
- Institute for Virology and Immunology (IVI)
- Spiez Laboratory

The network has contacted over a dozen other institutions and is currently exploring the possibility of collaboration or membership (see illustration for a selection).



In 2024, the Network Biological Risk held around 30 discussions with institutions and stakeholders in the field of biological risks. A selection of these contacts is shown according to the different focus areas of humans, animals and the environment.

2.2. Strategy development and thematic priorities

In 2024, the network further developed its strategic foundations together with the member institutions and cooperation partners. To this end, two working groups were founded in spring 2024, one on the topic of "Detection" and one on the topic of "Prevention". Both groups are each led by a member of the board and are each made up of 8-10 experts. At one kick-off meeting each and the subsequent written exchange, an initial outline was drawn up and priorities were set. The two working groups are in close contact with each other in order to coordinate their work.

The 'Detection' working group is primarily concerned with diagnostics, but also includes questions of early detection and surveillance. The following procedure has been outlined:

- prioritisation of pathogens and scenarios, which are or could become relevant for Switzerland
- create an overview of the existing processes, competences and capacities with regard to detection and, in particular, diagnostics
- identification of knowledge and supply gaps, promotion of research and innovation
- support for coordination across disciplines and sectors

The 'Prevention' working group prioritises vaccines. It would like to address the following topics, among others:

- optimal planning and utilisation of the existing infrastructure outside and during a crisis
- improving translation from basic research to clinical research to development and production
- exploring the potential of new technologies and possible synergies between human and veterinary vaccines

The 'Prevention' working group is also looking into drug therapies (antibiotic and antiviral drugs, monoclonal antibodies). Non-pharmaceutical prevention, such as protecting employee health in a crisis, is also one of the topics covered by this working group.

In order to better understand the expectations regarding the network and its future activities, the office conducted a representative survey with the majority of the founding members and cooperation partners in the form of a total of 16 individual interviews. On the basis of this information, a half-day strategy workshop was held on 28 October with expert support. The aim was to develop a vision, a mission and guiding principles for the future of the network. The workshop was attended by 18 people from the board, the working groups, the member institutions and the cooperation partners. In groups and in plenary sessions, they worked together to sharpen and concretise the direction and positioning of the association. The results include the newly chosen name 'Swiss Biorisk Alliance' and the vision 'connect to protect' (see box). The workshop also offered the opportunity to get to know each other better within the network and to exchange ideas.

Results of the strategy workshop



**Swiss Biorisk
Alliance** connect
to protect

Vision: connect to protect

Mission: We connect key players and bring together the competences needed to protect society from biological risks from communicable diseases. We take a comprehensive 'One Health' approach and are engaged in the areas of prevention, detection and management.

We are your single point of contact to prepare together for biological risks.

2.3. Exchange of expertise

Symposium

On 29 November, the network held its annual half-day symposium on 'Detecting Biological Risk' with six specialist presentations (see programme in the box).

With around 80 participants, the symposium met with great interest, as in the previous year, and led to lively discussions. In addition to an exchange of expertise, the symposium also served as a networking opportunity within and outside the association.

Symposium «Detecting Biological Risk» – PROGRAMME

29. November 2024, 13–16:30 h, sitem-insel, Bern

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 13.00 | Welcome & News from the Network Biological Risk
Stephen Leib & Franziska Oeschger, Network Biological Risk |
| 13.15 | Introducing the Swissmedic Innovation Office
Julia Djonova, Swissmedic |
| 13.30 | Infectious disease surveillance: systems, networks and programs
Annora Mack, Federal Office for Public Health |
| 14.00 | Abbott Pandemic Defense Coalition
Carsten Bünning, Abbott GmbH |
| 14.30 | <i>Break</i> |
| 15.00 | Diagnostics & Surveillance in the Context of Blood Donation
Christoph Niederhauser, Interregionale Blutspende SRK |
| 15.30 | Diagnostics & Surveillance of Tick-borne Diseases
Rahel Ackermann, Fondation ADMED |
| 16.00 | Surveillance of Tiger Mosquitoes and Aedes-borne Diseases
Damiana Ravasi, SUPSI |
| 16.30 | <i>Networking-Apéro</i> |



The symposium 'Detecting Biological Risk' at the end of November 2024 with 6 specialist presentations and the opportunity to exchange ideas met with lively interest among the around 80 participants.

Webinar

On 10 September 2024, the network held an internal webinar with Prof Kristina Adorjan, Director of the University Clinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at UPD, on the topic of 'Monitoring and protecting the mental health of employees in a crisis' to initiate an exchange on this topic.

Among other things, Prof Adorjan gave an overview of an app-based tool that she developed and scientifically investigated in collaboration with other researchers and specialists during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the webinar, it was decided to further explore the potential of the app-based tool within the network in a scientific pilot project.

2.4 Publicity and Communication

Web presence

At the end of January 2024, a first version of the website of the network was published online at <https://biorisknet.ch/en>. It provides a brief overview of the network's objectives and organisation. Since November 2024, the website has been redesigned and professionalised in collaboration with a local web agency. This also includes the development of a new visual identity together with the new name 'Swiss Biorisk Alliance' (see illustration for a preview of the new website).

The presence on LinkedIn was significantly increased in 2024 through regular posts, with the number of followers doubling to 370 (as at mid-December 2024). Preparations are also underway for short videos that will be published on the website and LinkedIn to draw attention to the network and its members and topics.

External events

The network was present at several scientific events with a lecture or a poster: at the Swiss RNA Therapeutics Summit (25 January 2024), the MCID Annual Meeting (4 July 2024), the Swiss Biosafety Meeting (22/23 August 2024), the CAS Medicines and Medical Devices in Emergency and Disaster (6 September 2024) and the continuing education day of the Office of Veterinary Affairs of the Canton of Bern (5 December 2024). The network was also presented in the MCID's February newsletter.



First draft for the new website of the Swiss Biorisk Alliance (Image: Terminal 8)

3. Outlook 2025

In the coming year, the position of the network will be further strengthened and the expansion towards a functional and efficient national platform will be driven forward. The aim is to integrate the institutions and stakeholders in Switzerland that are relevant to the prevention, detection and management of biological risks from infectious diseases into the network in the form of membership or formalised cooperation.

Based on the vision, mission and guiding principles developed in 2024, the two working groups will further specify the focal points of 'detection' and 'prevention'. Scenarios will be used to explore synergies between the institutions involved in the network and identify gaps. The first joint services will then be defined in dialogue with the stakeholder groups. A pilot project to monitor and promote the mental health of employees is already in preparation as one approach in the focus area of 'prevention' and will be further developed in 2025.

Another important topic will be the continued financing of the network after the start-up phase from 2027 and its sustainable anchoring in the Swiss research and innovation landscape. Initial

considerations and discussions to prepare for this second phase have already been made. The board will continue to pursue these intensively next year in dialogue with the funding institutions and the members and cooperation partners and with the involvement of additional experts.

The professional exchange within the network and with other stakeholders and experts will continue to be cultivated and strengthened. The already well-established annual symposium will be held again in early winter 2025 on one of the network's key topics. In addition, further event formats such as webinars or workshops are being considered.

Finally, it is planned to strengthen the network's communication with its target groups in 2025. A first milestone will be the announcement of the new name and the publication of the professionalised website in spring 2025. In addition, short videos will be produced and distributed at regular intervals to draw the attention of the target groups to the network and initiate discussion and reflection on the network's priority topics.

4. Finances

4.1. Annual financial statement 2024

ASSETS (31.12.2024)	CHF	LIABILITIES (31.12.2024)	CHF
Bank BEKB	38'663.66	Deferrals	2'000.00
Accruals	32'473.80	Profit brought forward	69'635.05
		Annual loss	-497.59
TOTAL ASSETS	71'173.46	TOTAL LIABILITIES	71'137.46

EXPENSE	CHF	REVENUE	CHF
Management office		Funding Canton of Bern	125'000.00
Salary expenses managing director (60%) incl. VAT	101'832.10	Membership fees (20 x 500 CHF)	10'000.00
Office operations (office materials, travel expenses)	789.52	Interest yield	16.88
Auditor costs	1'729.60		
Board			
Meetings & expenditures board	145.70		
Events			
Symposium (catering, expenditures speakers)	2'658.70		
Strategy workshop (moderator, room rental, catering)	7'112.50		
Communication			
Website (development, hosting)	13'527.45		
Illustration, informational material	3'688.90		
Project Whitepaper & Short videos			
Short videos	4'030.00		
TOTAL EXPENSE	135'541.47	TOTAL REVENUE	135'016.88
Result			-497.59

In 2024, the association's income and expenditure were almost balanced, with a small deficit of around CHF 500. The largest items of expenditure were the salary of the managing director, the strategy workshop and the development of the new website.

The association still has financial resources of around CHF 70'000 from 2023, which, after consultation with the Canton of Bern, are earmarked for the project 'whitepaper & short videos' and are to be used for this purpose in 2025 (see outlook on p. 7).

The annual financial statement was audited by the auditors Huwiler Revisionen AG and found to be correct.

4.2. In-Kind-Contributions 2024

ACTIVITY	CHF
Management office	
Expert support management office by Ifik	9'691.00
Administrative and technical support (5%) by Ifik	4'627.00
Overhead (10% of salaries) by Ifik	9'420.00
Provision of office space by Ifik	3'608.00
Board	
Workload by president & board members	26'233.00
Strategieentwicklung	
Workload survey / preparatory interviews by members and cooperation partners	14'465.00
Participation strategy workshop by members and cooperation partners	15'086.00
Workload lead and members of working groups	29'702.00
Events	
Workload speakers and participants symposium and webinar	18'858.00
Provision of event/meeting space by sitem-insel	1'680.00
TOTAL IN-KIND-CONTRIBUTIONS	133'370.00

In 2024, the association's member institutions and cooperation partners made in-kind contributions, i.e. contributions without cash flow, totalling CHF 133'370. These primarily include the participation of experts from the respective institutions in working groups, on the board and at the association's events such as the strategy workshop and the symposium.

Overall, the experts involved contributed around 550 hours of work to the network. In addition, the association's office was provided with expert, administrative and technical support as well as office and event space.

NETWORK Biological Risk

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