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Human Microbiome Project expands with new funding

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The Human Microbiome Project is expanding its scope thanks to \$42 million in additional funding from the National Institutes of Health.



The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has awarded \$42 million in additional funding to expand the scope of eight demonstration projects designed to study the connection between the human microbiome and human disease. The grants are part of the [Human Microbiome Project \(HMP\)](#), a \$157 million initiative that provides funding to research groups that study the human microbiome to increase understanding and hypothesize therapies for human disease.

In 2009, 15 groups were given funding to develop microbiome research protocols in one of seven body sites: the digestive tract, the mouth, the skin, the nose, the vagina, the blood, and the male urethra. The eight groups that received renewed funding were able to provide preliminary evidence of a connection between the human microbiome and human disease, and future research is supported for another one to three years.

“Humans are mostly microbes,” said Gregory A. Buck, a researcher at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA, whose work has received additional funding, “so you have to look at us as a commensal organism or maybe even a population, rather than as an individual organism.”

[Buck's research team](#) received an additional \$6.9 million for the next three years to continue studying the vaginal microbiome, bacterial vaginosis, and sexually transmitted diseases. His team has begun to see connections between the vaginal microbiome and women's health, in particular through a metagenomics approach that examines the genetics of the bacteria, the genetics of the woman, and the evolution that is happening between the two. “We're getting some new information that will tell us how the microbiota impacts women's vaginal health,” said Buck. “This has been an incredible team effort and I'm impressed at how the team has put their shoulders to the same wheel and tried to move it in the same direction.”

[Zhiheng Pei's research group](#) at the New York University School of Medicine received \$5.2 million for the next three years to continue examining the mouth and digestive tract microbiota, gastric esophageal reflux disease (GERD), and esophageal adenocarcinoma. “[The microbiome] is not like traditional bacteria, like pathogens that produce toxins; bacteria in the microbiome don't have those kinds of tools to produce a sharp effect on human health. Our goal is to define the change in population abundance or bacterial species presence that leads to human disease.”

The HMP has four stated goals, ranging from determining if humans share a core microbiome to addressing the ethical, legal, and social implications raised by human microbiome research. “The goal is to establish correlation, to see what type of bacterial population is associated with human health



A stated mission of the Human Microbiome Project is to generate resources to enable comprehensive characterization of the human microbiota and analyze its role in human health and disease. Source: National Institutes of Health.

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and what type with disease,” said Pei.

Keywords: Human Microbiome Project HMP microbiome NIH NIH Common Fund GERD bacterial vaginosis

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