



## PRESS RELEASE: INTERNATIONAL MICROORGANISM DAY – 17 SEPTEMBER 2020

**17 September is International Microorganism Day, an opportunity to promote the diversity and variety of microorganisms and a way to encourage everyone to recognize and celebrate the many ways microscopic organisms are important in human health, culture and, throughout our daily lives.**

International Microorganism Day is an annual celebration of microbiology and this year we are making an even greater effort to promote the positive contributions of microorganisms in our daily lives given the negative stories associated with viruses in the news.

This year we have focused our efforts on online activities:

- **We are running a 24hour live stream of talks and discussions across the day. [Check out the provisional programme here.](#)**
- **[Follow the IMD blog series for interesting perspectives on microorganisms](#)**
- **[We have published two Education Packs for teachers and students to learn about microorganisms](#)**
- **We are running the #MicrobeArt2020 Competition. [See details on how to enter here.](#)**

Microorganisms and their activities have widespread, significant, and generally positive effects on the health and well-being of human beings and the entire surface of the planet and its atmosphere. Microbes, invisible to the human eye, are the hidden power in many everyday activities, serving to ferment foods and treat sewage, to produce fuel, enzymes, and other bioactive compounds and are a vital component of fertile soil. In the human body, microorganisms make up the human microbiota, including the essential gut flora. The pathogens responsible for many infectious diseases are also microbes and as such are the target of disease prevention and control measures.

The scientific study of microorganisms began with their observation under the microscope in the 1670s by Antonie van Leeuwenhoek. 17 of September was chosen to acknowledge the date in 1683 van Leeuwenhoek - a Dutch merchant with no formal education - sent a letter to the Royal Society in London, reporting the first description of a single-celled organism. In the 1850s, Louis Pasteur found that microorganisms caused food spoilage and Robert Koch in the 1880s discovered that microorganisms caused the diseases tuberculosis, cholera, and anthrax.

Microorganisms include all unicellular organisms and so are extremely diverse. They live in almost every habitat from the poles to the equator, deserts, geysers, rocks, and the deep sea. Some are adapted to



extremes such as very hot or very cold conditions, others to high pressure, and a few to high radiation environments. There is evidence that 3.45-billion-year-old Australian rocks once contained microorganisms, the earliest direct evidence of life on Earth.

However, unlike other subjects having a significant impact upon humankind, knowledge of these vital microbial activities, how they impact our lives, and how they may be harnessed for the benefit of humankind – *microbiology literacy* – is low among the public and decision makers. An understanding of key microbial activities is essential in society for informed personal decisions, as well as for policy development in government and business.

We hope this can be addressed by microbiologists, microbiological learned societies, microbiology-literate professionals and all microbe lovers around their world sharing their passion and knowledge of microbes and their value to all humankind on 17 September. Microbiologists from across the globe will be contributing to International Microorganism Day, developing appealing teaching materials, introducing research in an engaging way, sharing interesting facts and stories about microorganisms and their impact. We hope to demonstrate to educators, policy makers, business leaders and relevant governmental and non-governmental agencies the significance of microorganism and the need for education support increased understanding of their importance and significance and through this, microbiology literacy in society will become reality.

### **About International Microorganism Day**

International Microorganism Day is an initiative launched by the Portuguese Society of Microbiology in 2017 to combine science dissemination activities. Since that initial edition, celebrations have been held in Portugal and internationally under a cohesive identity through logos and mascots produced in Portugal. It has been supported by FEMS to increase the size and impact of these events and especially in 2020, to present the positive aspects of microorganisms.

### **About FEMS**

The Federation of European Microbiological Societies (FEMS) is a not-for-profit organization, established in 1974 to advance microbiology for the benefit of society in the areas of health, energy, food, materials, and the environment. We are committed to supporting microbiologists do their work; promoting the best in microbiology research and knowledge to the world and, bringing microbiologists together to share that knowledge. We reinvest our revenues into supporting microbiologists throughout their career, publishing and promoting scientific research in our journals and organizing events to bring scientists together.

### **Information for Editors**

A full media pack including logos, images and the International Microorganism Day mascots is here: <https://www.internationalmicroorganismday.org/media-resources>

Social media hashtags for the event are **#InternationalMicroorganismDay** **#WhyMicroMatters** and **#MicrobiologyIsEverywhere**



The story of why 17 September was chosen as IMD and the discovery of microbes by Antonie van Leeuwenhoek is here: <https://fems-microbiology.org/femsmicroblog-17-september-is-international-microorganism-day-but-why-17-september/>

All media enquiries should be sent to Joe Shuttleworth (FEMS Science Communications Officer) [joseph.shuttleworth@fems-microbiology.org](mailto:joseph.shuttleworth@fems-microbiology.org)

