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FOR IMMUNOLOGY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LJI's Erica Ollmann Saphire Receives \$100,000 Fast Grant for COVID-19 Research

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LA JOLLA—San Diego researcher [Erica Ollmann Saphire, Ph.D.](#), a professor at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology (LJI), has received \$100,000 through the Emergent Ventures [Fast Grants](#) program to fuel research into how antibody therapeutics can treat COVID-19.

Antibody therapeutics will likely be a critical tool for protecting frontline healthcare workers and those at most risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection. Antibody-based immunotherapies could also treat those who have already been infected, reducing the severity of the disease and improving survival.

Saphire will use the new funds to purchase incubators to grow vaccine antigens and antibodies from human cells. This equipment will join a new LJI Board-funded arsenal of incubators to produce molecules needed for structural biology and by complementary efforts of the institute's larger [COVID-19 Taskforce](#), which includes Shane Crotty, Ph.D., Alessandro Sette, Dr. Biol. Sci, Bjoern Peters, Ph.D., Sujan Shresta, Ph.D., and Pandurangan Vijayanand, M.D. Ph.D.



Dr. Erica Ollmann Saphire

“This is a permanent advance in infrastructure,” says Saphire. “With both sets of instruments, LJI is equipped for high-level production for this pandemic and all the other diseases we study.”

The funding will also support the needs of the Coronavirus Immunotherapy Consortium ([CoVIC](#)), launched by the Bill & Melinda Gates COVID-19 Therapeutic Accelerator Platform. Sapphire leads the CoVIC, which includes experts from labs around the world. The consortium aims to find the most potent antibodies against COVID-19—work that could guide the development of vaccines against the current outbreak and protect against future pandemics.

Fast Grants is a new funding mechanism administered by Emergent Ventures, a project at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. The program is designed to move at a record pace, with a scientific panel on hand to help make funding decisions within 48 hours of application. The initial call for applications was met with 4,000 requests. Fewer than 1 percent of applications were funded.

“The speaks to the tremendous unmet need for science funding, and in particular rapid funding in an emergency,” says Sapphire. “We need to be able to move faster and make new findings, therapies and vaccines available nearly immediately.”

The initial \$12 million in grants went to 97 applicants and included contributions from John Collison, Patrick Collison, the Crankstart Foundation, Kim and Scott Farquhar, Paul Graham, Reid Hoffman, Fiona McKean and Tobias Lütke, Yuri and Julia Milner, Elon Musk, and Chris and Crystal Sacca.

Sapphire is so far the only investigator in Southern California to receive a Fast Grant.

[Learn more about LJ’s COVID-19 research](#)

[View Sapphire’s “Live from the Laboratory” webinar](#)

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About La Jolla Institute for Immunology

The La Jolla Institute for Immunology is dedicated to understanding the intricacies and power of the immune system so that we may apply that knowledge to promote human health and prevent a wide range of diseases. Since its founding in 1988 as an independent, nonprofit research organization, the Institute has made numerous advances leading toward its goal: *life without disease*.