

## 4 highlights from the world's largest MS research conference



### Passionate MS professionals shared MS research breakthroughs

Nearly 8,000 MS researchers, clinicians and scientists gathered online for MS Virtual 2020, the world's largest MS research conference organized by the Americas and European Committee for Treatment and Research in MS (ACTRIMS and ECTRIMS), from Sept. 11-13 with a special COVID-19 session convening Sept. 26.

Passionate MS professionals shared many incredible breakthroughs, and here are 4 research highlights you should know.

#### 1) Updates on coronavirus and MS

Initial findings of the COVID-19 & MS Global Data Sharing Initiative echo what's seen in the general population — **people who are older and those with higher levels of disability are more likely to experience a more severe course of COVID-19.** As well, findings show no evidence that being on a disease-modifying therapy increased the risk of dying from COVID-19 (however, in this study Rituxan or Ocrevus may have led to more severe cases of COVID-19, but other studies have not found this association).

At present, it is recommended people with MS consult their health care provider with any concerns regarding MS treatment and outcomes of COVID-19 infection.

#### 2) More research on progressive MS

- **Masitinib**, a new approach to treating primary progressive MS and “non-active” secondary progressive MS, showed promising results in a phase 3 clinical trial. Masitinib targets cells in the innate immune system —which is believed to be the driving force of damage within the brain and spinal cord in progressive phases of MS — to limit inflammatory processes that destroy myelin.
- Researchers shared the initial data of a phase 1 study of the immune therapy **ATA188**. This therapy **targets immune cells infected with the Epstein-Barr virus**, which may be involved in triggering MS. The small clinical trial measured benefits of this therapy in people with progressive MS. This is a significant breakthrough, as further research into this therapy could help improve or slow the worsening of disability.



Virtual landing page of the conference

### 3) Understanding MS prevalence

- The MS International Federation shared the newly updated Atlas of MS, an extensive study of MS prevalence. It revealed that there are now **2.8 million people worldwide who have MS**; as well, the number of people living with MS has increased in every world region since 2013. Highlights include: the average age of diagnosis is 32 years old (with variations between countries ranging from 20 to 50 years old), and an increase in the prevalence of pediatric MS thanks to a better understanding of how MS affects those under 18.
- Researchers shared the importance of understanding how **MS impacts different racial populations**. Presentations emphasized differences in how MS affects various

races and ethnicities, and the underrepresentation of racial minorities in clinical trials.

#### **4) Getting closer to a world free of MS**

**MS prodrome** is the phase where a symptom or a set of symptoms indicate the onset of MS before diagnostically specific symptoms develop. Researchers reviewed what has been reported about the MS prodrome and analyzed medical records from 14,000 people living with MS against a healthy control group. They found that 5 years before the first neurologic event among those eventually diagnosed with MS, increases in medical care were noted, and in the year leading up to the first symptom, there was a(n):

- 75% increase in the rate of hospitalization
- 88% increase in the use of physician services
- 49% increase in prescription medications
- 50% increase in mental health services

Other studies showed there can be increased rates of fibromyalgia, sleep disturbances, referrals to dermatologists, migraines, gastrointestinal complaints, pain, fatigue and more when compared to the control group.

Understanding MS prodrome could help researchers stop MS at its earliest stages or treat the disease before the onset of clinical signs of the disease.

#### **Web exclusive**

For a full update on MS Virtual 2020, visit the [Society News page](#).