



# BERGENBIO PRESENTS PRECLINICAL COVID-19 DATA AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON RETROVIRUSES AND OPPORTUNISTIC INFECTIONS (CROI 2021)

**Bergen, Norway, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2021**– BerGenBio ASA (OSE:BGBIO), a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company developing novel, selective AXL kinase inhibitors for severe unmet medical need, today delivered a Science Spotlight oral presentation on preclinical COVID-19 data at the annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI), taking place from 6-10 March 2021.

The presentation was led by BerGenBio's scientific collaborator, Professor Wendy Maury, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Iowa (Iowa City, USA), who presented preclinical data. The data presented included *in-vitro* and *in-vivo* models of SARS-CoV-2 infection that causes COVID-19, and the effect of bemcentinib treatment in these models.

The effect of bemcentinib was found to prevent infection by SARS-CoV-2, as assessed by viral transcripts in RNAseq studies, as well as reduce the viral load by qRT-PCR analysis in human lung epithelial, A549-hACE2 and Vero E6 cell-line models. Bemcentinib was reported to reduce virus internalization, without affecting virus binding, by limiting the endosomal entry route to the host cells. *In vivo*, bemcentinib was found to significantly reduce murine-hepatitis-virus liver titers, which is a measure of virus load, and significantly enhanced signatures of type I IFN response.

In conclusion, the effect of bemcentinib demonstrated potent antiviral effects in preclinical SARS-CoV-2 and other coronavirus models. Further, the findings support BerGenBio's ongoing Phase II trial evaluating bemcentinib for the treatment of hospitalised COVID-19 patients in South Africa and India.

The presentation will be made available on BerGenBio's website under 'Scientific Presentations 2021': <https://www.bergenbio.com/videos/Wendy-CROI-Talk-5min.mp4>

Details of the presentation are as follows:

**Title:** Targeting the receptor AXL by bemcentinib prevents SARS-CoV-2 infection

**Author:** Professor Wendy Maury, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Iowa (Iowa City, USA)

**-Ends-**

## About AXL

AXL kinase is a cell membrane receptor and an essential mediator of the biological mechanisms underlying life-threatening diseases.

In COVID-19, AXL has two synergistic mechanisms of action, it acts a co-receptor to ACE2, to which the spike protein of the Sars-Cov-2 virus attaches and enters the host cell, and AXL expression is upregulated that leads to suppression of the Type 1 Interferon immune response by host cells and in their environment. Research data confirms bemcentinib inhibits SARS-CoV-2 host cell entry and promotes the anti-viral Type I interferon response.

In cancer, increase in AXL expression has been linked to key mechanisms of drug resistance and immune escape by tumour cells, leading to aggressive metastatic cancers. AXL suppresses the body's immune response to tumours and drives treatment failure across many cancers. High AXL expression defines a very poor prognosis subgroup in most cancers. AXL inhibitors, such as bemcentinib, therefore, have potential high value as monotherapy and as the cornerstone of cancer combination therapy, addressing significant unmet medical needs and multiple high-value market opportunities. Research has also shown that AXL mediates other aggressive diseases including fibrosis.

## About Bemcentinib

Bemcentinib (formerly known as BGB324), is a potential first-in-class, potent and highly selective AXL inhibitor, currently in a broad phase II clinical development programme. It is administered as an oral capsule and taken once per day. Ongoing clinical trials are investigating bemcentinib in COVID-19, and multiple solid and haematological tumours, in combination with current and emerging therapies (including immunotherapies, targeted therapies and chemotherapy), and as a single agent. Bemcentinib targets and binds to the intracellular catalytic kinase domain of AXL receptor tyrosine kinase and inhibits its activity.

## About BerGenBio ASA

BerGenBio is a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company focused on developing transformative drugs targeting AXL as a potential cornerstone of therapy for aggressive diseases, including immune-evasive, therapy resistant cancers. The company's proprietary lead candidate, bemcentinib, is a potentially first-in-class selective AXL inhibitor in a broad phase II clinical

development programme focused on combination and single agent therapy in cancer, leukaemia and COVID-19. A first-in-class functional blocking anti-AXL antibody, tilvestamab, is undergoing phase I clinical testing. In parallel, BerGenBio is developing a companion diagnostic test to identify patient populations most likely to benefit from AXL inhibition: this is expected to facilitate more efficient registration trials supporting a precision medicine-based commercialisation strategy.

BerGenBio is based in Bergen, Norway with a subsidiary in Oxford, UK. The company is listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange (ticker: BGBIO). For more information, visit [www.bergenbio.com](http://www.bergenbio.com)

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## **Forward looking statements**

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