

Position Statement on Biosecurity and the Dual-Use of Research

Infectious diseases are a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide, particularly in low-income countries. They impact on global challenges such as food security & safety and water quality, and impose a financial burden on society.

The Microbiology Society recognises that to combat emerging infectious diseases, such as Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and 'old' diseases (sometimes in drug-resistant forms) like tuberculosis, sustained fundamental and translational research is needed to understand the mechanisms of pathogenicity and transmission. This research is designed to develop new or improved vaccines, novel anti-infectives and diagnostics for the treatment and prevention of these diseases. However, it may have the potential for misuse, for example in developing biological weapons, and is therefore sometimes referred to as dual-use research.

The Microbiology Society supports the principle of dual-use research for legitimate scientific purposes, as defined by the National Science Advisory Board on Biosecurity¹. However, the Society recognises that any research needs to be conducted safely and ethically, taking into account all relevant regulations².

The Microbiology Society promotes the understanding of microbiology and recognises the need for open scientific dialogue, exchange of information and improved communication between the scientific community, the funding agencies, scientific publishers and the wider public. While the Society opposes indiscriminate restrictions to scientific research, we also recognise that any research undertaken and/or published must balance the risks of misuse against any potential benefits.

The Society would like to see a process in place that brings together key members of the scientific community to rigorously review the use of dual-use research and the governance underpinning it on a regular basis.

The Microbiology Society also supports the position of the [American Society for Microbiology](#) and the [International Union of Microbiological Societies](#).

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¹ The National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) has defined dual use research as biological research with legitimate scientific purpose that may be misused to pose a biologic threat to public health and/or national security.

² Anti terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/24/contents>
Biological Weapons Act 1974 (as amended 2001) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/6/contents>