



# Changes to virus taxonomy and the International Code of Virus Classification and Nomenclature ratified by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (2019)

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## Abstract

This article reports the changes to virus taxonomy approved and ratified by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) in February 2019. Of note, in addition to seven new virus families, the ICTV has approved, by an absolute majority, the creation of the realm *Riboviria*, a likely monophyletic group encompassing all viruses with positive-strand, negative-strand and double-strand genomic RNA that use cognate RNA-directed RNA polymerases for replication.

## Introduction

Changes and updates to virus taxonomy (the universal scheme of virus classification of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses [ICTV]) take place annually and are the result of a multi-stage process. In accordance with the ICTV Statutes (<http://ictv.global/statutes.asp>), proposals submitted to the ICTV Executive Committee (EC) undergo a review process that involves input from the ICTV Study Groups (SGs) and Subcommittees (SCs), other interested virologists, and the EC. After final approval by the EC, proposals are presented for review and ratification to the full ICTV membership by publication on the ICTV website (<http://ictv.global>) followed by an electronic vote.

The latest set of proposals approved by the EC was made available on the ICTV website in January 2019 (see <http://ictv.global/proposals-2018/> for all proposals combined into a single zip file, and use the links provided in the References to access individual proposals). A list of proposals was then emailed on January 12, 2019 to the 162 members of ICTV, namely the EC Members, Life Members, ICTV

Subcommittee Members (including the SG chairs) and ICTV National Representatives. Members were then requested to vote on whether to ratify the taxonomic proposals. Voting closed on February 15, 2019.

## Changes to virus taxonomy, the International Code of Virus Classification and Nomenclature (ICTV Code), and the appointment of a new ICTV Life Member

All proposals [1–216] were ratified by ICTV members, in every case receiving an absolute majority of votes, between 60 and 64% of eligible voters. A summary of the taxonomy changes enacted by the ratified proposals is provided in Table 1. Each proposal is cited and listed in the References to acknowledge the authors' efforts and to provide links to the specific document source on the ICTV website. These documents remain available for those who wish to see the full details.

The introduction, in late 2018, of additional ranks in virus taxonomy has necessitated several changes in the ICTV Code. The amended Code had been approved by the EC and has been ratified by ICTV voting on an additional ballot question. The Code can be found at <http://ictv.global/code.asp>.

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**Table 1** Summary of taxonomic changes approved in February 2019

Rank	Total, MSL-33 <sup>a</sup>	New	Abolished	Renamed	Merged	Split	Total, MSL-34 <sup>b</sup>
Realm	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Phylum	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Subphylum	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Class	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Order	14	0	0	0	0	0	14
Suborder	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
Family	143	7	0	0	0	0	150
Subfamily	64	15	0	0	0	0	79
Genus	846	175	0	137	0	2	1019
Subgenus	59	0	0	0	0	0	59
Species	4958	614	11	59	2	0	5,560

<sup>a</sup> Total numbers of taxa in the ICTV Master Species List prior to 2019 ratification

<sup>b</sup> Total numbers of taxa now recognized, as reported in the ICTV Master Species List

Finally, Dr. Michael J. Adams has been elected as a Life Member, following nomination by the President, recommendation by the Executive Committee, and ratification by the ICTV membership [217]. Dr. Adams served the EC and ICTV in various capacities from 2001 till 2017, most recently as EC Business Secretary.

Perhaps the most notable taxonomic change approved in this ratification is the establishment of the realm *Riboviria*, a likely monophyletic clade of viruses with positive-strand, double-strand or negative-strand genomic RNA that use cognate RNA-directed RNA polymerases (RdRPs) for replication [2]. The realm *Riboviria* is placed at the highest taxonomic rank permitted by the ICTV Code. The evidence for monophyly of RNA viruses and for various clades within *Riboviria* has been accumulating over the years from phylogenetic analyses of the universal marker, RdRP, supplemented by comparison of additional molecular traits shared by subsets of RNA viruses [2, 218–220].

## Conclusion

All proposals submitted to ratification were ratified by an absolute majority of the ICTV, and the changes proposed are now part of official ICTV taxonomy. An up-to-date list of all approved taxa can be found on the ICTV online website: <http://ictv.global/msl.htm>.

## Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no conflicts of interest. A.R.M. is a Program Director at the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF); the statements and opinions expressed herein are made in a personal capacity and do not constitute endorsement by NSF or the government of the United States. Mention of trade names or commercial products in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing

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