



An evening dedicated to hygiene and infection prevention - Awarding of the 2026 Rudolf Schülke Foundation's Hygiene Prize and Hygieia Medal

In 2026, the Rudolf Schülke Foundation awarded the Hygiene Prize to Prof. Dr. med. Iris F. Chaberny. Dr. rer. nat. Jürgen Gebel was awarded the Hygieia Medal.

Hamburg, 23 March 2026 – For 50 years, the Rudolf Schülke Foundation has been awarding the Hygiene Award and the Hygieia Medal to highlight cutting-edge research in the field of hygiene. The Hygiene Award honours individuals whose scientific work significantly contributes to advancing infection prevention and protecting public health. The Hygieia Medal recognises distinguished personalities who have dedicated their life's work to hygiene and microbiology.

The festive award ceremony took place on 20 March 2026 at the Elsa Brändström House in Hamburg-Blankenese. In the ceremonial opening remarks by the Foundation's Chair, Prof. Dr. med. Martin Exner of the University Hospital Bonn, and a speech by Jan-Dirk Auris, CEO of Schülke & Mayr GmbH, the importance of research in infection prevention was highlighted.



f.l.t.r. Prof. Martin Exner (Chairman of the Management Board), Hygiene Prize winner Prof. Iris F. Chaberny (Scientific Advisory Board), Hygieia Medal winner Dr. Jürgen Gebel, PD Dr. Frank A. Pitten (Deputy Chairman of the Management Board)



Hygiene Award

This year's Hygiene Award of the Rudolf Schülke Foundation is presented to **Prof. Dr. med. Iris Freya Chaberny** of Kiel University (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) and the Institute of Hospital and Environmental Hygiene of the University Medical Center Schleswig-Holstein in Kiel and Lübeck, for the study: *Effect of daily antiseptic bathing with octenidine on ICU-acquired bacteremia and ICU-acquired multidrug-resistant organisms: A multicenter, cluster-randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, cross-over study.*

In the study, which was fully funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), Prof. Chaberny and her team were able to demonstrate that the daily use of octenidine-impregnated washcloths in intensive care patients reduces the rate of primary bacteraemia.¹

the study covered 23 hospitals with 44 intensive care units over a period of seven years. The ongoing support provided by the study management team, as well as independent funding from the DFG – which also made it possible to finance the various types of washcloths – contributed significantly to the high level of motivation among all those involved.

Study Background

Intensive care patients are routinely washed daily. The EFFECT study applied two methods for daily body washing: each intensive care unit used either disinfectant wash mitts or wash mitts without disinfectant properties for 15 months.

The study by the research group of Univ. Prof. Dr. med. Iris F. Chaberny, "*Effects of daily antiseptic whole-body washing with octenidine on ICU-acquired bacteremia and multidrug-resistant organisms: a multicenter, cluster-randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled cross-over study,*" shows that the risk of acquiring nosocomial primary bacteremia is reduced by 17%. Considering that many such bacteremias in intensive care patients progress to sepsis—with persistently high mortality—the importance of this result becomes evident. No reduction in colonisation with multidrug-resistant organisms was demonstrated.

In total, 44 intensive care units in 23 hospitals across Germany participated. Data from 104,039 ICU stays of 93,438 patients over two 12-month periods were analysed. Thus, daily washing of ICU patients with octenidine-containing washcloths can be recommended as part of a multimodal strategy to prevent sepsis in intensive care patients.

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Hygieia Medal

The Hygieia Medal is awarded this year to **Dr. rer. nat. Jürgen Gebel** for his outstanding contributions to the development and establishment of standardised test methods for chemical disinfection procedures. His work aims to strengthen patient safety, occupational safety in healthcare, and public health through tested and reliably effective disinfectants.

Dr. Gebel is Head of the Department of Disinfectant Testing at the Institute for Hygiene and Public Health of the University Hospital Bonn and Managing Director of the Association for Applied Hygiene (VAH). He is regarded as a leading expert in Europe in the field of efficacy testing of disinfectants and their use in medical settings. The Hygieia Medal, awarded every two years, honours individuals who dedicate their life's achievements to hygiene and microbiology.

More details about the Rudolf Schülke Foundation, the Hygiene Award, and the Hygieia Medal can be found on the Foundation's website: [Rudolf Schuelke Foundation](#).

About the Rudolf Schülke Foundation

The Rudolf Schülke Foundation promotes hygiene and microbiology with a focus on preventing and controlling communicable diseases. This includes the development and application of prevention and control strategies, as well as antimicrobial and antiviral agents and procedures for antisepsis, disinfection, and cleaning, and their relevance for patient safety. The Foundation aims to support interdisciplinary research and strengthen cooperation with universities.

Every two years, the Rudolf Schülke Foundation awards the Hygieia Medal to honour individuals who have devoted their life's work to hygiene and microbiology. Further information is available on the Foundation's website: [Rudolf Schuelke Foundation](#)

Literature:

1. Schaumburg, Tiffany et al. "EFFECT of daily antiseptic bathing with octenidine on ICU-acquired bacteremia and ICU-acquired multidrug-resistant organisms: a multicenter, cluster-randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, cross-over study." *Intensive care medicine* vol. 50,12 (2024): 2073-2082. doi:10.1007/s00134-024-07667-2

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