

Nobel winner, NASA astrobiologist Blumberg dies

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Baruch Blumberg, who won the Nobel Prize for helping identify the Hepatitis B virus and who served as the first chief of NASA's Astrobiology Institute, has died at the age of 85, NASA said Wednesday.

Blumberg died of an apparent heart attack while attending a NASA conference in California on Tuesday, the US space agency said in a statement.

"Barry Blumberg was a great biochemist and researcher," said Ames Center Director Pete Worden.

"He was a leading light in the scientific community and a great humanitarian. He also was a loyal and supportive friend to NASA, Ames Research Center and the nation's space program."

Blumberg headed the NASA Astrobiology Institute from 1999 to 2002, and won the 1976 Nobel Prize in Medicine for identifying the Hepatitis B virus.

He shared the prize that year with D. Carleton Gajdusek, who was known for his work on infectious viral diseases. Gajdusek, who pled guilty to one charge of molesting a young boy and served jail time for pedophilia, died in 2008.

Blumberg was described as a "great man" by former NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin.

"Barry saved lives through his research on the [Hepatitis B](#) virus. He also inspired a whole generation of people worldwide through his work in building the NASA Astrobiology Institute," he said.

"Our planet is an improved place as a result of Barry's few short days in residence."

Astrobiology is the study of life in the universe and the search for life forms beyond what is known on Earth.

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