

Mega beats Mimi for world's biggest virus

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The genome of Megavirus chilensis is 6.5 percent bigger than the [DNA code](#) of the previous virus record-holder, Mimivirus, isolated in 2003.

Viruses differ from bacteria in that they are usually far smaller and cannot reproduce on their own, needing to penetrate a host cell in which to replicate.

But *M. chilensis* is such a giant that it surpasses many bacteria in size and is genetically the most complex [DNA virus](#) ever described.

It was taken from sea water sample closed to the shore of Las Cruces, Chile. Its [host organism](#) is unknown.

DNA viruses include pox viruses and herpes viruses, but *M. chilensis* "doesn't seem to be harmful for humans," said Jean-Michel Claverie, of France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS).

The study appears in a US journal, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

More information: "A distant Mimivirus relative with a larger genome highlights the fundamental features of Megaviridae," by Defne Arslan, Matthieu Legendre, Virginie Seltzer, Chantal Abergel, and Jean-Michel Claverie, *PNAS*.

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