

# LECTURE NOTES: INTRODUCTION TO VIROLOGY

## INTRODUCTION

Viruses contribute significantly to the global burden of infectious disease. We experience countless infections throughout their lives, with particularly high frequency in early childhood. While most of these are mild, viruses may cause severe disease in susceptible individuals, such as the mal-nourished, immuno-compromised, the very old and the very young. Recent years have also seen the emergence of new viral diseases such as HIV, SARS and "swine flu" (H1N1 pandemic influenza A).

### What is a virus?

- They are **not cells**.
- They have **no organelles**.
- They are very **small**, sizes range from 20 to 200 nm. This is beyond the resolving power of the light microscope.
- They are very simple structures consisting essentially of a **nucleic acid genome**, protected by a shell of **protein**.
- They are metabolically inert and can only replicate once they are inside a host cell.
- The **genome** consists of only one type of nucleic acid: **either RNA or DNA**.
- Most DNA viruses are double stranded and most RNA viruses have a single stranded (ss) genome.
- A ssRNA genome may be either positive sense (this means that it can be used as mRNA to make proteins) or negative sense.
- Negative sense RNA is complimentary to mRNA, in other words, it has to be copied into mRNA.
- The viral genome codes only for the few proteins necessary for replication: some proteins are **non-structural** e.g. polymerase and some are **structural**, i.e. they form part of the virion structure.

# Ephti Medical Virology Lecture Notes

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