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In Memoriam: John R. La Montagne



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John R. La Montagne, deputy director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), died suddenly of a pulmonary embolism in his native Mexico City on 2 November 2004 at the age of 61. (See the [NIH press release](#).)

The longtime Alexandria, Virginia, resident dedicated his life to fighting disease, particularly influenza. For nearly 30 years, La Montagne helped lead NIAID's efforts to combat communicable and sexually transmitted diseases, asthma, allergies, potential bioterror illnesses, and autoimmune disorders. Just before his passing, La Montagne, along with NIAID director Anthony S. Fauci, wrote an editorial in the 3 November issue of the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), hoping that the information provided would end the nation's flu vaccine shortage. They hypothesized that using lower dosages and intradermal, rather than intramuscular, injections would extend the virus vaccine supply.

According to the [Washington Post](#), La Montagne's interest in science can be traced back to playing with a chemistry set and reading an article in *Look* magazine (no longer published) about a doctor who worked with vaccines. He graduated from Houston's Lamar High School and received a bachelor's (1965) and a master's (1967) degree from the University of Texas, Austin.

After receiving a Ph.D. in microbiology from Tulane University in 1971, La Montagne worked as a postdoc at the University of Pittsburgh, studying the polio and influenza viruses. He came to NIAID in 1976 as the officer of the influenza program. In 1983, he became the officer for the viral vaccines program and the next year the officer for the influenza and viral respiratory diseases program. In 1986, La Montagne became director of the AIDS program (now a division). The following year, he was named director of the microbiology and infectious diseases program (also now a division), serving there until he was promoted to deputy director of the agency in 1998.

An expert in the field of public health, La Montagne received several prominent awards, including the Surgeon General's Certificate of Appreciation and the Presidential Meritorious Executive Rank Award. La Montagne chaired the World Health Organization Task Force on Strategic Planning for the Children's Vaccine Initiative, advised the Pan American Health Organization on programs for vaccine-research implementation, and served as a member of the board for the Global Alliance for Tuberculosis Drug Development. He was also a member of the NIH Community Advisory Board for Security and the NIH Ethics Advisory Committee.

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