



“Towards population-level microbiome monitoring: the Flemish Gut Flora Project”

Prof. Dr. Jeroen Raes

KUL, VIB lab for Bioinformatics and (eco-)systems biology

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Abstract

Alterations in the gut microbiota have been linked to various pathologies, ranging from inflammatory bowel disease and diabetes to cancer. Although large numbers of clinical studies aiming at microbiome-based disease markers are currently being performed, our basic knowledge about the normal variability of the human intestinal microbiota and the factors that determine this still remain limited. Here, I will present a large-scale study of the gut microbiome variation in a geographically confined region (Flanders, Belgium). A cohort of >5000 individuals from the normal population is sampled for microbiome analysis and extensive metadata covering demographic, health- and lifestyle-related parameters is collected. Based on this cohort, a large-scale cross-sectional study of microbiome variability in relation to health as well as parameters associated to microbiome composition is being performed. In this presentation, I will discuss our experiences in large-scale microbiome monitoring, show how the development of dedicated computational approaches can assist in microbiome analysis and interpretation, and first results coming out of this effort.