

Company History

Novartis was created in 1996 through a merger of Ciba-Geigy and Sandoz. Novartis and its predecessor companies trace roots back more than 250 years, with a rich history of developing innovative products. From beginnings in the production of synthetic fabric dyes, the companies that eventually became Novartis branched out into producing chemicals and ultimately pharmaceuticals.

The history of Novartis traces the converging destinies of three companies: Geigy, a chemicals and dyes trading company founded in Basel, Switzerland in the middle of the 18th century; Ciba, which began producing dyes in 1859; and Sandoz, a chemical company founded in Basel in 1886.

These companies shared a common trait which lives on at Novartis: a passion for developing and marketing new products that contribute to human progress through advances in science and health. Building on this heritage, today Novartis focuses its innovation prowess on addressing the unmet needs of patients worldwide.

Painting of Johann Rudolf Geigy-Gemuseus with family

In 1758, Johann Rudolf Geigy-Gemuseus (1733-1793) founds the trading company J.R. Geigy in Basel, Switzerland to deal in "Materials, Chemicals, Dyes and Drugs of all Kinds."

Early photograph of Alexander Clavel

In 1859, Alexander Clavel (1805-1873) takes up the production of fuchsine, a synthetic dye, in his silk dyeing factory in Basel, Switzerland.

Early photographs of Dr. Alfred Kern (left) and Edouard Sandoz

The chemical company Kern & Sandoz is founded in Basel, Switzerland in 1886 by Dr. Alfred Kern (1850-1893) and Edouard Sandoz (1853-1928). The first dyes produced are alizarin blue and auramine.

Photograph of pharmaceutical research at Ciba in Basel, Switzerland in 1914

In 1900, Ciba produces its first pharmaceutical substances: Vioform, an antiseptic, and Salen, an antirheumatic agent. This image shows pharmaceutical research at Ciba in Basel, Switzerland in 1914.

Early photograph of the pharmaceutical department at Sandoz

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In 1917, Professor Arthur Stoll creates a pharmaceutical department at Sandoz, and research begins.

Presidents of Geigy and CIBA shake hands to commemorate merger

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Geigy President Louis von Planta and CIBA President Robert Käppeli shake hands to conclude the merger of CIBA-GEIGY in 1970.

Photograph of the old Novartis logo being changed out at the Novartis St. Johann site in Basel

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In 1996, the merger of Sandoz and Ciba-Geigy creates Novartis, one of the world's largest healthcare companies. This image, taken on February 3, 1997, shows the old logo being changed out at the Novartis St. Johann site in Basel.

NIBR headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Novartis unifies and strengthens its global research network in 2002 by creating the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research (NIBR), headquartered in the US in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Alcon, Inc. campus in Fort Worth, Texas

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Novartis completes a series of transactions that focus the company on three leading divisions: Pharmaceuticals, Alcon (eye care) and Sandoz (generic medicines).

Novartis headquarters in Basel, Switzerland

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On April 9th 2019, Alcon becomes a separately traded standalone company while Novartis strengthens its focus on Innovative Medicines and generic medicines (Sandoz).

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