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## Ask astronaut Alexander anything

11 March 2014

German European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Alexander Gerst is all set for the 'Blue Dot' mission to the International Space Station in May. Crewmates NASA astronaut Reid Wiseman and commander-cosmonaut Maxim Surayev will hold a media conference on Tuesday 18 March 2014 and ESA is inviting you to ask questions via Twitter.

Alexander is putting the finishing touches to his training before he heads to the Baikonur launch site in Kazakhstan in May. There, he will enter quarantine with his crewmates to make sure they do not bring any harmful viruses or bacteria to the orbital outpost.

The trip to space is surprisingly short: within around six hours the Expedition 40/41 crew will dock with the microgravity laboratory orbiting 400 kilometres above Earth at 28,800 kilometres per hour.

Once aboard, the new crew will have a week to get acclimatised to living without the benefit of gravity before their heavy workload begins.

During their six months in space they will assist in the docking and unloading of six visiting spacecraft that ferry supplies and experiments. Alexander is prime operator for Europe's Automated Transfer Vehicle, meaning he will monitor the arrival and take responsibility for distributing the 2600 kilograms of items in its cargo bay.

Alexander's science roster includes using the Electromagnetic Levitator for the first time. This furnace can melt and solidify metal alloys without a container, allowing scientists to understand the finer properties of these metals.

### Questions

ESA is offering you the chance to ask the astronauts a question during the press conference via Twitter. Send your questions in English on any topic. The best questions will be asked at the media conference that can be followed live on NASA television 18:00–19:00 GMT (19:00–20:00 CET) on 18 March 2014.

Post questions to @ESA using hashtag #bluedot. The deadline for receiving the questions is 12:00 GMT (13:00 CET) on Monday 17 March 2014.

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### Alexander Gerst during training in Star City near Moscow



The training of German ESA astronaut Alexander Gerst includes instruction in the use of special spacesuits. The image shows Gerst trying on the Russian Sokol space suit that he will wear during his six-hour flight to the ISS in a Soyuz spacecraft.

Credit: ESA.

### 'Blue Dot' – the logo for the ISS mission of the next German ESA astronaut, Alexander Gerst



'Blue Dot – Shaping the Future' is the motto of the ISS mission of the next ESA astronaut, Alexander Gerst. During German Aerospace Day on 22 September 2013, DLR and ESA revealed the mission name and its logo.

Credit: ESA.

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