



Technical Report No. 41 (Revised 2022)

Virus Retentive Filtration

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Virus Retentive Filtration Team

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Virus Retentive Filtration

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Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1	6.3.1 Scale-Down (Design) Qualification: Studies without Virus.....	26
1.1 Purpose.....	1	6.3.2 Virus Clearance Validation Studies	27
1.2 Scope	1	6.4 Test Virus	27
2.0 GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	2	6.4.1 Clinical vs. Licensure	28
2.1 Acronyms	5	6.4.2 Application of Parvovirus Claims to Larger Viruses	28
3.0 VIRUS-RETENTIVE FILTERS	5	6.4.3 Modular Claims	28
3.1 History of Virus Filters and Legacy Products	6	6.4.4 Virus Selection.....	29
3.2 Size Exclusion/Other Retention Mechanisms.....	7	6.4.5 Virus Spike Considerations.....	29
3.3 Virus Retention or Reduction Factor	8	6.5 Operating Conditions for Validation, Revalidation, and Number of Runs.....	29
3.4 Virus Size/Retention Rating.....	8	6.5.1 Quality by Design Considerations for Study Design.....	29
3.5 Protein Size, Sieving, and Passage Rating.....	8	6.6 Virus Assays and Assay Validation	31
4.0 CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRUS FILTER SELECTION	9	6.7 Manufacturing-scale Qualification Studies without Virus.....	31
4.1 Filter Validation/Qualification Expectations.....	9	6.8 Failure Analysis/Troubleshooting	31
4.2 Filter Construction.....	9	7.0 TYPES AND USES OF VIRUS FILTRATION	32
4.3 Hydraulic Stress Resistance	9	7.1 Industry Applications and Challenges	32
4.4 Filter System Configurations.....	9	7.1.1 Advanced Therapeutic Medicinal Products ..	33
4.5 Particulates, Leachables, and Extractables	11	7.2 Downstream Processing	33
4.6 Fluid/Filter Compatibility	11	7.3 Barrier Filtration of Input Raw Materials	33
4.7 Membrane Symmetry	12	7.3.1 Barrier Filter Requirements	35
4.8 Virus/Phage Challenge Testing (Opportunity for Standardization)	12	8.0 PHYSICAL AND MECHANICAL CHARACTERIZATION	36
4.9 Physical and Structural Limitations	12	8.1 Flow Rate and Clogging (Throughput)	36
4.10 Thermal / Chemical Stress Resistance	12	9.0 STERILIZATION	37
5.0 VIRUS FILTER INTEGRITY TESTS	13	10.0 AREAS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION.....	40
5.1 Relationship between Integrity Tests and Virus Retention	14	10.1 Introduction of New Filter Types and Configurations.....	40
5.2 Virus Retention Integrity Tests.....	14	10.2 Facilities Segregation	40
5.2.1 Gold Particle Retention.....	16	10.3 Continuous Virus Filtration	41
5.2.2 Gas-Liquid Diffusion.....	16	10.3.1 Extended Processing Times.....	42
5.2.3 Automated Integrity Test Instruments for Gas-Liquid Based Test Methods.....	18	10.3.2 Pressure and Fluid Protein Concentration Fluctuation during Processing	42
5.2.4 Liquid-Liquid Turbidimetry.....	18	10.3.3 Validation Strategies.....	42
5.3 Integrity Testing Checklist	18	10.4 Reprocessing.....	42
5.3.1 Failure Analysis/Troubleshooting.....	19	10.5 Process Intensification.....	43
5.3.2 Filter Manufacturer Integrity Tests.....	20	11.0 REFERENCES	43
6.0 VIRUS FILTRATION VALIDATION/ QUALIFICATION STUDIES	20	12.0 APPENDIX I: RISK EVALUATION TOOLS	47
6.1 Raw and Starting Materials and Equipment.....	20	13.0 APPENDIX II: VIRUS RETENTION AND PROTEIN PASSAGE NOMENCLATURE CLASSIFICATION ...	52
6.1.1 Virus Filtration Devices and Configurations..	21	13.1 References for Appendix II	52
6.1.2 Integrity Testing during Development	23		
6.1.3 Filtration Variability.....	23		
6.1.4 Feed Stream	24		
6.1.5 Filtration Conditions	24		
6.2 Establishing Representative Worst-Case Process Conditions	24		
6.3 Sequence of Process Evaluation.....	26		

FIGURES AND TABLES INDEX

Figure 3.0-1	Depiction of the Log10 Reduction Factor (LRF) as a Function of Virus Size 6	Table 6.4.5-1	Virus Stock Considerations 29
Table 4.1-1	Typical Qualification and Validation Test Recommendations for Virus Filters 10	Table 6.5.1-1	Quality by Design Considerations 30
Figure 4.5-1	Examples of NFF and TFF Filtration Systems (Picture courtesy of MilliporeSigma) 11	Table 7.1-1	Potential Points of Use for Biological Product Classes 33
Table 5.2-1	Filter Integrity Test Characteristics... 15	Table 9.0-1	Filter Sterilization Considerations 38
Table 5.3-1	Integrity Testing Considerations 19	Table 10.5-1	Process Intensification Considerations..... 39
Figure 6.1.1.1-1	Schematics of Decoupled (Off-Line) Prefiltration 21	Table 12.0-1	A Simple Risk Assessment Tool with Categorical Impact Levels of High, Medium, and Low 49
Figure 6.1.1.1-2	Schematics of Coupled (In-Line) Prefiltration 22	Table 12.0-2	Overview of Potential Categorization of Factors in a Virus Clearance FMEA 51
Figure 6.1.1.1-3	Schematics of In-Line Spiking 22	Table 12.0-3	Overview of Press RPN Scores 51
Figure 6.1.1.1-4	Considerations for Inclusion of a Prefilter in a Virus Filter Study 23	Table 12.0-4	Brief Example of Monoclonal Antibody Platform Process Failure Mode Effect Analysis 52
Table 6.2-1	Operational Factors Affecting Virus Retention 25	Figure 12.0-1	Example of an Ishikawa/fishbone Tool Employed to Analyze Potential Failure Modes for a Phase III 48

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1.0 Introduction

Biological therapeutic products are often manufactured using materials of animal or human origin, including recombinant cells, human blood plasma, cells derived directly from patients or other sources that could conceivably be contaminated by viruses. As some level of contamination risk exists (1–6), regulatory agencies worldwide require a demonstration of viral safety prior to the clinical use and/or marketing of such biologicals (7–10).

Risks of contamination are addressed by a combination of donor screening (where necessary) and virus testing of cell banks and raw materials as well as viral clearance steps in downstream purification processes. Virus-retentive filters are specifically designed to remove viruses from the process stream through a size-exclusion mechanism as part of a manufacturer's overarching virus safety strategy. They have been most commonly used in downstream processing as part of the orthogonal clearance strategy of recombinant or plasma-derived products; but in the context of some newer products (e.g., advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs) /cell therapies), they can be used to treat reagents and buffers used to manipulate cells for re-infusion or to pre-clear media used to culture or expand cells. They can also be used as barrier technologies for bioreactor media in a biological setting.

PDA Technical Report No. 41 (Revised): Virus Filtration addresses how virus-retentive filters work, recommends how to select the best filter for different applications, and describes the physical and biological/safety characterization of filter test methods, as well as strategies for the validation of virus retention.

1.1 Purpose

The biopharmaceutical industry has grown at an unprecedented rate over the past two decades; however, the need for patient safety has not changed. Yet, as part of the orthogonal virus clearance requirements, virus filtration may play a critical role in ensuring biologically derived products have a low risk of adventitious agents.

This technical report explains what virus filters are and where they can be used in current and emerging bioprocesses. Recommendations for selection of a suitable virus filter are included that include information on their physical and biological/safety characterization and guidance on how to incorporate quality by design (QbD) principles into virus filtration applications. Strategies for evaluating and validating virus retention by virus filtration, including defining the worst-case test parameters, are also discussed. Finally, considerations which reflect best practices and current thinking for implementing virus filtration into novel manufacturing technologies, such as barrier filters, continuous bioprocessing modes for filtration, or production of ATMPs are also included. TR-41 provides a summary of best practices for utilization of this technology in process development and manufacturing.

This document should be considered as a guide; it does not establish any mandatory or implied standards.

1.2 Scope

TR-41 provides a framework of the principles of operation, types of configuration, and materials of construction of virus-retentive filters and presents best practices for their design, operation, and validation in various applications; key literature references are noted. A QbD approach to virus safety assurance is described that starts with identification of critical process parameters related to virus filtration and discusses design space and operation within the proven acceptable range and normal acceptable range. Challenges to specific applications, such as large and small virus-retentive filters used for downstream processing of biopharmaceuticals, ATMPs, and plasma-derived products, as barrier technology prior to mammalian bioreactor cell culture, or for treating growth media for production of ATMPs, are also addressed. Additional sections examine critical considerations for evaluation and virus clearance validation studies, integrity testing, and sterilization. The final section focuses on future manufacturing technologies under development, such as the integration of virus filtration into continuous biopro-