

Technical Report No. 47
Preparation of Virus
Spikes Used for Virus
Clearance Studies



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Preparation of Virus Spikes Used for Virus Clearance Studies Task Force

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Table of Contents

<p>1.0 INTRODUCTION.....4</p> <p>2.0 GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....6</p> <p>3.0 PREPARATION OF VIRUS STOCKS10</p> <p> 3.1 Introduction..... 10</p> <p> 3.2 Sourcing of Viruses and Preparation of Virus... 10</p> <p> 3.2.1 Viruses Used for Viral Clearance Studies .. 10</p> <p> 3.3 Sourcing and Traceability of Viruses..... 12</p> <p> 3.3.1 Traceability of Viruses..... 12</p> <p> 3.4 Preparation of Virus Seed 13</p> <p> 3.4.1 Approaches for Preparation 13</p> <p> 3.4.2 Virus Seed Preparation 14</p> <p> 3.5 Preparation of Master and Working Virus Banks 14</p> <p> 3.5.1 Preparation of the Master Virus Bank (MVB)..... 15</p> <p> 3.5.2 Preparation of the Working Virus Bank (WVB) 16</p> <p> 3.6 Preparation of Virus Used for Virus Clearance Studies..... 16</p> <p> 3.6.1 Cytopathic Viruses..... 16</p> <p> 3.6.2 Non-cytopathic Viruses 17</p> <p> 3.7 Storage of Virus Stocks 17</p> <p> 3.8 Purification of Viruses..... 18</p> <p> 3.8.1 Purification by Ultracentrifugation 18</p> <p> 3.8.1.1 Pelleting..... 18</p> <p> 3.8.1.2 Cushions..... 18</p> <p> 3.8.1.3 Gradient Ultracentrifugation..... 19</p> <p> 3.8.2 Purification by Membrane Adsorber 19</p> <p> 3.8.2.1 Purification of Parvoviruses on a Q Membrane Adsorber 19</p> <p> 3.9 Methods Used to Reduce Aggregates..... 20</p> <p> 3.9.1 Filtration 20</p> <p> 3.9.2 Filtration at the Working Step 21</p> <p> 3.9.3 Sonication 22</p> <p>4.0 METHODS FOR CHARACTERIZATION23</p> <p> 4.1 Identity Testing..... 23</p> <p> 4.1.1 Sequencing..... 23</p> <p> 4.1.2 Immunological Assays..... 23</p> <p> 4.2 Functional Properties..... 24</p> <p> 4.2.1 Infectivity Assays..... 24</p> <p> 4.2.1.1 Data Analyses and Validation of Methods for Virus Enumeration 24</p> <p> 4.2.2 Total Particle Count..... 24</p> <p> 4.2.2.1 Electron Microscopic Determinations. 24</p> <p> 4.2.2.2 Quantitative PCR 25</p> <p> 4.2.2.3 Spectrophotometric Measurement..... 25</p> <p> 4.2.2.4 Infectivity to Particle Ratio..... 25</p> <p> 4.2.3 Aggregation..... 26</p> <p> 4.2.3.1 Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS)..... 26</p> <p> 4.2.3.2 Filter Sizing..... 26</p> <p> 4.2.3.3 Newer Methods 26</p> <p> 4.3 Purity..... 26</p> <p> 4.3.1 Protein Content..... 26</p> <p> 4.3.2 DNA/RNA Content..... 27</p> <p> 4.4 Contamination 28</p> <p> 4.4.1 Sterility/Bioburden..... 28</p> <p> 4.4.2 Mycoplasma..... 28</p> <p> 4.4.3 Adventitious Viruses..... 29</p> <p> 4.4.3.1 <i>In vitro</i> assays 29</p> <p> 4.4.3.2 Immunoassays..... 29</p>	<p>5.0 IMPACT OF VIRUS SPIKE ON THE SCALED DOWN MODEL AND ON VIRUS REMOVAL AND INACTIVATION.....30</p> <p> 5.1 Introduction..... 30</p> <p> 5.2 Influence of the Virus Spike on the Scaled Down Model 30</p> <p> 5.2.1 Chromatography 30</p> <p> 5.2.2 Filtration 31</p> <p> 5.2.2.1 Filtration Case Study #1 31</p> <p> 5.2.2.2 Filtration Case Study #2 32</p> <p> 5.2.2.3 Filtration Case Study #3 33</p> <p> 5.2.2.4 Filtration Case Study #4 34</p> <p> 5.3 Influence of the Virus Spike on the Log₁₀ Reduction Value (LRV) 35</p> <p> 5.3.1 Chromatography 36</p> <p> 5.3.2 Filtration 36</p> <p> 5.3.2.1 Filtration Case Study #5 37</p> <p> 5.3.2.2 Filtration Case Study #6 37</p> <p> 5.3.2.3 Filtration Case Study #7 39</p> <p> 5.3.2.4 Filtration Case Study #8 40</p> <p> 5.3.2.5 Filtration Case Study #9 42</p> <p> 5.3.2.6 Filtration Case Study #10 42</p> <p> 5.4 Influence of Virus Spike on Inactivation..... 43</p> <p> 5.4.1 Inactivation Case Study #1 (Pasteurization)..... 43</p> <p> 5.4.2 Inactivation Case Study #2 (Extreme pH) 44</p> <p> 5.4.3 Inactivation Case Study #3 (Low pH)..... 44</p> <p> 5.5 Conclusion/Discussion 45</p> <p>6.0 PHAGE PREPARATIONS FOR SPIKING STUDIES.....46</p>
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6.1 Typical Use of Phages in Spiking Studies	46	7.2 Origin, Source, and History of Cells	51
6.2 Potential Phage Models.....	46	7.3 Preparation of Cells and Cell Banking	52
6.2.1 PR772.....	47	7.3.1 Preparation of Master Cell Bank (MCB) and Working Cell Bank (WCB).....	52
6.2.2 Φ 6.....	48	7.3.2 Cultivation and Storage of Cells.....	53
6.2.3 Φ X-174.....	48	7.3.2.1 Medium Components	53
6.2.4 PP7.....	48	7.3.2.2 Serum.....	54
6.2.5 MS2.....	49	7.3.2.3 Trypsin.....	54
6.3 Crude vs. CsC1 Banding.....	49	7.3.3 Cryopreservation and Storage	55
6.4 Advantages of Phages over Mammalian Viruses in Filter Studies	50	7.4 Cell Bank Testing.....	55
7.0 CONTROL OF CELLS USED FOR VIRUS PROPAGATION AND TITRATION.....	51	7.5 Cell Line Characterization	56
7.1 Introduction.....	51	7.6 Raw Material Sourcing and Preparation	58
		7.7 Documentation.....	59
		8.0 REFERENCES.....	61

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FIGURES AND TABLES INDEX

Table 3.2.1	Mammalian Viruses Used in Virus Validation Studies.....	11	Figure 5.3.2.2-2	LRV Of PPV Using PPV Preparations of Different Purity	39
Figure 3.5	Master and Working Virus Bank Preparation Flowchart.....	15	Figure 5.3.2.3	Reduced LRV Observed with Flow Decay in a Small Virus Retentive Filter Caused by High Molecular Weight DNA	40
Table 3.7	Stability of SV40 and MMV Stored at -80°C.....	18	Figure 5.3.2.4-1	Purification of X-MuLV and MMV by Sucrose Gradient Centrifugation	41
Figure 3.8.2.1	Chromatograph of PPV Purified on a Q Membrane Adsorber	20	Figure 5.3.2.4-2	SV40 Stock Purification and Analysis	41
Table 3.8.2.1	Purification of PPV on a Q Membrane Adsorber.....	20	Table 5.3.2.4	SV40 Clearance by a Large Retentive Virus Filter	42
Table 3.9.2	Reduction of Virus Titer after Spiking and Pre-Filtration Through 0.2 and 0.1 μ m Rated Filters.....	21	Table 5.3.2.5	Effect of pH and Spike Quality on Observed LRV of PPV with a Large Virus Filter	42
Figure 4.1.2	Porcine parvovirus Infected Cultures of ST Cells; Uninfected Cells	23	Table 5.3.2.6	Removal of Virus Aggregates by Filtration.....	43
Table 4.3.1	Protein Concentration of MMV Purified by Various Means.....	27	Figure 5.4.1	Inactivation of Different HAV Preparations by Pasteurization in Albumin.....	43
Table 5.2.1	Product Yield from Four Scaled-Down Unit Operations Using Different Spike Ratios.....	31	Figure 5.4.2	Inactivation of Different HAV Preparations by Extreme pH.....	44
Figure 5.2.2.1	HAV Retention by a Small Size Virus Retentive Filter Using Different Spike Ratios.....	32	Figure 5.4.5	Inactivation of Different BVDV Preparations by Low pH.....	44
Figure 5.2.2.2	Capacity of a Virus Filter in Relation to the Purity of the Virus Spike	33	Table 6.2	Summary of the Properties of Selected Bacteriophages	47
Figure 5.2.2.3	Flow Decay in a Small Virus Filter Caused by High Molecular Weight Mammalian DNA	34	Figure 6.3	Procedure for Growth and Purification of Bacteriophages	50
Figure 5.2.2.4	Effect Of Spike Purity on Throughput of Various Small Virus Filters.....	35	Figure 7.3.1	Morphology of Vero Cells in Different Growth Stages.....	53
Figure 5.3.1	Influence of Spike Purity on LRV by a Small Virus Retentive Filter	36	Figure 7.5-1	Examples Demonstrating the Susceptibility of Two Cell Lines to Various Viruses	57
Figure 5.3.2.1	Small Virus Filter LRV Observed with Purified and Crude MMV Preparations.....	37	Figure 7.5-2	Virus Growth Characteristic (HAV, Strain HM175, in FRHK-4 Cells)	58
Figure 5.3.2.2-1	Filtration Volume Of Spiked IgG Using Different PPV Preparations	38	Table 7.7	Documentation for Cell Banks and the Use of Cells	60

1.0 Introduction

Assuring the viral safety of plasma derived biologicals and biopharmaceuticals is critical for safe use by healthcare consumers and successful marketing by industry of these vitally important healthcare products. Incidences of contamination of products derived from human plasma in the past have adversely impacted the health of hundreds of patients and tainted the image of certain segments of the healthcare industry. Today's recombinant biopharmaceuticals have never, as far as we know, presented a similar viral safety issue, and plasma derived products have a better safety record today. This is in large part due to stringent measures taken by the industry and regulators to mitigate viral safety risks.

The current strategy for ensuring viral safety involves multiple levels of control over the product and process, including cell bank screening, source material screening and/or inactivation, and incorporation of specific virus removal or inactivation steps into the production scheme. Validating the ability of the process to remove or inactivate viruses is key in understanding the ability of the manufacturing scheme to clear viruses, in the unlikely event that they do contaminate a process intermediate, and in providing a yard-stick to determine if the clearance capacity is large enough to assure viral safety.

Viral clearance studies start by designing scale-down models of the actual manufacturing unit operations. The objective of the scale-down model is to determine the performance and viral clearance that can be expected of a unit operation at full scale. First, key and critical process parameters, as defined in PDA Technical Report No. 42 (1) or ICH Q8(P2) (2) (e.g., resin contact time, filtration volume per membrane surface), are matched between the scale-down models and commercial large scale processing. Second, key and critical performance parameters, such as step yield and purity, must be representative of the large scale unit operation. Non-key/non-critical operating parameters, like column bed diameter and filter area, are lowered to allow reduction of the model unit operation to a scale practical for lab studies. Other key and critical parameters have to be considered if precipitation steps are investigated and virus is removed by distribution into the precipitate.

Viral clearance studies are conducted by spiking virus into the relevant intermediate and processing the spiked material in a scaled down unit operation. The reduction in the virus load by the unit operation demonstrates the effectiveness of the process step for virus removal or inactivation. The virus spike used in viral clearance studies should be representative of a potential contaminant to the extent achievable. Not only is the selection of appropriate relevant or model viruses important; the properties of the virus spike must also be considered. For example, the presence of serum in a virus spike may be problematic for a validation study of a serum-free manufacturing scheme. As another example, the presence of non-viral extraneous macromolecules, such as proteins and DNA, would be problematic for a validation of a downstream unit operation where the process fluid is presumably a highly purified, non-aggregated protein. It is important that contaminants in the virus spike itself do not impact key or critical performance parameters in a way that makes the scale-down model unrepresentative of the large scale process.

Achievement of these goals involves careful selection and design of virus spikes, both in terms of volume of spiking and purity of the preparations themselves. While it is relatively straightforward to modify the spiking volume to the point where it is non-interfering, achievement of spike purity is more complicated. Presently, some relatively crude spikes are produced directly from unprocessed clarified cell culture lysates or culture supernatants for direct use in validation studies. These spikes, like most biological systems, are relatively heterogeneous and difficult to control. Other virus preparations that are purified by ultracentrifugation/re-suspension, chromatography or other methods possess higher purity, but are still heterogeneous to some degree. The heterogeneities and