SEP 22, 2021

OPEN ACCESS

DOI:
dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.bmg3k3yn

External link:
https://link.springer.com/protocol/10.1007/978-1-0716-0207-2_17

Protocol Citation: Timothy S C Hinks, Bonnie van Wilgenburg, Huimeng Wang, Liyen Loh, Marios Koutsakos, Katherine Kedzierska, Alexandra J. Corbett, Zhenjun Chen 2021. Viral Plaque Assay. **protocols.io**
<https://dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.bmg3k3yn>

License: This is an open access protocol distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited

Protocol status: Working

Created: Sep 17, 2020

Last Modified: Sep 22, 2021

PROTOCOL integer ID:
 42235

Viral Plaque Assay

In 1 collection

Timothy S C Hinks¹, Bonnie van Wilgenburg², Huimeng Wang³, Liyen Loh³, Marios Koutsakos³, Katherine Kedzierska³, Alexandra J. Corbett³, Zhenjun Chen³

¹Respiratory Medicine Unit, Nuffield Department of Medicine Experimental Medicine, University of Oxford, Oxfordshire, UK;

²Peter Medawar Building for Pathogen Research and Translational Gastroenterology Unit, Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK;

³Department of Microbiology and Immunology, The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Australia

Springer Nature Books

Satyavati Kharde
 Springer Nature

Keywords: Virus, MAIT cell, Flow cytometry, MR1-tetramer, Infection, Mouse

ABSTRACT

This is part 3.6 of the "Study of MAIT Cell Activation in Viral Infections In Vivo" collection of protocols.

Collection Abstract: MAIT cells are abundant, highly evolutionarily conserved innate-like lymphocytes expressing a semi-invariant T cell receptor (TCR), which recognizes microbially derived small intermediate molecules from the riboflavin biosynthetic pathway. However, in addition to their TCR-mediated functions they can also be activated in a TCR-independent manner via cytokines including IL-12, -15, -18, and type I interferon. Emerging data suggest that they are expanded and activated by a range of viral infections, and significantly that they can contribute to a protective anti-viral response. Here we describe methods used to investigate these anti-viral functions in vivo in murine models. To overcome the technical challenge that MAIT cells are rare in specific pathogen-free laboratory mice, we describe how pulmonary MAIT cells can be expanded using intranasal bacterial infection or a combination of synthetic MAIT cell antigen and TLR agonists. We also describe protocols for adoptive transfer of MAIT cells, methods for lung homogenization for plaque assays, and surface and intracellular cytokine staining to determine MAIT cell activation.

Abstract: Viral plaque assays are used to determine influenza viral titers. A diluted solution of egg-adapted Influenza A viruses/lung-infected tissue homogenates are applied to a six-well tissue culture dish containing a monolayer of Madin-Darby canine kidney (MDCK) cells. The infected MDCK cells grow under a semisolid overlay medium (agar) containing trypsin. A plaque is produced when a virus particle infects a cell, replicates, and then kills the cell. This process can be repeated several times as surrounding cells can be infected by newly replicated virus and killed. When visualized by eye, plaques appear as white spots. The assay is measured in PFU/mL.

ATTACHMENTS

[Study of MAIT Cell
Activation in Viral
Infections In Vivo.pdf](#)

MATERIALS

For materials, please refer to the Guidelines section of the "[Study of MAIT Cell Activation in Viral Infections In Vivo](#)" collection.

SAFETY WARNINGS

! Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn at all times (gloves, lab coat, & eye protection) (see **Notes 3** and **4**).

For hazard information and safety warnings, please refer to the SDS (Safety Data Sheet).

Passaging MDCK cells:

- 1 Warm up MDCK cell media, trypsin–versene, and PBS at 37 °C .
- 2 Check the confluency of MDCK cells, aspirate the medium, add 10 mL PBS , aspirate the medium, and repeat wash.
- 3 Discard PBS, add 2–3 mL of trypsin–versene (stored -20 °C) to MDCK monolayers, and incubate at 37 °C for 00:05:00 . After 00:05:00 tap the flasks, and incubate for longer if required (maximum 00:15:00).
- 4 In the meantime, add 15 mL MDCK cell media to fresh T75 flasks.
- 5 Add MDCK cell media to a total volume of 10 mL to the trypsinized cells, and transfer cells to a 10-mL tube.
- 6 Count cells using a hemocytometer.

Set up multiple T75 flasks with different cell densities to determine the growth pattern of MDCK

7 cells. Generally $\sim 3-5 \times 10^5$ for 3-day split.

8 Incubate at 37°C , [M] 5 % CO₂.

Amplification of MDCK cells for plaque assay:

9 Warm up MDCK cell media, trypsin–versene, and PBS at 37°C .

10 Check the confluency of MDCK cells, aspirate the medium, add 10 mL PBS , aspirate the medium, and repeat wash.

11 Discard PBS, add 2 mL – $3\text{ mL trypsin–versene}$ (stored -20°C) to MDCK monolayers, and incubate at 37°C for $00:05:00$. After $00:05:00$ tap the flasks, and incubate for longer if required (maximum $00:15:00$).

12 In the meantime, add $40\text{ mL MDCK cell media}$ to fresh T175 flasks. Set up one T175 flask of MDCK cells per ~ 4 plates for plaque assay. Each 6-well plate assays 3 viral dilutions (as dilutions are done in duplicate).

13 Add MDCK cell media to a total volume of 10 mL to trypsinized cells, and transfer cells to a 10-mL tube.

14 Count cells using a hemocytometer.

- 15 Add $\sim 7-8 \times 10^5$ cells per T175 flask for 3-day culture.

Seeding flat-bottomed 6-well tissue culture (TC6) plates fo...

- 16 Warm up MDCK cell media, trypsin–versene, and PBS at 37 °C .

- 17 Check the confluency of MDCK cells, aspirate the medium, add 10 mL PBS , aspirate the medium, and repeat the wash.

- 18 Discard PBS, add 5 mL – 8 mL trypsin–versene (-20 °C) to MDCK monolayers in T175 flask, incubate at 37 °C for 00:05:00 . After 00:05:00 , tap bottles, incubate for longer if required (maximum 00:15:00).

- 19 Add 17 mL – 20 mL MDCK cell media to each flask (total 25 mL including 5 mL – 8 mL trypsin) to inhibit trypsin–versene.

- 20 Pool cells into one flask.

- 21 Count the cells, adjust the concentration to 3.3×10^5 cells/mL.

- 22 Add 3 mL of 3.3×10^5 cells/mL to each well of TC6 plates ($\sim 1 \times 10^6$ /well), swirl plates gently to distribute cells evenly. Include a negative control plate.

- 23 Incubate cells at 37 °C , 5 % CO2 Overnight . Aim for monolayers to be confluent in 6-well plates for assay.

Plaque assay

- 24 Warm up SF-DMEM at 37 °C .

- 25 Prepare dilutions of samples to be titrated. This can be done in a 96-well flat-bottom plate.

- 26 Cells will be infected with 150 µL of each dilution in duplicate, so a minimum of 300 µL of each dilution is required. A 96-well flat-bottom plate can hold ~**350 µL/well**. 35 µL of samples would be added to 315 µL media for a final volume of 350 µL (35 in 350 = 1:10 dilution). If a sample is to be plaqued neat, add 350 µL of sample to the first well.

- 27 Add 315 µL SF-DMEM in each well of 96-well plate. A multichannel can be used and add 157 µL and 158 µL (total 315 µL) to each well.

- 28 Add 35 µL sample to the first well with media (tenfold dilution) and continue serial tenfold dilutions by transferring 35 µL across wells, changing tips between dilutions.

- 29 For titration of viral stocks use dilutions from 10^{-4} to 10^{-6} . 10^{-1} can be used as a positive control. Half-log dilutions can also be performed. For titration of mouse lung homogenates, generally:
(a) Days 1–5: 10^{-1} to 10^{-3} .
(b) Days 6–10: neat to 10^{-2} (see **Note 26**).

- 30 Wash MDCK cells with 1 mL – 2 mL of PBS/well.

- 31** Infect cells with **150 µL/well** of the appropriate dilution, swirl gently to cover all cells and incubate at **37 °C**, **5 % CO₂** for **01:00:00**, shake gently *every 15 min*.
- 32** In the meantime, prepare overlay media, best to start doing so in the beginning of the 1 h incubation of MDCK cells.
- 33** Weigh out **1.8 g agarose** into 200 mL glass bottle, add **100 mL sterile water** (**1.8 % agarose**), and melt in microwave. Store in a **55 °C** water bath.
- 34** Aliquot **50 mL 2 × L-15 medium** into 50 mL tubes (need 2 × 50 mL aliquots of 2 × L-15 medium and 1 bottle (**100 mL**) of **1.8 % agarose**) and store in **37 °C** water bath.
- 35** Thaw trypsin–versene at **40 °C**. Thaw a **200 µL** aliquot/50 mL of 2 × L-15.
- 36** After 1 h incubation of MDCK cells with sample: Add **200 µL trypsin** to each 50 mL tube of 2 × L-15.
- 37** Make overlay media by adding **100 mL 2 × L-15 + trypsin solution** to **100 mL 1.8% agarose** and mix well (see **Note 27**).
- 38** Add **3 mL overlay medium** /well and leave at **Room temperature** until it sets.

39 Incubate upside-down at 37 °C , 5 % CO2 for 3 days. Plaques maybe visible by the end of day 2 and the plates can be incubated till day 4 if plaques are too small on day 3.

40 Count the plaques. This can be done by holding the plates against the light. Alternatively, remove agarose overlay and stain with crystal violet. To stain, cover the cells with a minimal amount of crystal violet solution for ~ 00:15:00 . Rock plates if necessary to ensure even coverage. Gently wash off the crystal violet stain with water. Once fixed, stained, and dried, store plaques indefinitely for future analysis.

41 Calculate viral titer in PFU/mL: Average count of duplicate well × Dilution factor × (1000/150) = PFU/mL (multiply lung homogenate counts by 2 to give total viral load, as lungs were taken and homogenized in 2 mL RPMI).