Short Communication

COMPARISON OF BOVINE _ROTAVIRUS_ STRAINS BY PLAQUE ASSAY

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ABSTRACT


Using plaque assay on MA 104 cells, four strains of bovine _rota_virus were compared: the attenuated American strain NCDV, and three virulent strains isolated in Canada (PQ) or in Belgium (S 14 and S 77). The attenuated strain (NCDV) formed smaller plaques than the three others. The plaque size may thus be used as a marker for this strain. The Belgian strain S 77 formed the largest plaques and no significant differences could be found between the Canadian strain PQ and the second Belgian strain S 14. On BSC-1 cells, the Canadian strain PQ formed much smaller plaques than on MA 104 cells.

Verly and Cohen (1977) observed differences in RNA segments of bovine rotavirus isolates and Spence et al. (1978), using the haemagglutination inhibition test, concluded that some strains of bovine _rota_virus differ from others. We have tried to differentiate four strains of bovine _rota_virus by the plaque assay technique on established cultures of rhesus monkey kidney cells (MA 104 or BSC-1).

An American attenuated strain (NCDV, from Prof. Mebus, University of Nebraska) was kindly furnished by Dr. R.S. Roy and a Canadian strain PQ by Dr. M.E. Bégin, both from the Veterinary School of the University of Montreal, Quebec. Two Belgian strains (S 14 and S 77) were isolated in our laboratory using the method described by Babiuk et al. (1977) (Dagenais et al., 1980, 1981). The third passage of these rotaviruses grown on cultures of MA 104 and BSC-1 cells was used for the plaque assay. Established cultures of rhesus monkey kidney cells (MA 104 or BSC-1) were cultured in Earle’s minimum essential medium (MEM), supplemented with non-essential amino acids (Flow Laboratories), 0.85 g/l of sodium bicarbonate, 10% of foetal bovine serum (Gibco), 100 units/ml of penicillin and 100 µg/ml of streptomycin. These cells were kindly furnished, respectively, by Prof. Bohl (O.A. R.D.C., Ohio) and Dr. R.S. Roy (St-Hyacinthe, Quebec).
The plaque assay technique was based on the method described by Matsuno et al. (1977) and Bohl (1979). Confluent cell monolayers grown in Petri dishes (30 mm diameter) were rinsed with a solution of MEM containing 2.5 μg/ml of trypsin (1:250, Difco), inoculated with 0.2 ml of tenfold dilutions of the virus and incubated for 1 h at 37°C. The infected cells were then covered with MEM containing 1% agarose (Pharmindustrie), 2.5 μg trypsin and 100 μg DEAE dextran (Pharmacia) per ml. A similar procedure was followed on uninfected cells as a control. The cells were fixed with formaldehyde after 4 days of incubation, then stained with May–Grünewald–Giemsa (Vindevogel et al., 1975; Jetteur et al., 1979).

Cell cultures inoculated with the optimal dilution producing a satisfactory number of isolated plaques (approximatively 50) were examined according to a method previously described (Jetteur et al., 1979). Briefly, plaques were printed with an offset camera to obtain a final magnification of X 10. For each strain cultivated on MA 104 cells, the areas of 50 plaques taken at random were measured with an OH Kempton planimeter.

The normality of the plaque size distribution was tested for skewness and kurtosis. The mean plaque size of the different virus strains was compared by a one-way analysis of variance. Student's t-test was used to determine which strain differed significantly from the others.

The addition of trypsin and DEAE dextran in the overlay agarose allowed the production of larger plaques from rotavirus, as found by Matsuno et al. (1977). There were significant differences in the mean plaque size of the four rotavirus strains studied ($P < 0.0001$). The mean and the standard deviation of plaque size of the four strains grown on MA 104 are given in Table I. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PQ</th>
<th>NCDV</th>
<th>S 14</th>
<th>S 77</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>12.379</td>
<td>5.886</td>
<td>12.246</td>
<td>14.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>0.806</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>0.944</td>
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Values are in mm², calculated from 50 plaques.

$t$-test showed that the American attenuated strain (NCDV) produced significantly smaller plaques than the other strains ($P < 0.0001$); the plaques induced by the Belgian strain S 77 were larger than those induced by S 14 and PQ. These two last strains did not differ significantly in their mean plaque size. The four strains of bovine rotavirus inoculated on BSC-1 cells induced much smaller plaques. Statistical analysis was only performed on the PQ strain. The mean and the standard deviation of plaque size are given in Table II. The
analysis of variance showed that the two populations were quite different (Fig. 1).

The plaque assay technique is a valuable method for the study of variants of viruses as well as for the effect of some antiviral compounds (Jetteur et al., 1979; Pastoret et al., 1979; Schwers et al., 1980). Estes and Graham (1980) observed differences in plaque size produced by rotaviruses of three mammalian species; simian, bovine and porcine. Our results with the plaque assay technique indicate that the American attenuated strain of rotavirus (NCDV) differs strongly from the three other strains. The Canadian strain (PQ) and the Belgian strain S 14 are similar, but the strain S 77 differs to a lesser degree from S 14 and PQ. Thus, the American attenuated strain (NCDV), which is used as a vaccine, induces smaller plaques than the other strains tested. This characteristic may be used as a marker to detect the NCDV strain. We were able to demonstrate differences in plaque size of four uncloned strains of rotavirus isolated from the same species (cattle). Our results, added to those of Verly and Cohen (1977) and Spence et al. (1978), agree with the hypothesis that differences do exist between strains of bovine rotavirus in nature. In our hands, BSC-1 cells proved to be less sensitive for rotavirus growth since the titres on these cells were lower and the plaques smaller.

TABLE II

Mean and standard deviation of plaque size of bovine rotavirus strain PQ grown on MA 104 cells and BSC-1 cells

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MA 104</th>
<th>BSC-1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>12.379</td>
<td>2.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>0.806</td>
<td>0.254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are in mm², calculated from 50 plaques and 36 plaques from PQ on MA 104 and PQ on BSC-1 cells, respectively.

Fig. 1. Plaques formed by the Canadian strain PQ of bovine rotavirus: (a) on MA 104 cells; (b) on BSC-1 cells.
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REFERENCES