Easy Application of Digoxigenin-11-dUTP Labelled Probe in Detection of Human Papillomavirus DNA

Hyang Joon Park, M.D., Ho Suk Sung, M.D.

Department of Dermatology, Inje University College of Medicine, Pusan, Korea

In situ hybridization was performed in ten cases of condyloma acuminata in order to study the applicability of digoxigenin-11 dUTP (Dig-dUTP) labelled probe compared with radioactive isotope labelled probes.

Although signal intensity was denser in radiolabelled probes, high positive rates were obtained with Dig-dUTP labelled probes. From these results, Dig-dUTP labelling is found to be more efficient in typing of human papillomavirus DNA than radiolabelling.

(Ann Dermatol 3:(2) 91–95, 1991)

Key Words: In situ hybridization, Condyloma acuminatum, Digoxigenin-11-dUTP, Radioactive isotope

Various methods of hybridization have been used to identify human papillomavirus (HVP). Among these techniques, in situ hybridization is directly applicable to the biopsy specimen and allows us to investigate the location of specific genes. Since this technique can be applied to the paraffin-embedded tissue, retrospective studies are also possible.¹ ²

Radioactive isotopes including ³²P, ³⁵S, ³H have been used in hybridization experiments.³ ⁵ Most isotopes have a short half life requiring frequent probe preparation. Safety issues and the high cost of radioactive waste disposal have stimulated the search for effective nonradioactive markers for the labelling of the probes.⁶ ⁸

Recently digoxigenin was introduced as a new nonradioactive labelling material with good efficiency.⁹ In this study we applied Dig-dUTP labelled probes in condyloma acuminatum using in situ hybridization technique and compared the results with radiolabelled probes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Tissue Samples
Ten cases of condylomata acuminata formalin-fixed and embedded in paraffin were selected. For comparison of the different methods of in situ hybridization, three slides of each sample were prepared.

Pretreatment of Tissue Sections
Sections 4 to 6 µm thick were placed on poly-l-lysine (Sigma, St. Louis) coated slides. They were deparaffinized in xylene two times and hydrated through graded alcohols to distilled

Received November 4, 1990
Accepted for publication April 22, 1991.
Reprint requests: Hyang Joon Park, M.D., Department of Dermatology, Inje University, College of Medicine, Pusan 614–110, Korea
water. Briefly, the slides were immersed in 0.2N HCl for 15 min., washed in 2X SSC, 5μ EDTA solution, then digested by a solution of proteinase K.

Tissue blocking step was added when using isotope ³⁵S in addition to treatment of 0.1M triethanolamine with 0.25% acetic anhydride to reduce background in cases of radiolabelled probes.

The slides were washed twice in PBS containing 0.2% glycine, then dehydrated through graded alcohols.

**Detecting Probes**
HPV 11 plasmid DNA was labelled with Dig-dUTP(Boehringer Mannheim, Mannheim, West Germany), ³⁵S-dCTP(Amersham, Amersham, U.K.) and ³²P-dCTP(Amersham, Amersham, U.K.) using a random primer method. Unlabelled nucleotides were removed on a Sephadex G-50 column(Sigma, St. Louis).

**Prehybridization**
Hybridization solution(5X SSC, 0.5% blocking solution(Boehringer Mannheim), 0.1% N-lauroyl sarcosin, and 0.02% SDS) was placed on the tissue section. The slides were incubated in a humidified box at 51°C for one hour.

**In Situ Hybridization**
Hybridization mixture(50μl) containing 5ng/μl of a probe was pipetted onto the prepared section and the slides were covered with coverslips. They were placed on a hot plate and denatured for 2 min at 92°C and transferred to an incubator at 51°C in a humidified box for 18-42 hours.

After hybridization, the slides were immersed in 2X SSC, then coverslips were removed carefully. The slides were washed sequentially in 1X SSC at room temperature with agitation for 15 min., 0.1X SSC at 50°C two times. They were dehydrated through graded ethanol and allowed to air-dry.

**Detection of Hybridization Signals**
With Dig-dUTP probes, the slides were processed using a Nonradioactive DNA Labeling and Detection kit(Behringer Mannheim).
The slides were washed with buffer 1 for 1 min. They were drained of excess buffer and incubated with polyclonal sheep anti-digoxigenin, conjugated to alkaline phosphatase for 30 min. The slides were then incubated for enzyme catalyzed color reaction with 5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate and nitroblue tetrazolium salt and stained with eosin.

With radioactive probes, the slides were dipped in liquid photographic emulsion(Kodak Nuclear tract NTB2, Eastman Kodak Co.) and allowed to dry completely in a dark box. They were developed, fixed and stained with hematoxylin.

**RESULTS**

**Positivity of the reaction**
The results of the experiments are summarized in Table 1. There was 55.5% positive rate with Dig-dUTP labeled probes(Fig. 1). With radiolabelled probes, 12.5% and 30% positivity was achieved with ³⁵S and ³²P respectively (Fig. 2, Fig. 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Positivity of Reactions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Probe</td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>³⁵S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>³²P</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dig-dUTP</td>
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**Intensity of the signals**
The signals were relatively intense with radiolabelled probes compared with Dig-dUTP probes(Table 2).

**DISCUSSION**
Among the hybridization techniques, in situ
Table 2. Intensity of Signals

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Probe</th>
<th>Positive cases</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$^{35}$S</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^{32}$P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dig dUTP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 1</td>
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hybridization is less sensitive than other hybridization techniques. This technique, however, permits study of the location of specific genes.

Generally, detection by nonradiolabelled probes is significantly less sensitive than radiolabeled probes.² Previous reports have given conflicting results of the sensitivity of these methods.³⁻⁷ Recently, a new nonautographic method using Dig-dUTP has been developed which is said to be very sensitive. Digoxigenin is a steroid which occurs naturally only in digitalis plants (digitalis purpurea). Its structure is shown in Fig. 4.

![Fig. 4. Structure of Digoxigenin-11-dUTP](image)

We tested Dig-dUTP labelled probes to compare the sensitivity of reactions using in situ hybridization. In previous reports, a 60–80% positive rate of detection was found in cases of condyloma accuminatum by in situ hybridization.¹¹⁻¹³ In our experiments, we obtained positive rates of 55.5%, 30% and 12.5% with Dig-dUTP, $^{32}$P and $^{35}$S respectively. We believe the
low positive rates in our cases were caused less than optimally controlled conditions, especially in radiolabelled probes. If we controlled exposure time more adequately, we believe higher sensitivity rates would be obtained with the radiolabelled probes. Other possible factors include infections by HPV types different from 11 (eg, HPV 6 was three times as frequent as HPV 11) and a too vigorous washing process.

We also compared the signal intensity. Although only 12.5% and 30% of positivity were achieved by radiolabelled probes, three out of four reactions were intense in contrast with Dig-dUTP labelled probes which generated intense signals in only one out of five cases. Additionally there were more intense signals with radiolabelled probes than with Dig-dUTP labelled ones in three cases in which comparison of intensity was possible. These results show radiolabelled probes generated more intense signals with prolonged exposure time.

In this experiment, positive controls indicat- ing adequate exposure time are necessary to increase positive rate of in situ hybridization using radiolabelled probes. Because HPV 6 and HPV 11 cannot be cultivated, there are no control samples to aid in detection, unlike HPV 16 or HPV 18 which are transfected into CaSki cell or Hela cell lines.

Compared with radiolabelled probes which take several days of exposure and dark room development, the enzymatic technique takes only a few hours, and is technically less difficult. In conclusion, Dig-dUTP labelled probes can be effectively used in the detection of human papillomavirus and other infectious agents. However, further studies are necessary to have reliable data on in situ hybridization using dig-dUTP probes.

REFERENCES


