Policy on Research Utilizing Virus Vector Transduced Cells or Virus Infection of Animals

Version 5

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Research with cells transduced with replication competent or defective viral vectors capable of infecting human or animal cells must be carried out in an approved Containment Level 2 (CL2) physical laboratory. This includes, but is not limited to vectors derived from Adenovirus, Adeno-associated virus, lab adapted strains of Vesicular Stomatitis Virus, alpha viruses, measles virus, murine, avian or feline gamma retroviruses (formerly known as type C retroviruses) and herpes simplex virus type I or II. Even though the gamma retroviral vector may be replication defective, endogenous retroviruses residing within the transduced cells *in vitro* or *in vivo* could package the nascent viral RNA as pseudotyped infectious particles. Both amphotropic and xenotropic retroviruses from different species are capable of infecting human cells. Research utilizing replication defective lentiviral vectors must be conducted in a Containment Level 2 (CL2) physical laboratory with the use of Containment Level 3 (CL3) operational practices (commonly termed CL2+). This includes vectors derived from, but not limited to, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Researchers are strongly encouraged to use self-inactivating lentiviral vectors. These guidelines also apply to *in vivo* work.

Research involving a live replication competent or defective viral vector containing a known oncogene, regardless of the type of the viral vector, requires CL3 if the vector is infectious for human cells. Viral vectors expressing genes that are known to be anti-apoptotic or promote cell survival and/or proliferation may also require higher levels of containment but will have to assessed on a case by case basis by the UWO Biohazards Subcommittee.

It is recognized that experiments involving direct injection of virus or a virus-transduced cell line into an animal place significant burden on the researchers in order to meet the recommended guidelines. For example, conducting a stereotaxic injection of a viral vector into a targeted area of the brain is generally not possible using conventional laminar flow hoods. Whole animal imaging (MRI, CT, PET or ultrasound, bioluminescence) and flow cytometry of live vector-transduced cells are additional examples where biosafety issues make experimental protocols more difficult. In an effort to help reduce this burden, the following procedures are proposed to provide proof that no virus is being released from transduced cells as a way to reduce the need for CL2 or CL2+ containment.

Gamma retrovirus or lentivirus vectors:

For experiments that require that cells stably transduced with a gamma retroviral or lentiviral vector be injected into an animal the level of containment can be dropped providing the following conditions can be satisfied:

1. The use of self-inactivating gamma retroviral or lentiviral vectors is strongly advised when available. Commercially available lentiviral vectors are self-inactivating. Most gamma retroviral vectors are not.

2. Once stable viral transductants have been selected/established under the required containment conditions, the engineered cells containing a reporter gene (GFP or luciferase for example), a gene that mediates targeted recombination (Cre or Flip recombinase) or a gene that modifies metabolism but does not affect the cell cycle or proliferation can be tested for the absence of virus production. This can be demonstrated by taking the clarified cell supernatant from the transduced cell line after 5 to 10 cell passages and adding it to cultures of the original uninfected cells or a similar cell line that is highly permissible to viral infection. Reporter gene assays can then be conducted after 48 to 72 hours of culture. However, these types of assays may not be particularly sensitive and should be discussed with the Biohazard Subcommittee in advance. The preferred approach, and that which must be done for all non-reporter gene constructs, is to use quantitative PCR as the confirmatory assay with appropriate standards to confirm assay sensitivity. The assay must be sensitive enough to detect at least one infected cell per 10^6 uninfected cells. Alternatively, clarified supernatants from cell passage 5 to 10 can be concentrated by ultracentrifugation and the pellet area extracted in the presence of carrier RNA. Real time qRT-PCR can be conducted with standards to determine if virus is being released from the stably transduced cells. In either case one primer should be derived from the vector sequence and the other from the transgene of interest. If the virus is undetectable in either of these assays, a CL2 or CL2+ cell line could be handled at its original, nontransduced containment level. Animals injected with these reclassified cells could also be handled at their original, nontransduced containment levels. If gamma retro virus or lentivirus vectors must be injected directly into animals then injections can be conducted in a level 2 room outside of a laminar flow hood provided appropriate personal protective equipment is worn and appropriate decontamination procedures are in place. Once this proof of principle experiment is conducted and submitted to the Biohazard Subcommittee for review, then all subsequent experiments using the same gamma retroviral or lentiviral vector transduced cells can be done under reduced containment. Positive detection of the virus in culture supernatant or as integrated viral DNA from test cells would require maintenance of the virally transduced containment level.

Note that this “dropdown” option does not apply to immunocompromised mice repopulated with primary human or nonhuman primate (NHP), unmodified primary or viral vector modified primary cells. For those mice, the containment must not be lower than CL2 (the standard for handling any primary human material) or CL2+ (the standard for handling NHP material). If the primary cells are known to be infected with a risk group 3 human pathogen, then they must be handled at the containment level appropriate for that pathogen. If the transduced gene is known to promote cell survival or alter cell cycling in favour of proliferation (as in the case of an oncogene), then CL2+ or a higher containment level, determined by a risk assessment made in collaboration with the Biohazard Subcommittee, must be maintained for live viral vector work, especially if the vectors are capable of infecting human cells.

Adenovirus vectors:

For animal experiments that require the use of replication competent adenovirus vectors (first generation vectors), level 2 containment must be observed regardless of the transgene to be used. For experiments using 2nd or 3rd generation replication defective Adenovirus vectors that do not contain an oncogene or genes that promote cell survival and or cell proliferation, direct injection

of virus infected cells or direct injection of virus can be done outside a laminar flow hood in an approved level 2 room with personal protective equipment worn once the following proof of principle condition has been satisfied:

Following injection of the animal, bodily fluids such as blood, bronchial lavage, and urine as well as stool should be collected at several time points over the first 14 days post-infection. Quantitative PCR with the use of positive spiking controls and assay sensitivity controls can then be used to demonstrate that the recombinant Adenovirus is not being released from the infected animal. Once this proof of principle experiment is conducted then all following experiments using the same Adenovector can be done under reduced containment conditions and the animals can be returned to CL1 animal housing at the point when the Q-PCR gave reproducible negative results.

In some cases, the animal can be kept in quarantine at Level 2 containment for a prescribed period of time and then removed to Level 1. To do this, the researcher must provide suitable evidence from the literature regarding an appropriate quarantine period for the specific agent in use. This use of quarantine is approved by the Biohazards Subcommittee on a case-by-case basis.

Adeno-associated virus vectors:

For experiments using recombinant Adeno-associated virus vectors it is strongly recommended that the vector be generated using a construct that can generate the vector by transfection such that helper virus is not required. For direct animal injection experiments the same proof of principle experiment as described for the Adenovirus vectors must be conducted before lowering of the containment level for animal housing can be considered.

In some cases, the animal can be kept in quarantine at Level 2 containment for a prescribed period of time and then removed to Level 1. To do this, the researcher must provide suitable evidence from the literature regarding an appropriate quarantine period for the specific agent in use. This use of quarantine is approved by the Biohazards Subcommittee on a case-by-case basis.

Other viral vectors:

Experiments requiring the use of less commonly used viral vectors will need to be considered by the Biohazard Subcommittee on a case by case basis in consultation with AUS-ACVS.