

Fig. 1. HSL expression in macrophages is reduced by *M. leprae* infection. THP-1 cells grown on glass coverslips in 24-well plates for 24 h were used as a control or were infected with *M. leprae* for 24 h, then subjected to oil red O staining (A and B), ADRP immunostaining (C and D) or HSL immunostaining (E and F). Bars = 10 μ m.

was clearly visible in the control THP-1 cells before infection, but it was significantly reduced by 24 h after *M. leprae* infection (Fig. 1E and F). Overall, oil red O staining was detected in 14.8% (9/61) of control THP-1 cells, whereas the percentage of *M. leprae*-infected cells increased to 91.7% (89/97). Similarly, only 16.9% (12/71) of cells were weakly immunostained with ADRP, but 88.2% (90/102) were strongly stained following infection. HSL-positive cells were observed in 80.3% (53/66) of control cells, but in only 7.2% (6/83) following *M. leprae* infection. These results suggested that the lipolytic pathway is constitutively activated in the control THP-1 cells, as evidenced by strong HSL staining; however, it was significantly suppressed by *M. leprae* infection, which in turn would reduce lipolysis in infected cells and maintain cellular lipids.

3.2. Only live *M. leprae* suppresses HSL expression

We next evaluated changes in HSL mRNA and protein levels in THP-1 cells following *M. leprae* infection. Reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) analysis revealed that HSL mRNA levels were significantly decreased 6 h after *M. leprae* infection (Fig. 2A, left panel). HSL protein levels, as assessed by Western blot analysis, were also decreased by 6 h after infection (Fig. 2B, left panel). In both cases ADRP levels were increased as previously shown [9].

In order to clarify whether the observed decrease of HSL was specific to viable *M. leprae* or non-specific to phagocytosis, we compared the effects of live *M. leprae* with dead (heat-killed) *M. leprae* or latex beads on HSL expression. The mRNA and protein

levels of HSL were transiently decreased at 6 h following exposure to dead *M. leprae* and latex beads, but they had mostly recovered to the original levels by 48 h (Fig. 2A and B, middle and right panels). In contrast, ADRP levels were transiently increased by dead *M. leprae* or latex beads at 6 h, but had returned to the original levels in 48 h. The transient effects of dead bacilli and the sustained effects of live bacilli on HSL suppression are similar to the effects of dead and live bacilli on the phagosomal localization of CORO1A [16,18]. Together, these results suggest that the phagocytosis of certain particles will transiently, but not permanently, decrease HSL expression; however, only live *M. leprae* was capable of maintaining the suppression of HSL expression (Fig. 2A and B).

Phosphorylation of HSL on Ser⁵⁶³ by PKA and Ser⁵⁶⁵ by 5'-AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) is required for the translocation and the functional activity of HSL [19,20]. Therefore, these serine residues were evaluated to determine if they are dephosphorylated following *M. leprae* infection. Western blot analysis using phosphorylation-specific antibodies revealed a rapid decrease in phosphorylation of HSL at both Ser⁵⁶³ and Ser⁵⁶⁵ 1 h after *M. leprae* infection (Fig. 2C). This result further confirmed that *M. leprae* infection not only reduces HSL expression, but potentially abrogates its function as well.

3.3. Innate immune activation increases HSL expression, but *M. leprae* infection reverses

The induction of innate immunity by activation of toll-like receptors (TLRs) modulates the expression of host proteins and

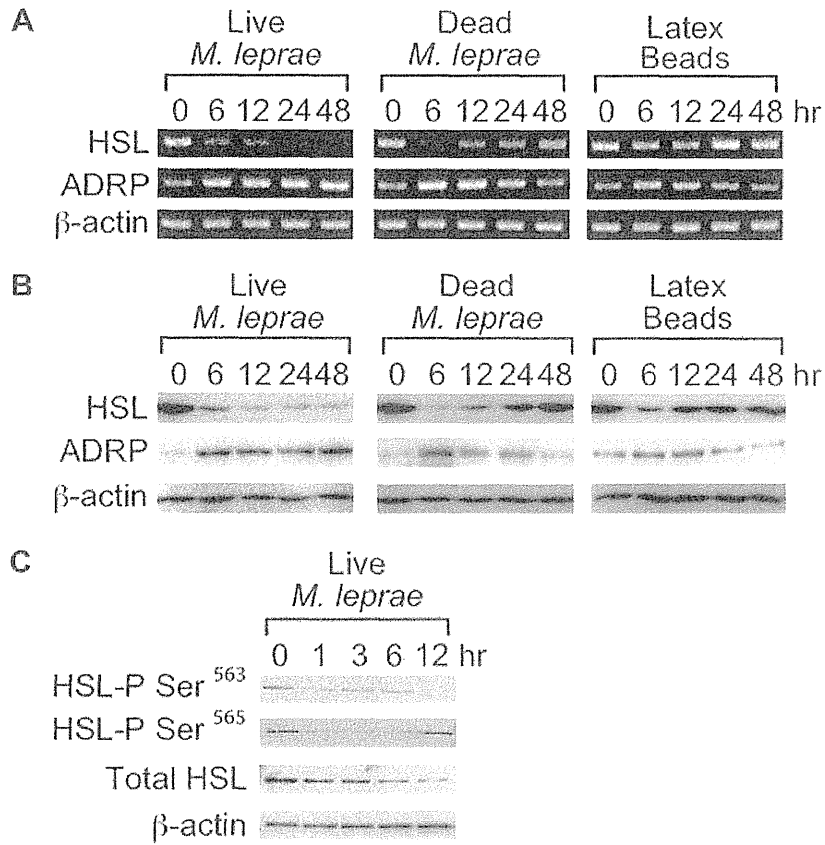


Fig. 2. Only live *M. leprae* persistently reduces HSL mRNA and protein levels in infected cells. THP-1 cells were cultured in a six-well plate and infected with live *M. leprae*, heat killed (80 °C for 30 min) *M. leprae* or latex beads. After incubating for the indicated period of time, total RNA and total cellular protein were purified and RT-PCR analysis (A) and Western blot analysis (B) for HSL, ADRP and β-actin were performed. Phosphorylation of HSL on Ser⁵⁶³ and Ser⁵⁶⁵ was evaluated by Western blot analysis in *M. leprae*-infected cells using specific antibodies (C).

contributes to host defense against *M. leprae* [9,16,17,21]. Therefore, the possible effect of PGN, a ligand for TLR2, on HSL expression levels was examined. When PGN was added to the culture medium of THP-1 cells, HSL mRNA expression was increased at 6 h and high levels of expression were maintained up to 24 h (Fig. 3A). HSL protein levels were also increased and high levels were still evident even 48 h after treatment (Fig. 3B). Since

infection of live *M. leprae* significantly suppressed HSL expression (Fig. 2), we evaluated the possible effect of *M. leprae* infection on the effect of PGN. When *M. leprae* was added with PGN, the increase of PGN-induced HSL mRNA and protein levels observed at 6 h was abolished (Fig. 3C and D vs. Fig. 3A and B, respectively). Instead, HSL mRNA and protein levels had decreased by 48 h (Fig. 3C and D).

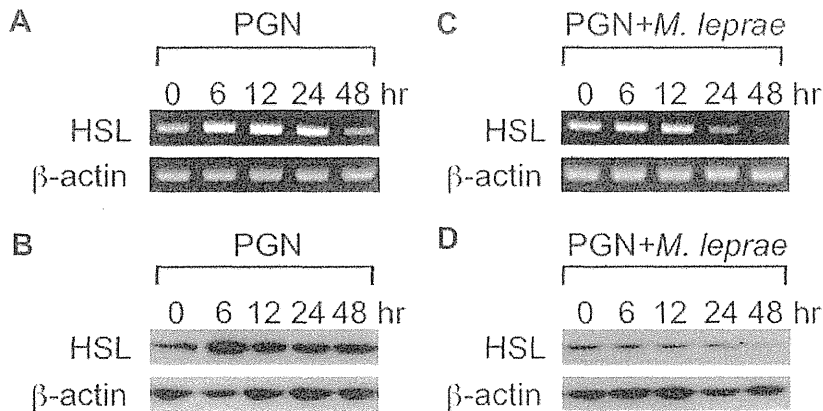


Fig. 3. *M. leprae* inhibits the ability of PGN to induce the expression of HSL. THP-1 cells were cultured in a six-well plate and treated with PGN (A and B), PGN plus *M. leprae* (C and D). After incubating for the indicated time, total RNA and total cellular protein for each experiment were purified and RT-PCR analysis (A and C) and Western blot analysis (B and D) for HSL and β-actin were performed.

TLR2 neutralizing antibody was able to suppress the PGN-mediated induction of HSL mRNA and protein levels (Fig. 4C vs. A and D vs. B, respectively), suggesting that the action of PGN is mediated through TLR2. Although activation of TLR4 by LPS enhanced HSL expression, *M. leprae* infection abolished LPS-induced HSL mRNA and protein levels (Fig. 4G vs. E and H vs. F, respectively). These results suggest that lipolysis is activated by TLR activation. However, infection of live *M. leprae* inhibits the TLR-mediated increase of HSL expression despite the fact that PGN is actually a component of the *M. leprae* cell wall. Therefore, *M. leprae* could potentially activate a hitherto unrecognized TLR-independent pathway that results in inhibition of TLR-mediated HSL activation in order to prevent the degradation of lipids in infected phagosomes.

3.4. Appearance of HSL mRNA in slit-skin smears correlates with clinical course of leprosy

All of the *in vitro* studies described herein indicated that *M. leprae* infection decreases HSL expression, which may correlate with the maintenance of a lipid-rich environment within the phagosome. To examine HSL expression in the skin lesions of leprosy patients, HSL mRNA levels were evaluated in slit-skin smear specimens by RT-PCR analysis. HSL mRNA was not detected in the five lepromatous leprosy (LL) patients nor in four out of seven borderline lepromatous leprosy (BL) patients, but was clearly detected in two of these patients (Fig. 5A, cases 8 and 12).

Interestingly, these two cases, whose HSL mRNA levels were clearly detectable, exhibited a 'type 1 lepra reaction (or upgrading reaction)' after treatment (at one year for case 8 and three months for case 12), which is thought to be a cell-mediated, delayed-type of hypersensitivity immune response.

We also analyzed slit-skin smear samples from four patients who received MDT treatment, which consisted of diaphenylsulfone, clofazimine and rifampicin, as per WHO protocol. While HSL mRNA was not detected before treatment, HSL expression was induced (or recovered) after MDT treatment in all four cases (Fig. 5B). These results indicate that HSL expression is significantly suppressed following *M. leprae* infection in LL and BL patients; however, it reappeared in untreated patients who might have a potentially active immune response to *M. leprae* and in those whose bactericidal activity is enhanced by effective treatment.

4. Discussion

In this report, we first demonstrated that *M. leprae* suppresses the expression of HSL mRNA and protein in infected macrophages. Only live *M. leprae* could sustain suppressed levels of HSL, although phagocytosis itself only transiently decreased HSL levels. This situation is quite similar to the induction of lipid droplet-associated proteins, ADRP and perilipin, in macrophages infected with *M. leprae* as previously reported [9]. In that study, only live *M. leprae* infection could induce and maintain high expression levels of ADRP and perilipin. The present study provides another mechanism by

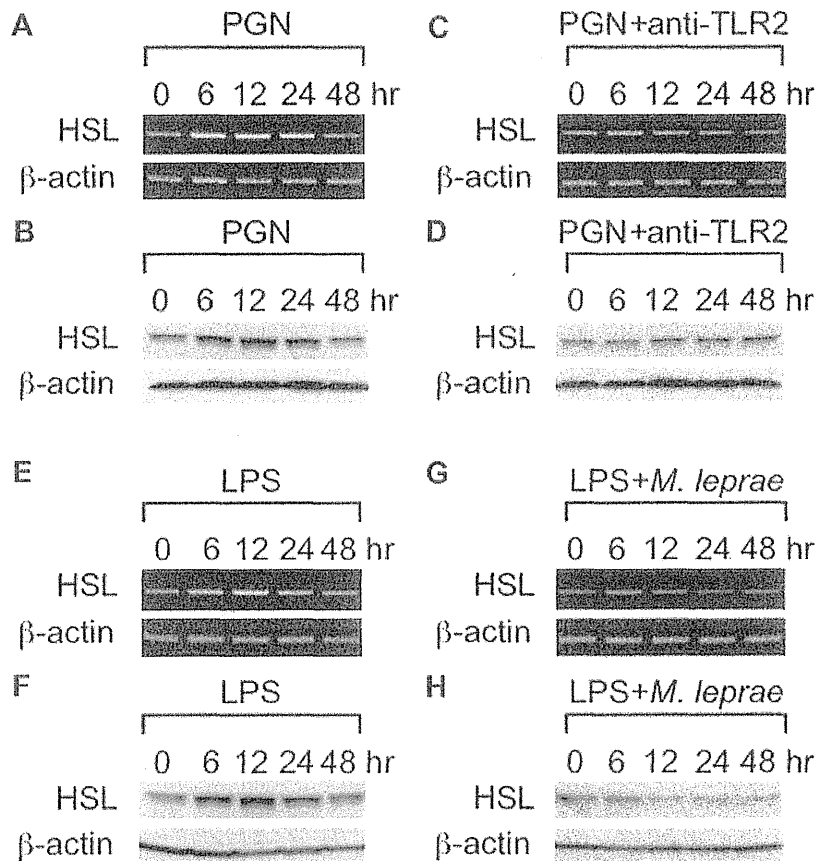


Fig. 4. TLR-mediated increase of HSL expression and its suppression by *M. leprae* infection. THP-1 cells were cultured in a six-well plate and treated with PGN (A and B), PGN plus TLR2 neutralizing antibody (C and D) or LPS (E and F) or LPS plus *M. leprae* (G and H). After incubating for the indicated time, mRNA expression or protein levels of HSL were evaluated by RT-PCR analysis (A, C, E and G) and Western blot analysis (B, D, F and H).

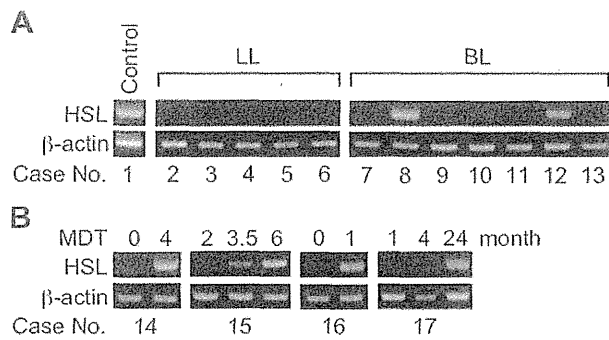


Fig. 5. Detection of HSL mRNA in slit-skin smear samples from leprosy patients. RNA was isolated from slit-skin smear specimens taken from five LL patients and seven BL patients for RT-PCR analysis (A). Cases 8 and 12 developed type 1 lepra reactions after MDT treatment. RNA isolated from four BL patients before and after MDT for the indicated period of time, was also used for RT-PCR analysis (B). The control sample was obtained from patients with skin granulomas where *M. leprae* was not found.

which *M. leprae* maintains host cell lipids, namely by suppressing their degradation.

Activation of the TLR signaling pathway by PGN increased HSL expression, indicating that activation of the innate immune response may induce lipid degradation that makes it difficult for *M. leprae* to survive within infected phagosomes. *M. leprae* infection not only suppressed HSL expression, but also inhibited the ability of PGN to increase HSL expression. We previously showed that PGN suppresses expression of ADRP and perilipin, and also significantly reduces expression of CORO1A, also known as tryptophan aspartate-containing coat protein (TACO), which contributes to the inhibition of lysosomal fusion and accounts for the survival of bacilli [9,16,17]. *M. leprae* infection invalidates all of these effects of PGN and thus maintains levels of CORO1A, ADRP and perilipin, and reduces HSL expression, thus ensuring a favorable phagosome environment for itself. These results showing that *M. leprae* and PGN, a cell wall component of *M. leprae*, have quite different effects are somewhat contradictory. It is plausible to speculate that some *M. leprae* components can activate a pathway that counteracts TLR signaling.

Suppression of HSL, in addition to the induction and phagosomal translocation of ADRP/perilipin and CORO1A, would reduce degradation of stored lipids, thereby maintaining the lipid-rich environment in the parasitized phagosome where *M. leprae* lives. *M. leprae* possesses only a small number of functional genes, which likely makes it difficult for the bacilli to survive without relying on host cell metabolism [14–16,22]. Therefore, *M. leprae* may regulate the expression of host genes that accumulate and maintain cellular lipids in order to utilize them as an essential nutrient for survival. Recent studies suggest that *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (*M. tuberculosis*) persists within lipid-rich foamy phagosomes, while its translocation into the cytosol may relate to caseation and virulence [23–27]. Therefore, intracellular lifestyle and lipid requirements might differ substantially between *M. tuberculosis* and *M. leprae*, partly reflecting the massive gene decay in *M. leprae* [22]. Whether the small lipid droplets seen in *M. leprae*-infected cells (Fig. 1B) fuse with phagosomes containing *M. leprae* is still to be determined.

There was once debate over whether the lipids originate from *M. leprae* cell wall components or from the host [28,29]. It was suggested that lipids and fatty acids were important carbon sources for *M. leprae* in infected macrophages where the oxygen tension gradient is low [30]. It is now known that mycobacteria induce the accumulation of 1-palmitoyl-2-(5,6-epoxyisopropane E2)-sn-glycero-3-phosphorylcholine (PEIPC), a host-derived oxidized phospholipid, and is similar to the formation of foamy cells found in atherosclerotic lesions [31,32]. Of interest, *M. tuberculosis* has

a large number of proteins involved in lipid metabolism, including at least one HSL family protein. However, *M. leprae* seems to have a small number of such genes, and no HSL-like genes were identified (<http://genolist.pasteur.fr/Leproma/>).

The lipid degradation process in adipocytes involves both HSL and perilipin [33]. Both are polyphosphorylated by protein kinase A (PKA), and phosphorylation of perilipin is required for the translocation of HSL from the cytosol to the surface of the lipid droplet, which is a critical step in the lipolytic reaction [34]. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that both perilipin and comparative gene identification-58 (CGI-58) protein act as scaffold proteins on lipid droplets in adipocytes [35]. We demonstrated that live *M. leprae* not only suppresses HSL protein expression, but that it also phosphorylates two serine residues, Ser⁵⁶³ and Ser⁵⁶⁵, which are essential for its action. HSL expression is modulated by energy level changes in a variety of situations, such as obesity [36], type 2 diabetes mellitus [37] and in cultured adipocytes [38,39]. However, there have been no reports that pathogenic microorganisms have the ability to modulate HSL expression. Since *M. tuberculosis* and *Mycobacterium avium* utilize host lipids [40,41], our finding may highlight an important mechanism by which these bacteria interact and modify host gene expression. Phosphorylation of HSL occurs at multiple sites, including Ser⁵⁶³, which is believed to be mutually exclusive with phosphorylation of HSL at the non-PKA site Ser⁵⁶⁵ [19,20]. Therefore, the observed decrease of HSL phosphorylation might be due to down-regulation of PKA or induction of a non-functional kinase following infection with *M. leprae*.

HSL expression was not detected in slit-skin smear samples from any of the LL patients and most of the BL patients examined in this study. Two BL patients who showed detectable levels of HSL mRNA developed a type 1 lepra (or reversal) reaction, which is thought to be a Th1-type cellular immune response and is characterized by an acute inflammatory reaction that causes worsening of skin lesions, neuritis and other systemic complications that occur in patients who are immunologically unstable [42]. Therefore, the increase in HSL expression detected in untreated BL patients is potentially activation of an immune reaction. The lepra reaction is one of the major problems faced by clinicians during treatment, and there is currently no method of predicting this critical side effect of treatment. Our observation suggests that detecting HSL mRNA in slit-skin smear samples from untreated patients could potentially be a reliable, convenient and minimally invasive procedure by which to predict possible occurrence of the type 1 lepra reaction. In addition, MDT treatment results in a rapid induction of HSL expression. Consequently, HSL expression levels after MDT treatment might also be a marker for treatment efficacy without the need for complicated tests to evaluate drug resistance of the bacilli. Although early diagnosis and appropriate treatment provide a complete cure, delays in diagnosis and treatment result in severe deformities and disabilities. Therefore, evaluation of HSL levels from slit-skin smear samples may be a simple and accurate method for clinical examination. In both cases, however, analysis of more clinical samples is needed to validate the clinical usefulness of this metric.

In conclusion, we have shown that *M. leprae* infection suppresses host HSL expression, which helps to retain the lipid-rich environment necessary for the survival of the pathogen within the phagosome. In addition, the measurement of HSL expression from slit-skin smears may be a useful diagnostic tool for patient prognosis.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science

and Technology of Japan (K.S. and N.I.) and by a Grant-in-Aid for Research on Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare of Japan (K.S. and N.I.).

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CASE REPORT

***Mycobacterium shigaense* sp. nov., a novel slowly growing scotochromogenic mycobacterium that produced nodules in an erythroderma patient with severe cellular immunodeficiency and a history of Hodgkin's disease**

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ABSTRACT

A novel slow-growing scotochromogenic mycobacterium was isolated from skin biopsies from a patient with a history of Hodgkin's disease and severe cellular immunodeficiency as an opportunistic pathogen. Clinical characterization of these lesions revealed papules and nodules with pathological granuloma formation. Genotypic analysis using 16S rRNA misidentified this isolate as *Mycobacterium simiae*. However, multiple gene analysis using the internal transcribed spacer between the 16S and 23S rRNA genes, and the *rpoB* and *hsp65* genes revealed the presence of a novel mycobacterium. The antimicrobial susceptibility of this isolate was completely different from that of *M. simiae*. On the basis of these findings, we propose naming this new species *Mycobacterium shigaense* sp. nov., and conclude that multiple gene analysis is required for the appropriate diagnosis and treatment of non-tuberculous mycobacterial infections.

Key words: cellular immunodeficiency, *Mycobacterium shigaense* sp. nov., non-tuberculous mycobacteria, opportunistic infection.

INTRODUCTION

Non-tuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) have been well recognized as causative agents of human diseases. Recently, a number of new species have been added to the NTM. Some of these cause opportunistic infections in immunocompromised patients, not only those with AIDS, but also non-AIDS associated infections. Here, we report an additional new species of mycobacterium that caused cutaneous infection occurring as an opportunistic infection.

CASE REPORT

A 55-year-old Japanese male with a history of treatment of neck-oriented Hodgkin's disease in 2000, presented with erythema accompanied by generalized itching in 2005. The lesion persisted and worsened after treatment with a low dose of oral corticosteroids, resulting in erythroderma and scattered cutaneous nodules on the body trunk in 2007. On physical examination, he presented with itchy erythema over more than 90% of the total body surface (erythroderma) (Fig. 1a); scattered nodules on his chest, back and extremities (Fig. 1b); and multiple papules (Fig. 1c) on his back. He

also presented with high-grade fever and slight lymphadenopathy of the neck and axilla. Cytomegalovirus (CMV) retinitis was diagnosed by ophthalmologists and several positive values of CMV antigen were detected at the end stage. His symptoms progressed, and after 2008 he was treated with ganciclovir or valganciclovir. Laboratory tests showed elevated levels of white blood cells ($10.2 \times 10^3/\text{mm}^3$; normal range [NR], $3.0\text{--}8.0 \times 10^3$) composed of 79.8% segmented neutrophils (NR, 40–74), 3.9% eosinophils (NR, 0–7), 11% lymphocytes (NR, 15–48) and 0% atypical lymphocytes, lactate dehydrogenase (295 IU/L; NR, 100–210), C-reactive protein (1.9 mg/dL; NR, <0.3), immunoglobulin E (188 498 IU/mL; NR, <400) and soluble interleukin-2 receptor (7470 U/mL; NR, 135–483). The platelet counts, liver and renal functions, serum immunoglobulin levels, complement values and angiotensin-converting enzyme were all within normal ranges. Antibodies against human T-lymphotropic virus-1 and HIV-1 were negative. Phenotypic analysis of peripheral lymphocytes revealed an increase in CD3 (95%; NR, 60–78%), T-cell receptors (TCR)- $\alpha\beta$ (94%) and $-\gamma\delta$ (1%), CD4 (93%; NR, 28–47) CD8 (3%; NR, 25–42) and CD19 (1%; NR, 6–16). Southern blot of peripheral lymphocytes revealed no monoclonal band. A tuberculin skin test for purified protein derivative was

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Received 24 April 2011; accepted 21 June 2011.

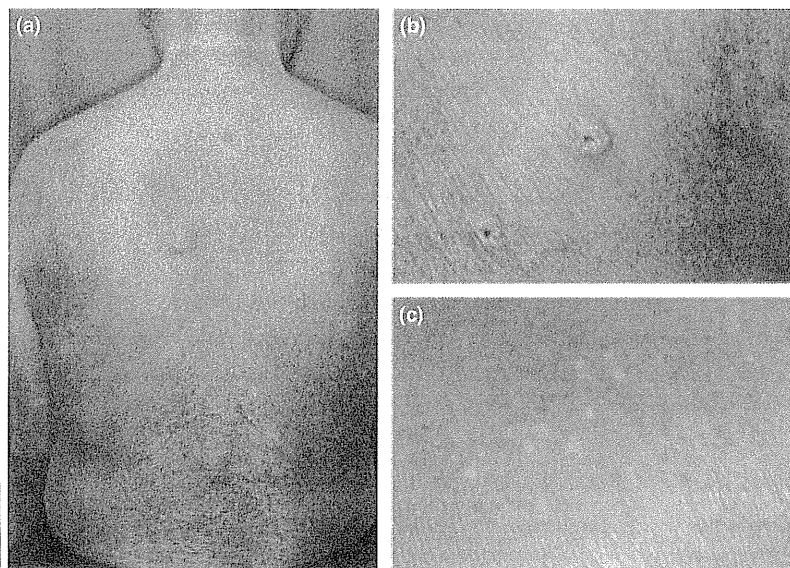


Figure 1. (a) Itchy erythema covered more than 90% of the body surface. (b) Scattered cutaneous nodules on the trunk. (c) Multiple papules on the back.

negative. A systemic investigation using computed tomography, endoscopy and Gallium scintigraphy revealed no abnormalities or internal malignancies, including a recurrence of Hodgkin's disease.

Skin biopsies were taken from the erythema, nodules and papules. A biopsy specimen from the erythema showed only lymphocytic infiltration (primarily CD4 T cells) around superficial dermal vessels (Fig. 2a). The lymphocytes were histologically normal, and Southern blot analysis of the biopsy specimen revealed no monoclonal band. The papules were histologically diagnosed as molluscum contagiosum (MC), because numerous basophilic inclusion bodies were observed in keratinocytes which located in the upper dermis. The nodular lesions showed dense infiltration of histiocytes in the superficial dermis, which formed granulomatous lesions (Fig. 2b). Ziehl-Neelsen staining of repeated biopsy specimens from these nodules showed multiple copies of banded acid-fast bacilli (Fig. 2c).

From these findings, we initially diagnosed an opportunistic mycobacterium infection in a patient of cellular immunodeficiency and administrated 400 mg of oral clarithromycin and 400 mg of isoniazid daily. The nodules improved within a few weeks. Multiple biopsies and histological investigations with Ziehl-Neelsen staining failed to detect any bacilli. The medicines were administrated for 12 months. New lesions of MC sometimes occurred after cessation of drug therapy, but no nodules were found. Oral prednisolone was administrated for the erythroderma. The erythroderma often recurred after healing of the mycobacterial infection, but because none of the skin biopsies from the erythroderma and peripheral blood showed atypical cells, the origin of the erythroderma is unknown.

While oral corticosteroids were effective, a daily low dose was needed to control the erythroderma. In October 2009, he complained of abdominal pain. At the time, he was almost blind due to CMV retinitis. Computed tomography showed a mass in the small

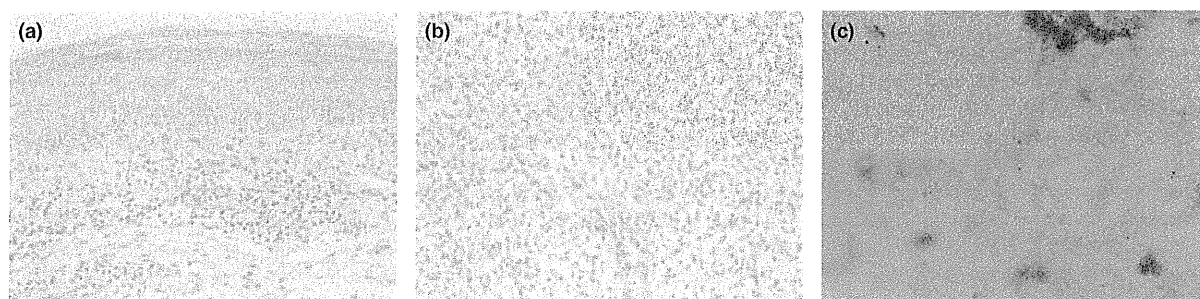


Figure 2. (a) Histological examination of erythema. Lymphocytic infiltration around superficial dermal vessels (hematoxylin-eosin [HE], original magnification $\times 100$). (b) Histological examination of nodular lesions. Dense infiltrated histiocytes formed granulomatous lesions in the dermis (HE, $\times 200$). (c) Ziehl-Neelsen staining of a skin biopsy from a nodule (oil immersion, $\times 1000$).

intestine and perforation of the gastrointestinal tract. Although a surgical resection of the mass in the small intestine was performed, he died of sepsis in November 2009. An autopsy was not performed. However, a histopathological examination of the mass revealed dense atypical lymphocytic infiltration without Hodgkin's cells, and Southern blot analysis showed a monoclonal band of TCR- $\alpha\beta$ cells. Therefore, we concluded that he died not of a recurrence of Hodgkin's disease, but of non-Hodgkin T-cell lymphoma (NHL) with severe immunodeficiency.

A skin biopsy from the nodules confirmed multiple copies of acid-fast bacilli with Ziehl-Neelsen staining, although polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests targeting *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, *Mycobacterium avium*, *Mycobacterium intracellulare* and *Mycobac-*

terium leprae were all negative. The sequencing and genotypic analysis of DNA from the biopsy specimens using the first one-third of the 16S rRNA gene showed the highest similarities to *Mycobacterium simiae* (99.54% identity with a 2-bp difference) and *Mycobacterium interjectum* (98.61% identity with a 6-bp difference) when compared with the Ribosomal Differentiation of Micro-organisms (RIDOM) database.¹

The mycobacterium was isolated from the skin biopsy using the BBL MGIT tube (Becton Dickinson, Franklin Lakes, NJ, USA) and designated *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152. Phenotypic characteristics were analyzed after sub-culturing on 2% Ogawa egg slant medium (Table 1).² The strain was scotochromogenic with an intense yellow color in both light and dark conditions and had a banded appearance after Ziehl-Neelsen staining (Fig. 3), however, usual strains of *M. simiae* are photochromogenic. The strain was slow-growing, had a smooth colonial morphology, and was positive for 3-day arylsulfatase activity, 68°C and semi-quantitative catalase activity

Table 1. Phenotypic differentiation between isolate *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 and genotypically similar species of mycobacteria

Characteristics	Isolate UN152 of <i>Mycobacterium</i> sp.	<i>Mycobacterium simiae</i> ATCC 25275 ^T	<i>Mycobacterium interjectum</i> ATCC 51457 ^T
Growth [†] in 7 days	+	+	+
Growth [†] at:			
25°C	+	+	+
30°C	+	+	+
37°C	+	+	+
42°C	-	+	-
Colony morphology	Smooth	Smooth	Smooth
Colony pigmentation			
In the dark	+	-	+
Photoactivity	-	+	-
Growth [†] supplemented with:			
PNB (500 µg/mL)	+	+	+
NaCl (5%)	+	+	+
TCH (1 µg/mL)	+	+	+
TCH (10 µg/mL)	+	+	+
Iron uptake	-	-	-
Niacin	-	+	-
Tween-80 hydrolysis (5, 10 days)	-	-	-
Urease	+	+	+
Nitrate reduction	-	-	-
Semi-quantitative catalase	+	+	+
68°C catalase	+	+	+
Arylsulfatase (3 day)	+	-	-
Pyrazinamidase	+	+	+
MPB64 production	-	-	-

[†]Bacterial growth was examined on 2% Ogawa slants.

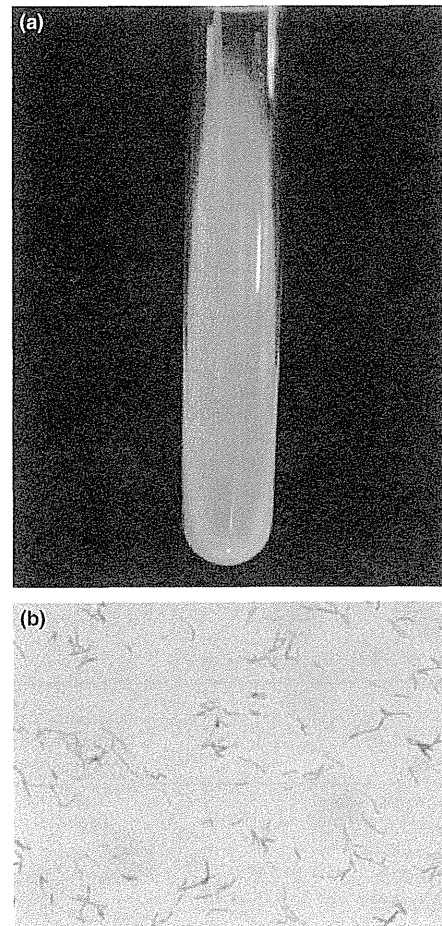


Figure 3. (a) Scotochromogenic colonies of *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 sub-cultured on 2% Ogawa egg medium. (b) Ziehl-Neelsen staining of *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 sub-cultured on 2% Ogawa egg medium (oil immersion, $\times 1000$).

and urease activity, but was negative for niacin activity, which suggested that this isolate was phenotypically different from *M. simiae*.

DNA–DNA hybridization to identify the species (DDH Mycobacteria Kyokuto Pharmaceutical Industrial, Tokyo, Japan) produced no matches with any of the 18 mycobacteria species included in the panel with *M. simiae*.³ Further genotypic analysis was performed in an attempt to identify this isolate. Sequence analysis targeting fragments of the 16S rRNA gene, the internal transcribed spacer between the 16S and 23S rRNA genes (ITS region), and the *rpoB* and *hsp65* genes was performed (Table 2). Amplified PCR products were sequenced using an ABI Prism 310 PCR Genetic Analyzer (Applied

Biosystems, Foster City, CA).⁸ The sequences of isolate UN-152 were compared to those from the *M. simiae* (ATCC25275^T) type strain and the *M. simiae* clinical isolate 51808 from Japan.⁹ We also performed a similarity search using BLAST to find identical and/or closely-related species of mycobacteria.¹⁰ Phylogenetic analyses were performed using the neighbor joining method with Kimura's two-parameter distance correction model with 1000 bootstrap replications in the MEGA version 4.0.2 (Build#: 4028) software package.¹¹

The sequence of the first one-third of the 16S rRNA gene from a sub-culture was identical with that from the previously examined skin biopsy. There were only four sites of a point difference between the sequence of UN-152 and that of *M. simiae* (99.7%

Table 2. Primers used in this study

Primer	Sequence	Target (amplified fragment size)	Reference
8F16S	5'-AGAGTTTGATCCTGGCTCAG-3'	16S rRNA gene (~1500 bp)	4
1047R16S	5'-TGCACACAGGCCACAAGGGA-3'		
830F16S	5'-GTGTGGGTTTCCTTCCTTG-3'		
1542R16S	5'-AAGGAGGTGATCCAGCCGCA-3'		
ITSF	5'-TTGTACACACCGCCCGTC-3'	16S-23S ITS region (~340 bp)	5
ITSR	5'-TCTCGATGCCAAGGCATCCACC-3'		
MF	5'-CGACCACTTCGGCAACCG-3'	<i>rpoB</i> gene (351 bp)	6
MR	5'-TCGATCGGGCACATCCGG-3'		
TB11	5'-ACCAACGATGGTGTGCCAT-3'	<i>hsp65</i> gene (441 bp)	7
TB12	5'-CTTGTCGAACCGCATACCCT-3'		

Table 3. DNA sequence similarities between isolate *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 and highly similar species of mycobacteria

Species [†]	% identity			
	16S rRNA (1471 bp)	ITS (280 bp)	<i>rpoB</i> (315 bp)	<i>hsp65</i> (401 bp)
<i>Mycobacterium</i> sp. UN-152	100	100	100	100
<i>Mycobacterium simiae</i> ATCC 25275 ^T	99.7	88.4	90.2	94.0
<i>M. simiae</i> 051808	99.7	88.4	90.8	94.0
<i>Mycobacterium sherrisii</i> ATCC BAA-832 ^T	99.5	ND	ND#	93.0
<i>Mycobacterium triplex</i> ATCC 700071 ^T	99.1	85.7	ND	94.3
<i>Mycobacterium cookii</i> CIP 105396 ^T	ND	ND	95.9	93.3

[†]Sequence data (accession number in parenthesis) of three species were taken from database: *M. sherrisii* (AY353699, AY365190), *M. triplex* (U57632, GQ153291, AF334028) and *M. cookii* (AF547824, AY544904). #Not determined.

Table 4. Antibiotic susceptibility tests

Antibiotics	Minimal inhibitory concentration (μg/mL)		
	Isolate UN152 of <i>Mycobacterium</i> sp.	<i>Mycobacterium</i> <i>simiae</i> isolate	<i>M. simiae</i> (ATCC 25275 ^T)
Streptomycin (SM)	8	16	4
Ethambutol (EB)	>128	32	44
Kanamycin (KM)	4	8	4
Isoniazid (INH)	>32	32	4
Rifampicin (REF)	0.03	>32	>32
Levofloxacin (LVFX)	0.5	2	1
Clarithromycin (CAM)	1	8	2
Ethionamide (TH)	>16	4	4
Amikacin (AMK)	4	8	4

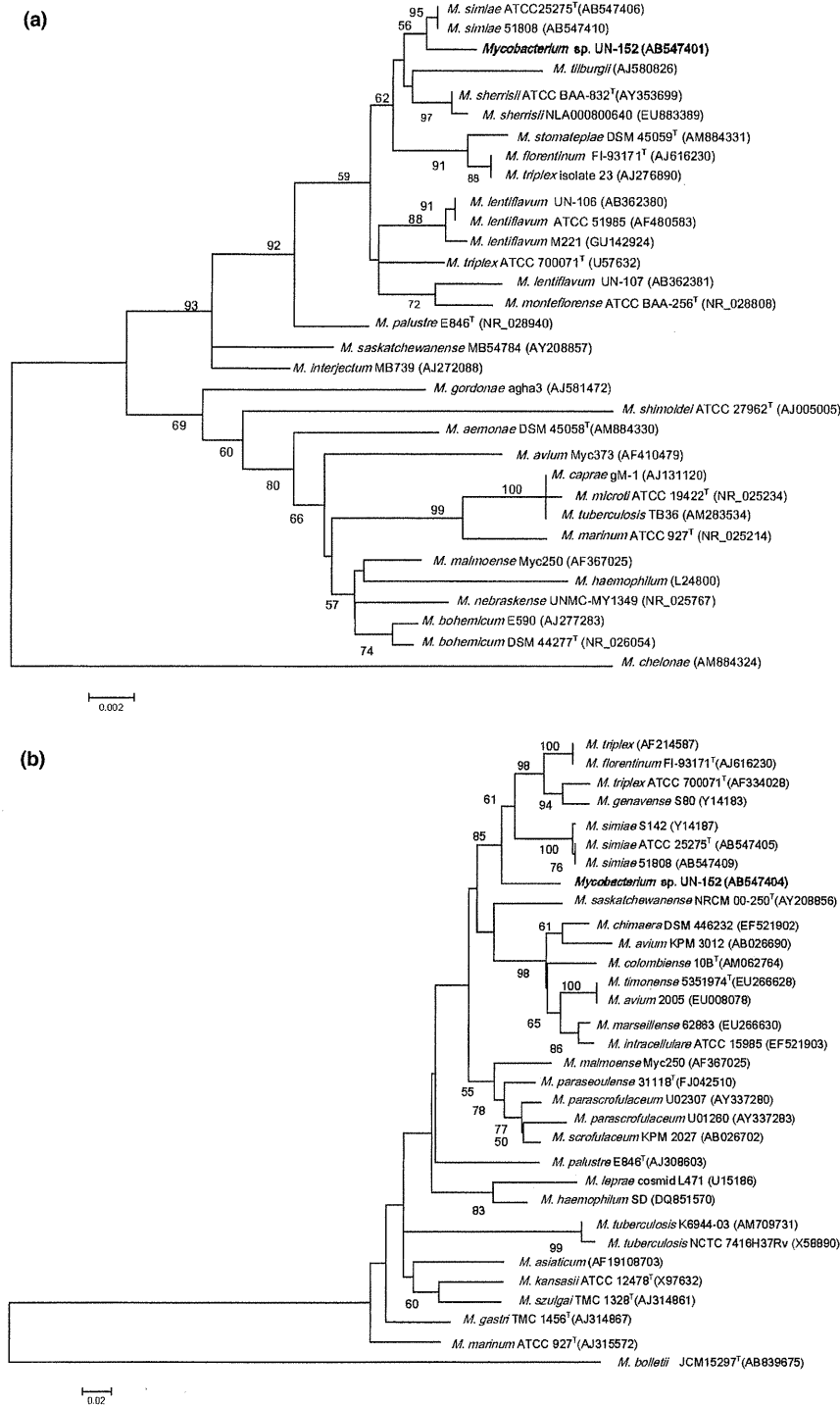


Figure 4. (a) Phylogenetic position of *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 (bold font) based on 1471 bp of the 16S rRNA gene. The percentages at the nodes represent bootstrap levels (values of <50% are not shown). The scale bar represents differences in nucleotide sequences. (b) Phylogenetic position of *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 (bold font) based on 280 bp of the 16S-23S rRNA ITS region. (c) Phylogenetic position of *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 (bold font) based on 315 bp of the *rpoB* gene. (d) Phylogenetic position of *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 (bold font) based on 401 bp of the *hsp65* gene.

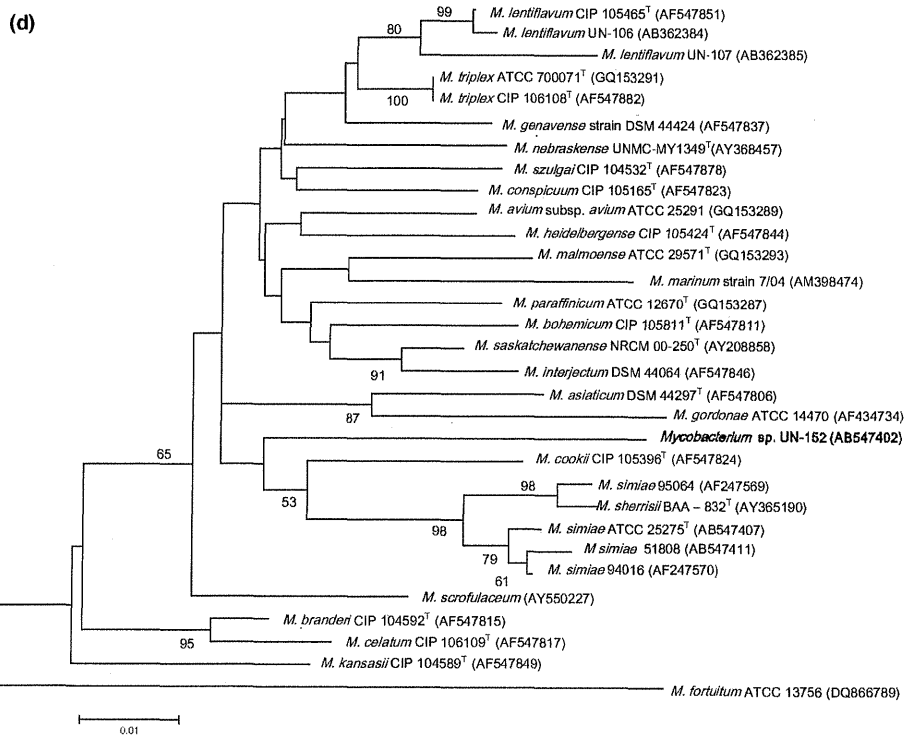
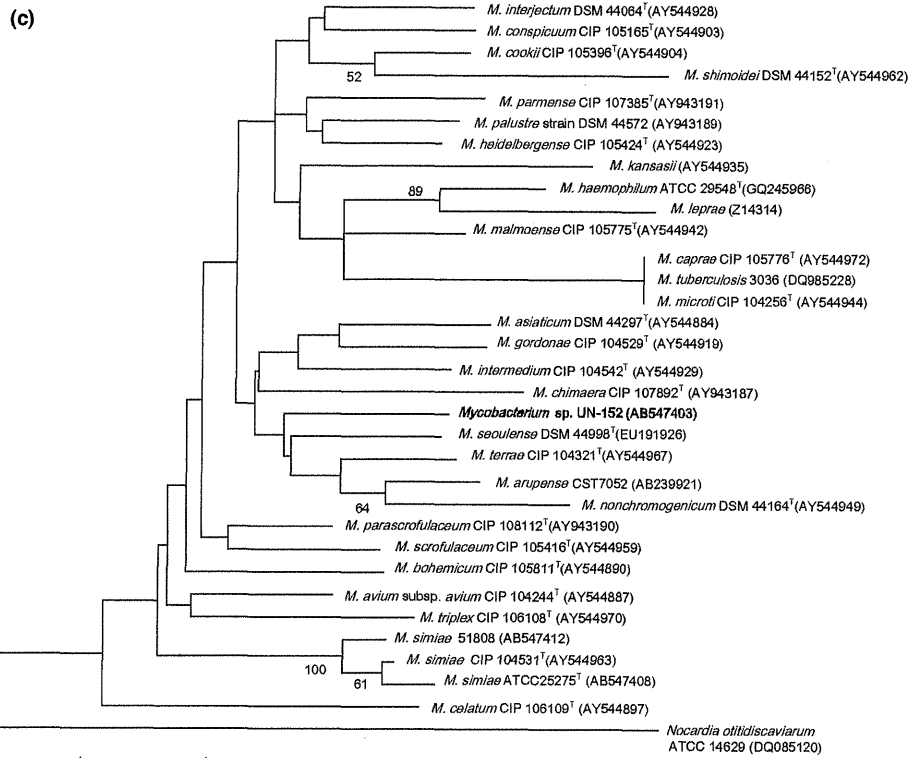


Figure 4. (Continued).

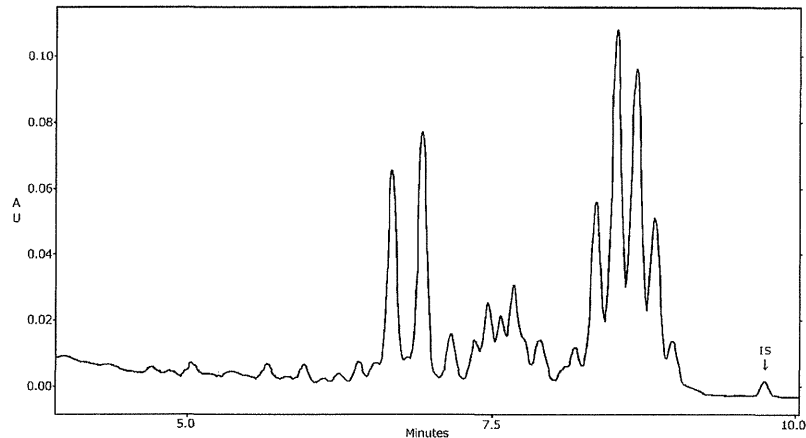


Figure 5. Mycolic acid analysis in *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 using high-performance liquid chromatography. IS, high molecular mass internal standard.

identity) when compared to almost all portions of the 16S rRNA gene (1471 bp). In contrast, the sequence identity of the ITS region was only 88.4% between UN-152 and the *M. simiae*. *Mycobacterium cookii* revealed the highest similarity (95.9% identity) in the *rpoB* gene while *M. simiae* showed only 90.2–90.8% identities. *Mycobacterium triplex* exhibited the highest similarity in the *hsp65* gene (94.3% identity) while *M. simiae* was 94.0% similar (Table 3). However, there was no single mycobacterium species that showed the highest similarity across these four gene fragments, which suggested that this clinical isolate, *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152, was a novel mycobacterium (Fig. 4).

Table 4 shows the results of antimicrobial susceptibility tests against *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152, and the two strains of *M. simiae* (BrothMIC NTM; Kyokuto Pharmaceutical Industrial). *Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152 was highly susceptible to rifampicin and exhibited good susceptibility to clarithromycin and levofloxacin. Conversely, the minimal inhibitory concentration of rifampicin to *M. simiae* reference and clinical strains was more than 32 µg/mL, demonstrating that the antimicrobial susceptibility profile of the unknown isolate was different from that of *M. simiae*. The sequences obtained from the multiple gene analysis of the unknown clinical isolate (*Mycobacterium* sp. UN-152) and the *M. simiae* reference strains (ATCC25275^T and 51808) were deposited into the International Nucleotide Sequence Databases (INSD) through the DNA Databank of Japan (DDBJ)¹² under the accession numbers AB547401 to AB547412.

Finally, high-performance liquid chromatography of mycolic acid methyl esters was performed according to the CDC guidelines.¹³ The pattern of bromophenacyl esters of mycolic acids can be used as an alternative method of discrimination of mycobacteria. The chromatographs revealed a representative profile characterized by three late clusters of peaks grossly resembling *M. simiae* or *Mycobacterium lentiflavum* (Fig. 5).¹⁴

DISCUSSION

Based on colony morphology, this clinical isolate may belong to NTM Runyon II. Because a slow-growing mycobacterium has a long

culture time, the genotypic analysis of clinical samples would enable rapid diagnosis and treatment.^{8,15} Genotypic analysis using the 16S rRNA gene is now contributing to diagnostics as an identification methodology for novel NTM.¹⁶ In this case, the result of 16S rRNA gene sequences strongly suggested that *M. simiae* was the etiological strain; however, the identification was not supported by the scotochromogenic colony morphology and negative niacin accumulation. Additional sequence analysis targeting the ITS region and the *rpoB* and *hsp65* genes suggested the different species of mycobacteria, leading to the discovery of a novel NTM. We propose naming this new species *Mycobacterium shigaense* sp. nov.

Some species of recently registered mycobacteria may be of dubious clinical significance.¹⁶ This isolate was determined to be clinically significant and not an environmental contaminant because: (i) it was isolated from multiple nodules, not from the erythema; (ii) the nodules improved after treatment with clarithromycin and isoniazid; and (iii) the isolate was no longer detectable once the nodules improved, a result which was repeatedly confirmed histologically. Unfortunately we could not know the source of this mycobacterium infection from medical interview.

In this case, MC infection was frequently seen in the trunk, CMV retinitis was diagnosed and treated for several months, and finally NHL was diagnosed. These findings were indicative of a significant cellular immunity deficiency because MC, CMV and NHL are frequently found in advanced AIDS patients with significant cellular immunodeficiency.^{17–19} We propose that the decrease of peripheral CD8 T cells and the history of Hodgkin's disease resulted in severe immunodeficiency and that the cutaneous *M. shigaense* infection occurred as an opportunistic infection.

The genotypes obtained from a skin biopsy and subculture were identical, suggesting that the bacterium is responsible for the multiple nodules. In addition to the clinical significance, this case shows the insufficiency of single 16S rRNA gene analysis. Multiple gene analysis would be required to identify the species of mycobacteria.²⁰ This species has been never reported, but may have been previously misidentified as *M. simiae*. Because *M. shigaense* and *M. simiae* differ significantly in their susceptibility to rifampicin,

clinicians must differentiate the two isolates in terms of the treatment. Therefore, multiple gene analysis that includes the ITS region and *rpoB* and *hsp65* genes is required for the appropriate treatment and diagnosis of NTM.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to Dr Tatsuo Kato (Nagara Medical Center) for giving us a clinical isolate of *Mycobacterium simiae* 51808. This work was supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Research on Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan to Y. H., M. M. and N. I. and by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan to Y. H.

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Critical role of AIM2 in *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection

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Received 1 March 2012, accepted 9 April 2012

Abstract

Absent in melanoma 2 (AIM2) is a sensor of cytosolic DNA that is responsible for activation of the inflammasome and host immune responses to DNA viruses and intracellular bacteria. However, the role of AIM2 in host defenses against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is unknown. Here, we show that AIM2-deficient mice were highly susceptible to intratracheal infection with *M. tuberculosis* and that this was associated with defective IL-1 β and IL-18 production together with impaired T_H1 responses. Macrophages from AIM2-deficient mice infected with *M. tuberculosis* showed severely impaired secretion of IL-1 β and IL-18 as well as activation of the inflammasome, determined by caspase-1 cleavage. Genomic DNA extracted from *M. tuberculosis* (Mtb DNA) induced caspase-1 activation and IL-1 β /IL-18 secretion in an AIM2-dependent manner. Mtb DNA, which was present in the cytosol, co-localized with AIM2. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that AIM2 plays an important role in *M. tuberculosis* infection through the recognition of Mtb DNA.

Keywords: host defense, inflammasome, macrophages

Introduction

Tuberculosis is caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and is a serious disease worldwide causing about 2 million deaths each year. The risk of disease is increased by the emergence of acquired immune deficiency syndrome and multidrug-resistant mycobacteria (1). *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* mainly invades and parasitizes macrophages by inhibiting phagosome maturation into phagolysosomes. Macrophages have several recognition systems to defend against mycobacterial invasion. Toll-like receptors (TLRs) recognize mycobacterial components such as glycolipids and CpG motif DNA (2–4). Several recent findings have also indicated that pattern recognition receptors other than TLRs, such as C-type lectin receptors and NOD-like receptors (NLRs), are implicated in the innate recognition of mycobacterial components (5–10). TLRs and C-type lectin receptors are membrane-bound

molecules recognizing mycobacterial components in the extracellular compartments, whereas NLRs are present in the cytosol. Thus, several pattern recognition receptors showing distinct subcellular expression patterns recognize structurally and functionally different components of mycobacteria, contributing to protection by evoking an immune response.

Among the NLR family of proteins, NLR pyrin domain containing 3 (NLRP3) is known to activate the inflammasome, a multi-protein platform leading to the processing of the IL-1 family of cytokines (11–14). NLRP3 inflammasome, which is composed of NLRP3, adaptor protein Apoptosis-associated speck-like protein containing a CARD (ASC) and caspase-1, is activated by mycobacteria (15–18). Following activation, inactive caspase-1 is processed by autocleavage via ASC and is converted into the active form of caspase-1 containing

10 kDa/20 kDa subunits. The active form of caspase-1 then cleaves pro-IL-1 β and pro-IL-18 into mature forms of IL-1 β and IL-18, respectively. The IL-1 family of cytokines, including IL-1 β and IL-18, possess potent pro-inflammatory activities (19–21) and are responsible for the host defense against mycobacteria (22–29). However, several studies suggest that NLRP3 or caspase-1, which mediates the processing of the IL-1 family of cytokines, is not essential for the induction of protective immunity to *M. tuberculosis in vivo* (25, 26, 30–32). Thus, the signaling pathway leading to IL-1 β /IL-18 production in mycobacterial infection remains controversial.

Recent studies identified that AIM2 (absent in melanoma 2), which possesses HIN-200 and pyrin domains, recognizes cytosolic DNA leading to activation of the inflammasome and secretion of IL-1 β and IL-18 (33–36). Several studies have demonstrated that AIM2 is mandatory for the host defense against DNA viruses (Vaccinia virus and mouse cytomegalovirus) and intracellular bacteria (*Francisella tularensis* and *Listeria monocytogenes*) (37–41). However, the role of AIM2-dependent inflammasome activation in mycobacterial infection remains unknown.

In this study, we analyzed the role of AIM2 in mycobacterial infection. AIM2-deficient mice were highly sensitive to *M. tuberculosis* infection. AIM2-deficient macrophages showed impaired activation of the inflammasome and defective production of IL-1 β and IL-18 after *M. tuberculosis* infection. Genomic DNA from *M. tuberculosis* was present within the cytosol after infection and induced activation of the inflammasome in an AIM2-dependent manner. These findings demonstrate the critical role of AIM2 in *M. tuberculosis* infection.

Methods

Mice and bacteria

The *Aim2* gene was isolated from genomic DNA extracted from embryonic stem cells (V6.5) by PCR using Elongase Enzyme Mix (Invitrogen). The targeting vector was constructed by replacing a 2.5-kb fragment encoding the exons of *Aim2* with a neomycin-resistance gene cassette and a herpes simplex virus thymidine kinase gene driven by the PGK promoter for negative selection. After transfection of the targeting vector into embryonic stem cells, colonies resistant to both G418 and ganciclovir were selected and screened by PCR and Southern blot. Homologous recombinants were microinjected into blastocysts of C57BL/6 female mice, and heterozygous F1 progenies were intercrossed to obtain AIM2-deficient mice. AIM2-deficient mice and their wild-type littermates from these intercrosses were used and all animal experiments were conducted with the approval of the Animal Research Committee of the Graduate School of Medicine at Osaka University.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis strain H37Rv (ATCC358121) was grown in Middlebrook 7H9-ADC medium for 2 weeks and stored at -80°C until use.

In vivo infection of mice

Mice were intratracheally infected with *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv (1×10^6 CFU per mouse). At 4 weeks after infection, homogenates of the lungs and livers were plated onto 7H10-OADC agar. For histological analysis, the lungs were fixed with 4% PFA, embedded in paraffin, cut into sections, and stained with hematoxylin and eosin or by the Ziehl–Neelsen method.

Harvest of BALF, blood and cells from tissues

Bronchoalveolar lavage fluid (BALF) was collected from uninfected and infected mice by washing the lung airways with phosphate buffered saline (PBS) at 3 weeks post-infection, and blood was collected from the hearts of uninfected and infected mice. CD4 $^{+}$ T cells (4×10^6 cells) were isolated from the spleens at 3 weeks after infection, and then were stimulated with PPD ($2 \mu\text{g ml}^{-1}$; Japan BCG Laboratory) in the presence of APC (4×10^6 cells) for 48 h.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis genomic DNA extraction

Mycobacterium tuberculosis (1×10^9 CFU) was homogenized with glass beads (0.1 mm; ASONE) and proteins were removed using Phenol/Chloroform/Isoamyl alcohol and Chloroform/Isoamyl alcohol. Genomic DNA was precipitated using isopropanol.

Cell culture and stimulation

Mice were intraperitoneally injected with 4% thioglycollate (Sigma) and 3 days later macrophages were isolated from the peritoneal cavity. Cells were stimulated with LPS (200 ng ml^{-1}) for 3 h and then transfected with poly(dA:dT) (Sigma) or *M. tuberculosis* DNA using Lipofectamine 2000 according to the manufacturer's instructions (Invitrogen). Peritoneal macrophages were infected with *M. tuberculosis* (MOI of 3) for 6 h. Cells were washed three times with PBS and then incubated for 24 h.

ELISA

The concentration of IFN- γ , IL-1 β or IL-12p40 in culture supernatants was measured by ELISA according to the manufacturer's instructions (R&D Systems). The ELISA kit for IL-18 was purchased from Medical & Biological Laboratories.

Immuno-precipitation and immuno-blot analysis

Supernatants were precleared with protein G–Sepharose (GE Healthcare), incubated with anti-caspase-1 p10 rabbit antibody ($2 \mu\text{g}$; Santa Cruz Biotechnology). Cell pellets were lysed in lysis buffer (1% Nonidet P-40, 150 mM NaCl and 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5) and together with the immuno-precipitants, separated on SDS-PAGE and transferred to PVDF membranes (Millipore). The membranes were incubated with anti-caspase-1 p10 antibody (1:200) and anti- β -actin antibody (1:500; Sigma). Bound antibody was detected with SuperSignal West Dura Extended Duration Substrate (Thermo).

Immuno-fluorescence analysis

Mycobacterium tuberculosis genomic DNA was labeled with Hoechst 33342 (100 ng ml^{-1} ; Invitrogen) by incubation for 24 h. Hoechst-labeled *M. tuberculosis* was washed five times with PBS before use. RAW264.7 cells were infected with Hoechst-labeled *M. tuberculosis* (MOI of 3) for 6 h, washed three times with PBS and then incubated for 24 h. Cells were fixed with 4% PFA and permeabilized with 0.4% saponin. The cells were incubated with rabbit anti-Rab7 antibody (1:200; Santa Cruz Biotechnology) or rabbit anti-AIM2 antibody (1:200; Santa Cruz Biotechnology) or rat anti-LAMP1 antibody (1:200; BD Biosciences) for 1 h at room temperature. Cells

were then incubated with Alexa 488 anti-rabbit IgG antibody (Invitrogen) or Alexa 594 anti-rat IgG antibody (Invitrogen) for 40 min at room temperature. The immuno-stained cells were mounted with ProLong Gold antifade reagent (Invitrogen) on glass slides and analyzed using a fluorescence microscope (FV1000-D IX81; Olympus).

Statistical analysis

Differences between control and experimental groups were evaluated using Student's *t* test. Values of *P* < 0.05 were considered to indicate statistical significance.

Results

Aim2^{-/-} mice are highly susceptible to *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection

To assess the *in vivo* role of AIM2, we generated AIM2-deficient mice by gene targeting (Supplementary Figure 1A is available at *International Immunology Online*), which was confirmed by Southern and northern blot analyses (Supplementary Figure 1B and C is available at *International Immunology Online*). *Aim2*^{+/+} mice were born at normal Mendelian ratios, developed normally and showed no apparent abnormalities when housed in our specific pathogen-free facility. Several previous studies demonstrated that AIM2 recognizes cytosolic DNA, leading to caspase-1 activation and subsequent processing of the IL-1 family of cytokines, such as IL-1 β and IL-18 (33–36, 39). Therefore, we first analyzed the response to synthetic B-form double-stranded DNA [poly(dA:dT)] in *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages. Peritoneal macrophages were collected from wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} mice and then transfected with poly(dA:dT) into the cytosol after priming with LPS. In immuno-blot analysis, a 10 kDa active form of caspase-1 (p10) was detected in wild-type macrophages stimulated with poly(dA:dT). In contrast, the cleaved p10 form of caspase-1 was not detected in *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages (Supplementary Figure 2A is available at *International Immunology Online*). In addition, poly(dA:dT)-induced secretion of IL-1 β and IL-18 into the culture supernatants was markedly decreased in *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages, although ATP-induced secretion of IL-1 β was normally observed (Supplementary Figure 2B is available at *International Immunology Online*). Thus, in accordance with previous reports, *Aim2*^{-/-} mice showed defective DNA-induced activation of the inflammasome.

We examined the involvement of AIM2 in mycobacterial infection using these *Aim2*^{-/-} mice. Wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} mice were intratracheally infected with the virulent H37Rv strain of *M. tuberculosis* and monitored for their survival (Fig. 1A). All *M. tuberculosis*-infected wild-type mice survived to at least 8 weeks post-infection. In contrast, all *Aim2*^{-/-} mice died within 7 weeks of infection with *M. tuberculosis*. We also assessed bacterial burdens in the lungs and livers at 4 weeks post-infection (Fig. 1B). Colony-forming unit titers of *M. tuberculosis* in lungs and livers were higher in *Aim2*^{-/-} mice than in wild-type mice. We next performed histological analysis of the lungs of mice at 4 weeks post-infection. Gross appearances of the lungs of wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} mice were markedly different, and many granulomatous changes were evident in *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} mice (Fig. 2A). Hematoxylin and eosin staining

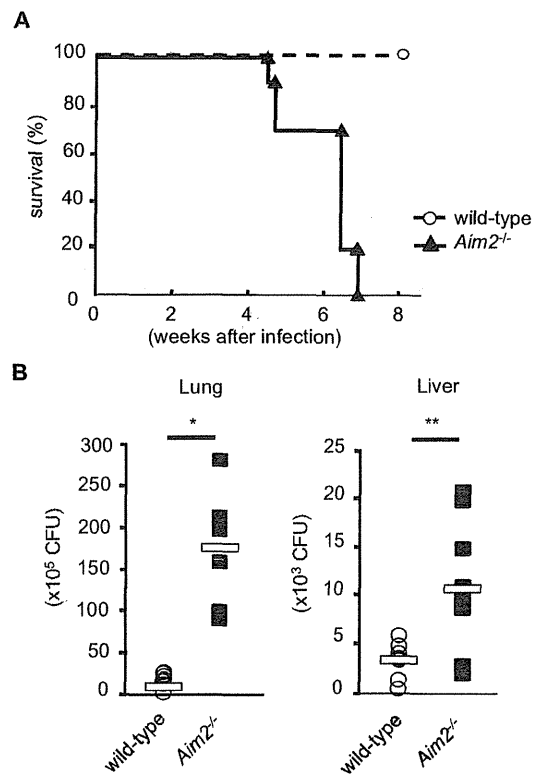


Fig. 1. *Aim2*^{-/-} mice are highly sensitive to infection with *M. tuberculosis*. (A) Wild-type (*n* = 11) and *Aim2*^{-/-} (*n* = 10) mice were intratracheally infected with *M. tuberculosis* and monitored for their survival. (B) Wild-type (*n* = 7) and *Aim2*^{-/-} (*n* = 8) mice were intratracheally infected with *M. tuberculosis*. At 4 weeks after infection, homogenates of the lungs and livers were plated onto 7H10-OADC agar and the CFU titers were counted. Symbols represent individual mice, and bars represent the mean CFU numbers. *, *P* < 0.001; **, *P* < 0.01.

of lung sections from infected *Aim2*^{-/-} mice demonstrated infiltration of many inflammatory cells (Fig. 2B). The number of *M. tuberculosis* in the lungs was measured by staining acid-fast bacilli using the Ziehl–Neelsen method (Fig. 2C). In the lungs of *Aim2*^{-/-} mice, the number of red-stained *M. tuberculosis* was markedly increased compared with those of wild-type mice. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *Aim2*^{-/-} mice are highly susceptible to intratracheal infection with the virulent H37Rv strain of *M. tuberculosis*.

AIM2 mediates IL-1 β /IL-18 production and *T*_h1 responses in *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection

Recent studies demonstrated that IL-1 β is produced from *M. tuberculosis*-infected monocytes and alveolar macrophages mediating the host defense to mycobacteria (22–26, 42). Therefore, we first analyzed the levels of IL-1 β in BALF from *M. tuberculosis*-infected mice (Fig. 3A). At 3 weeks after *M. tuberculosis* infection, IL-1 β was abundantly detected in BALF from wild-type mice. In contrast, the concentration of IL-1 β was profoundly decreased in BALF from *Aim2*^{-/-} mice. In addition to IL-1 β , IL-18 has also been shown to be important for host resistance to mycobacterial infection (27–29). Therefore, we next

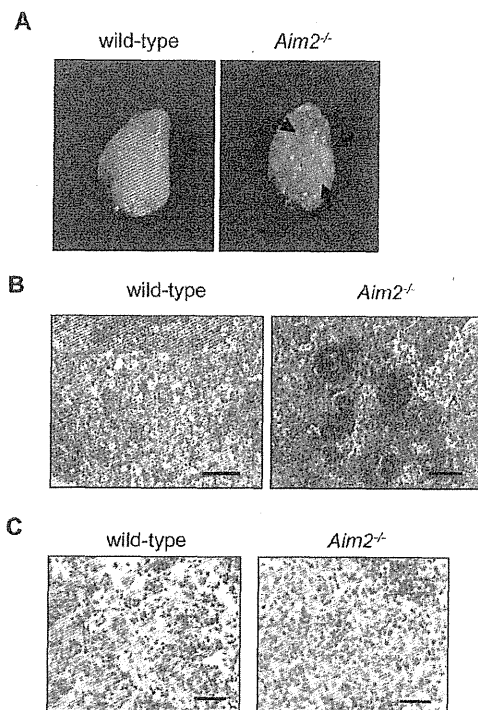


Fig. 2. High susceptibility of *Aim2*^{-/-} mice to infection with *M. tuberculosis*. (A) Lung tissues from wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} mice at 4 weeks post-intratracheal infection with *M. tuberculosis*. Arrows are shown to granulomatous lesion. (B) Lung tissue sections were stained with hematoxylin and eosin. Scale bars represent 100 μ m. (C) Lung tissue sections were stained by the Ziehl-Neelsen method. Scale bars represent 40 μ m.

measured the serum levels of IL-18 in *M. tuberculosis*-infected mice (Fig. 3B). Serum concentration of IL-18 was increased in wild-type mice at 3 weeks post-infection. In contrast, IL-18 was not detected in sera from *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} mice. We also assessed antigen-specific T_h1 responses following infection. CD4⁺ T cells were isolated from the spleens of wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} mice at 4 weeks post-infection and stimulated with a mycobacterial-specific antigen [purified protein derivative (PPD) of *Mycobacterium bovis*] in the presence of antigen-presenting cells (Fig. 3C). PPD stimulation induced marked production of IFN- γ in *M. tuberculosis*-infected wild-type mice. Antigen-specific production of IFN- γ was severely reduced in CD4⁺ T cells derived from *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} mice. These results indicate that the absence of AIM2 results in impaired production of IL-1 β and IL-18 as well as T_h1 responses after *M. tuberculosis* infection.

AIM2 mediates Mycobacterium tuberculosis-induced inflammasome activation

We assessed the activation of caspase-1 to determine how AIM2-dependent immune responses develop following *M. tuberculosis* infection (Fig. 4A). Cleaved p10 form of caspase-1 was detected in *M. tuberculosis*-infected macrophages of wild-type mice. In contrast, cleavage of caspase-1 was severely reduced in *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages.

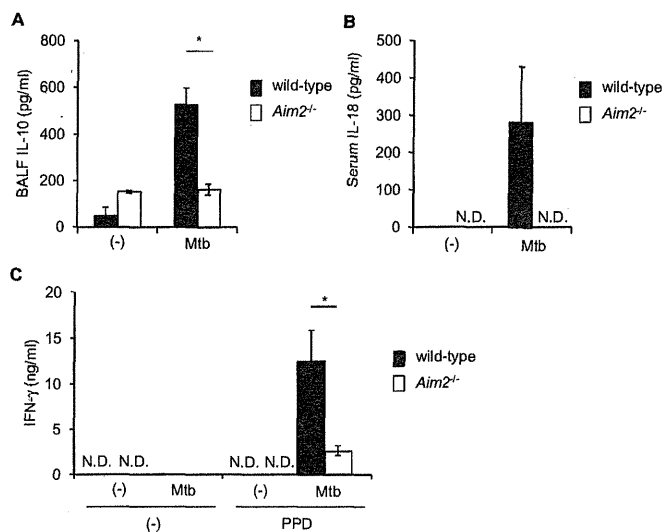


Fig. 3. Impaired production of IL-1 β and IL-18 in *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} mice. (A) BALF was collected from uninfected and infected mice at 3 weeks post-mycobacterial infection. BALF concentration of IL-1 β was measured by ELISA. Data are presented as means \pm SD of triplicate determinants and are one representative of two independent experiments. *, $P < 0.01$. (B) At 3 weeks after mycobacterial infection, sera were collected from uninfected and infected mice. Concentration of IL-18 was measured by ELISA. Data are presented as means \pm SD of triplicate determinants and are one representative of two independent experiments. N.D., not detected. (C) CD4⁺ T cells were isolated from the spleens of *M. tuberculosis*-uninfected and infected mice. The cells were co-cultured with APC for 48 h in the presence of PPD. The levels of IFN- γ in the cell supernatants were measured by ELISA. Data are presented as means \pm SD of triplicate determinants and are one representative of two independent experiments. *, $P < 0.05$. N.D., not detected.

We also analyzed cytokine production in *M. tuberculosis*-infected macrophages. Peritoneal macrophages from wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} mice were infected with *M. tuberculosis* and the levels of cytokines in culture supernatants were measured by ELISA (Fig. 4B). *M. tuberculosis*-induced production of IL-12p40 or IFN- γ was comparable between wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages. However, the production of IL-1 β and IL-18 was severely reduced in *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages. Similar mRNA expression levels of *Il1b* and *Il18* in *M. tuberculosis*-infected wild-type and *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages were detected using real-time quantitative RT-PCR (Supplementary Figure 3 is available at *International Immunology Online*), indicating that AIM2 controls the production of IL-1 β and IL-18 at the post-transcriptional level. Induction of *Irfnb*, encoding IFN- β , was enhanced in *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages, confirming previous results (37). Thus, *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages show defective caspase-1 activation leading to selective impairment in IL-1 β and IL-18 secretion.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis genomic DNA activates AIM2 inflammasome

AIM2 has been shown to recognize cytosolic DNA (33–41). Therefore, we tested whether genomic DNA purified from

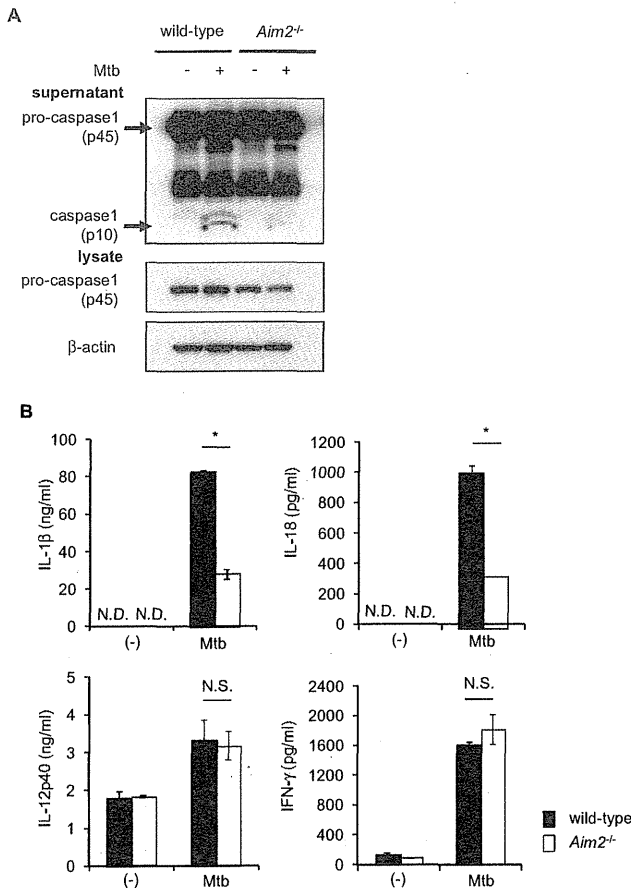


Fig. 4. AIM2-dependent inflammasome activation in *M. tuberculosis* infection. (A) *M. tuberculosis*-infected peritoneal macrophage culture supernatants were immuno-precipitated and the cell pellets were lysed. Caspase-1 specific bands were detected by western blotting and β -actin was used as a control for the cell lysate. One representative of three independent experiments is shown. (B) Thioglycollate-induced peritoneal macrophages were infected with *M. tuberculosis* (MOI of 3). The levels of the indicated cytokines in the culture supernatants were measured by ELISA. Data are presented as means \pm SD of triplicate determinants and are one representative of three independent experiments. *, $P < 0.01$. N.S., not significant; N.D., not detected.

M. tuberculosis (Mtb DNA) activates caspase-1. Mtb DNA was transfected into the cytoplasm of peritoneal macrophages primed with LPS and analyzed for caspase-1 activation (Fig. 5A). The cleaved p10 form of caspase-1 was detected in LPS/Mtb DNA-stimulated wild-type macrophages. In contrast, the active form of caspase-1 was not induced in *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages stimulated with LPS/Mtb DNA. We also analyzed the secretion of IL-1 β and IL-18 (Fig. 5B). Wild-type peritoneal macrophages stimulated with LPS/Mtb DNA secreted substantial amounts of IL-1 β and IL-18. In contrast, the production of IL-1 β and IL-18 was profoundly reduced in *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages. These findings indicate that AIM2 mediates Mtb DNA-dependent induction of caspase-1 activation and subsequent IL-1 β /IL-18 secretion.

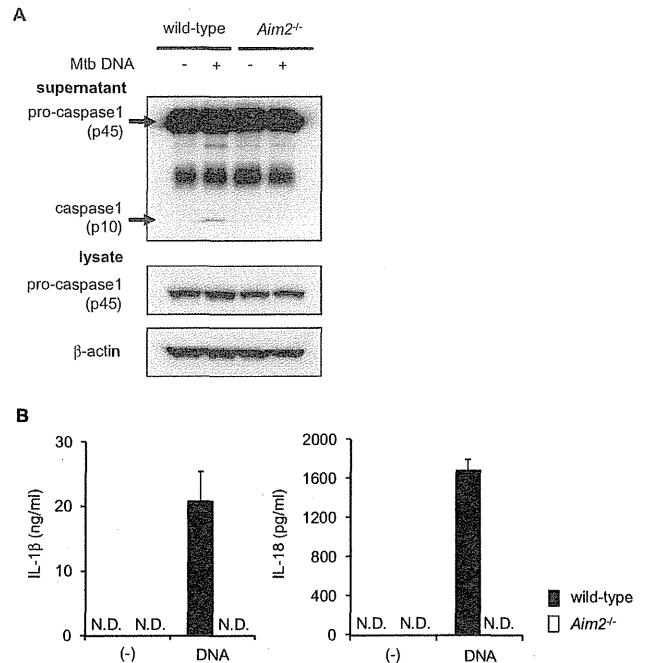


Fig. 5. AIM2 inflammasome is activated by *M. tuberculosis* genomic DNA. (A) Peritoneal macrophages were stimulated with LPS and transfected with Mtb DNA using Lipofectamine 2000. The culture supernatants were immuno-precipitated and the cells were lysed. Caspase-1 specific bands were detected by western blotting. β -actin was used as a control for the cell lysate. One representative of three independent experiments is shown. (B) Thioglycollate-elicited peritoneal macrophages were stimulated with LPS and transfected with Mtb DNA using Lipofectamine 2000. The production of IL-1 β and IL-18 in the culture supernatants was measured by ELISA. Data are presented as means \pm SD of triplicate determinants and are one representative of three independent experiments. N.D., not detected.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis genomic DNA is co-localized with cytosolic AIM2

We next determined the cellular compartment where Mtb DNA is recognized by AIM2. Recent studies demonstrated that virulent *M. tuberculosis* escapes from phagosomes into the cytosol (43). *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* was incubated with Hoechst 33342 to label genomic DNA and then infected into RAW264.7 macrophages. Some Mtb DNA was not co-localized with Rab7, which is recruited to the phagosomal membrane (Fig. 6A). Although LAMP1 is enriched in the phagolysosomal compartment, some Mtb DNA was not co-localized with it (Fig. 6B, upper panels). In contrast, genomic DNA from non-virulent *M. bovis* bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) was fully merged with phagosome markers, Rab7 and LAMP1 (Supplementary Figure 4 is available at *International Immunology* Online). These findings indicate that Mtb DNA is present in the cytosol. We further visualized cytosolic AIM2 (Fig. 6B, lower panels). Mtb DNA, which was not present within the phagosome, co-localized with AIM2. We also analyzed co-localization of AIM2 and Mtb DNA in peritoneal macrophages (Supplementary Figure 5 is available at *International Immunology* Online). As was the case in RAW264.7 macrophages, Mtb DNA was merged with

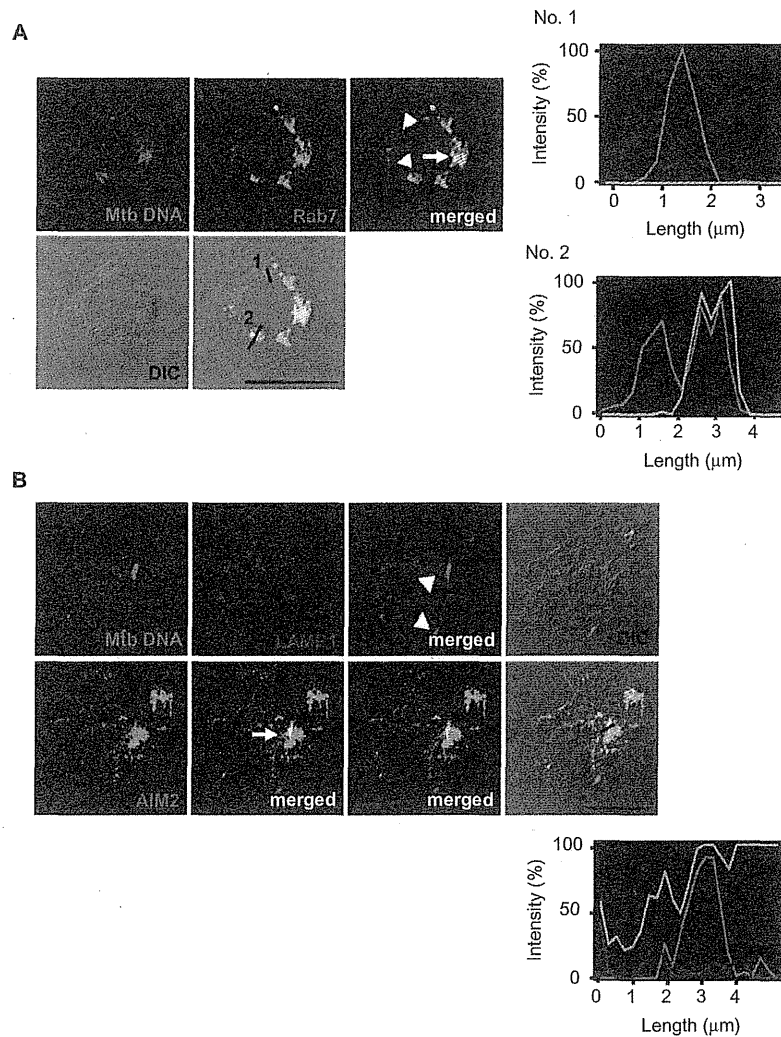


Fig. 6. Co-localization of cytosolic *M. tuberculosis* genomic DNA with AIM2. (A) RAW264.7 macrophages were infected with Hoechst-labeled *M. tuberculosis* (red) and stained with antibody to Rab7 (green). Scale bar represents 20 μm . Arrow heads indicate localization of the red signal alone. Arrow indicates co-localization of the red and green signals. Fluorescence intensities of the red and green signals were quantified along selected lines 1 or 2 (no. 1, upper panel; no. 2, lower panel). (B) RAW264.7 macrophages were infected with Hoechst-labeled *M. tuberculosis* (red) and stained with antibody to LAMP1 (blue, upper panels) or AIM2 (green, lower panels). Scale bar represents 20 μm . Arrow heads indicate localization of the red signal alone. Arrow indicates co-localization of the red and green signals. Fluorescence intensities of the blue, red and green signals were quantified along a selected line.

AIM2, but not with LAMP1. These findings demonstrate that the recognition of Mtb DNA by AIM2 occurs within the cytosolic compartment.

Discussion

In this study, we analyzed the role of AIM2 in the host defense against *M. tuberculosis* using AIM2-deficient mice. *Aim2*^{-/-} mice were highly susceptible to mycobacterial infection compared with wild-type mice and showed severely reduced production of IL-1 β and IL-18. IL-1 β plays an important role in anti-mycobacterial host defense responses (22–26), and IL-18 is responsible for resistance to *M. tuberculosis*

infection via induction of IFN- γ -mediated T_H1 responses (27–29). Therefore, defective production of IL-1 family cytokines, such as IL-1 β and IL-18, might cause a high sensitivity to *M. tuberculosis* infection in *Aim2*^{-/-} mice.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis has been shown to activate the inflammasome via NLRP3 (15–18). However, several studies showed that mice deficient in NLRP3 are not highly sensitive to *M. tuberculosis* infection (26, 30–32). This study clearly shows that *Aim2*^{-/-} mice are highly sensitive to infection with *M. tuberculosis* with defective activation of caspase-1, identifying AIM2 as the important molecule for activation of the inflammasome in *M. tuberculosis* infection. However, mice deficient in ASC or caspase-1,

critical components of the inflammasome, do not show dramatically severe phenotypes as compared with those of IL-1 β -deficient mice in *M. tuberculosis* infection (25, 26). In this regard, AIM2 might also activate a signaling pathway, leading to inflammasome-independent production of the IL-1 family of cytokines. *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages expressed high amounts of IFN- β , confirming a previous study that showed that poly(dA:dT) induces increased amounts of IFN- β in *Aim2*^{-/-} splenocytes and macrophages (37). Thus, AIM2 might be involved in the signaling pathway responsible for suppression of IFN- β . IFN- β is induced by *M. tuberculosis* infection and then suppresses the production of IL-1 β in macrophages and dendritic cells (44,45). Indeed, the type I IFNs have been shown to contribute to impaired host resistance to *M. tuberculosis* in mice (26, 46–48). Thus, it is possible that AIM2 activates two signaling pathways, one mediating the inflammasome-dependent processing of the IL-1 family of cytokines and a second that mediates activation of unknown pathways that sustain the production of IL-1 β by suppressing type I IFNs.

The cleaved p10 form of caspase-1 was not detected, and production of IL-1 β and IL-18 was almost completely abrogated in Mtb DNA-stimulated *Aim2*^{-/-} macrophages. In contrast, IL-1 β and IL-18 were moderately produced and the cleaved form of caspase-1 was also slightly detected in *M. tuberculosis*-infected *Aim2*^{-/-} peritoneal macrophages. This might be due to NLRP3-dependent recognition of *M. tuberculosis* (15–18). An AIM2-independent and inflammasome-independent mechanism for IL-1 β release might also be operating in mycobacterial infection. Matrix metalloproteinase-9 (MMP-9, also known as gelatinase B) is robustly induced in mycobacteria-infected macrophages, causing inactive IL-1 β to be processed into a biologically active form (49, 50). Thus, MMP-9 might be involved in the inflammasome-independent processing of the IL-1 family of cytokines during *M. tuberculosis* infection.

We showed that Mtb DNA co-localized with AIM2 in the cytosol, but the localization of mycobacteria within macrophages is still under debate (51). Virulent *M. tuberculosis* resides within phagosomes by inhibiting their maturation into phagolysosomes (52–54). But there are several reports supporting cytosolic escape of virulent mycobacteria (43, 51, 55–57). *Mycobacterium marinum* can escape from phagosomes into the cytosol by actin-based motility (55), an activity which depends on the region of difference 1 [RD1 (57)]. *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and *Mycobacterium leprae* can translocate from phagosomes to the cytosol of myeloid cells in an RD1-dependent manner and following cell death (43). This might be compatible with our results for *M. tuberculosis*-induced activation of the AIM2 inflammasome, which also requires induction of pyroptosis, a form of cell death (33–39). Our data suggest that *M. bovis* BCG, lacking the RD1 locus, fails to escape from phagosomes into the cytosol. In addition, *M. bovis* BCG does not induce IL-1 β secretion from macrophages (32). Thus, AIM2 recognizes *M. tuberculosis* upon translocation into the cytosol. It will be interesting to determine how Mtb DNA becomes exposed and is recognized by AIM2 in the cytosol.

We have identified a novel recognition mechanism in mycobacterial infection through the cytosolic DNA sensor AIM2. Several pattern recognition receptors, such as TLRs and C-type lectin receptors mediate gene expression in mycobacterial infection. AIM2 is co-operatively involved in the immune response to mycobacterial infection with these innate immune mycobacterial sensors.

Supplementary data

Supplementary data are available at *International Immunology Online*.

Funding

This work was supported by Core Research for Evolutional Science and Technology, Japan Science and Technology Agency; Grant-in-Aid from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; Grant-in-Aid from the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare; and the Osaka Foundation for the Promotion of Clinical Immunology.

Acknowledgements

We thank C. Hidaka for secretarial assistance and Y. Magota for technical assistance.

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