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RESEARCH NOTE

Analysis of the complete genome of hepatitis B virus subgenotype C2 isolate NHB17965 from a patient with uncomplicated chronicity [version 1; peer review: 1 approved, 1 not approved]

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Abstract

The number of chronic cases of hepatitis B virus (HBV) is increasing rapidly in the world. Herein, we report a complete genome of HBV subgenotype C2 (HBV/C2) with current common amino acid substitutions from a patient with chronic HBV without liver complications. Complete genome analysis revealed that the isolated strain was a non-recombinant wild type and had several regular substitutions in the reverse transcriptase domain and small surface proteins of HBV. The isolated complete sequence could be considered as a chronic reference strain of HBV/C2 in Bangladesh. This study may help clinicians and scientists gain in-depth knowledge on common substitutions of HBV/C2 genome and to identify potential therapies against chronic HBV infections.

Keywords

HBV/C2, Chronic, Non-recombinant, Bangladesh

Open Peer Review

Approval Status

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version 1 09 Jul 2018	view	view	

1. **Mohammad Ariful Islam** , Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
2. **Paul Klapper** , University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
3. **Ashesh Kumar Chowdhury** , BIRDEM General Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Any reports and responses or comments on the

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article can be found at the end of the article.

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Author roles: **Shaha M:** Methodology, Writing – Original Draft Preparation; **Sarker PK:** Investigation, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Hossain MS:** Data Curation, Methodology; **Das KC:** Conceptualization, Writing – Review & Editing; **Jahan M:** Data Curation, Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing; **Dey SK:** Investigation, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Tabassum S:** Data Curation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Hashem A:** Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing; **Salimullah M:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: The study was supported by the National Institute of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Bangladesh.

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Introduction

The number of cases of chronic liver disease caused by hepatitis B virus (HBV) are increasing markedly¹. Globally, more than 2 billion people have been infected by HBV² and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) **approximately 257 million were living with HBV in 2017**. In Bangladesh, the rate of HBV chronicity is 2–6%³, which makes it relatively higher risk than other infectious diseases.

HBV genome comprises a partially double-stranded covalently closed circular DNA that encodes four highly overlapping major open reading frames⁴. Due to the absence of proof-reading activity, the mutation rate of HBV is high⁵; hence, recombinant strains are evolving with a common pattern. Most of the HBV cases are chronic, which has a high possibility of causing liver cirrhosis⁶ and hepatocellular carcinoma⁷. In Bangladesh, there are no reported reference complete sequence of HBV chronic strain of subgenotype C2. Hence, we isolated the complete genome of a HBV/C2 strain collected from a patient without liver complications, though carrying the virus for a long time.

Methods

Isolation and sequencing

An HBV-positive plasma sample was collected from a 45-year-old male patient in a tertiary hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh after obtaining the patient's written informed consent. The infected patient had chronic liver disease, as determined by ultrasonography. The patient was diagnosed with chronic HBV infection recently, with a high viral load in the plasma. However, the patient was not showing signs of jaundice, though was affected by fever, nausea, vomiting and fatigue. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of National Institute of Biotechnology, Bangladesh (NIBREC2015-01). The patient was not taking any antiviral therapy and was diagnosed 1 month prior to obtainment of the plasma sample. HBV DNA was extracted from the sample using the QIAamp MinElute Virus Spin kit (Qiagen, Germany). The complete HBV genome was amplified by six sets of primer pairs used previously in another study⁸ using a conventional PCR method. The primer sequences and their annealing temperatures were as follows: set 1, forward-AAGCTCTGCTAGATCCCAGAGT, reverse- AGTTGGCGA-GAAAGTGAAAGCCTG, 56°C; set 2, forward- CCTATTGATT-GGAAAGTATGTCA, reverse- AACAGACCAATTTATGCCTA, 48°C; set 3, forward- GAGACCACCGTGAACGCCCA, reverse-CCTGAGTGCTGTATGGTGAGG, 56°C; set 4, forward- TTCAC-CTCTGCCTAATCATC, reverse- ATAGGGGCAATTTGGTGGTCT, 52°C; set 5, forward- TCAGGCAACTATTGTGGTTTCA, reverse- GGGTTGAAGTCCCCAATCTGGATT, 51°C; set 6, forward-GGGTCACCATATTCTTGGA, reverse- CGAGTCTA-GACTCTGTGGTA, 51°C. For a mixture of 25 µl reaction volume, 12.5 µl of 2X MasterMix (Thermo Fisher Scientific, USA), 1 µl each of forward and reverse primers (IDT, USA), 9.5 µl of

nuclease-free water (Thermo Fisher Scientific, USA) and 2 µl of template DNA were used. The condition of the PCR reaction was 1 cycle at 95°C for 10 min, 35 cycles at 95°C for 1 min, with the aforementioned annealing temperatures for 1 min and 72°C for 1 min, and a final cycle for 10 min at 72°C. Sanger sequencing was performed using the BigDye Terminator version 3.1 cycling sequencing kit (Applied Biosystems, USA) by ABI 3130 Genetic Analyser (SeqGen, CA, USA) and by thermal cycler (Sigma-Aldrich, Germany) using the described annealing temperatures as per manufacturer's instructions after the purification of PCR products using PureLink PCR Purification Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, USA), performed in accordance with the manufacturer's protocol. Next, the sequenced contigs were assembled using the Seqman tool of DNASTAR Lasergene version 7.2⁹.

Analysis

The subgenotyping and mutation analysis of the sequenced genome were performed using the **HBV Geno2Pheno** tool version 2 using the default parameters, comparing against the HBV genotype D consensus sequence. Recombination analysis of the sequence was performed using the **NCBI genotyping tool**. The complete genome was deposited in the GenBank under the accession number **MH220971**.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the complete genome denotes that the isolate studied here, termed NHB17965, comprises HBV genotype C and subgenotype C2 (HBV/C2) with a GC content of 48.77%. Recombination analysis using the NCBI Genotyping tool showed that NHB17965 is a non-recombinant wild-type HBV isolate (**Figure 1**).

Isolate NHB17965 was observed to have amino acid substitutions H9Y, N13H, I91L, P109S, T128N, I269L and V278I in the polymerase domain and S53L, P120T, I126T and S210N in the small hepatitis B surface protein as analysed by **HBV Geno2Pheno** tool, compared against the HBV genotype D consensus sequence. These substitutions may be the results of regular genomic changes to HBV because of a lack of proof-reading activity of the viral reverse transcriptase, and may not signify any danger. Hence, the isolate NHB17965 could be considered as a reference strain of chronic HBV/C2 infection in Bangladesh.

The findings of this study will help clinicians and scientists to gain substantial knowledge about the current common genomic substitutions of HBV/C2 and to develop treatments against chronic HBV infections.

Data availability

Genome of the HBV strain isolated in this study, **MH220971**.

Figure 1. Recombination analysis of the isolate NHB17965. The Simplot diagram was generated using the NCBI Genotyping tool.

Competing interests

No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information

The study was supported by the National Institute of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Bangladesh.

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status:

Version 1

Reviewer Report 07 August 2018

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Paul Klapper

University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

This paper reports a sequence analysis of a strain of hepatitis B virus. However, there are some aspects of the paper that merit attention. In the Abstract and again in the Introduction the authors state: *The number of chronic cases of hepatitis B virus (HBV) is increasing rapidly in the world*". I found this an interesting statement and wondered what was the evidence base for this. In the Introduction the authors cite MacLachlan and Cowie (2015). It appears to me that the authors are mis-quoting this reference. The reference actually says "*The burden of chronic HBV infection is increasingly being recognized*", this is substantially different from suggesting that the number of cases is increasing. There is a general lack of comprehensive epidemiological information on chronic hepatitis B infection as many developing countries (the epicentre of chronic HBV infections) lack surveillance to provide data. We do not know how WHO programmes to prevent vertical transmission of HBV are impacting on chronic hepatitis B and I believe we lack information to support the assertion of a global increase in numbers.

Also in the abstract - the third line "*with current common amino acid substitutions*" is not a meaningful statement. The sentence needs rewriting to make clear what the authors actually mean.

Introduction 1st paragraph

last 2 lines: "*which makes it relatively higher risk than other infectious diseases*"; it is unclear what is meant here, a rate of 2-6% is clearly low compared with risk of, for example, influenza or rotavirus infection.

Introduction, 2nd Paragraph "*the mutation rate of hepatitis B is high*" and "*hence, recombinant strains are evolving with a common pattern*". Mutation is a random event how can a random event lead to a commonly evolving pattern. The authors need to recast the sentence to explain what they really mean.

Introduction, end of 2nd paragraph. the genome was isolated from "*a patient without liver complication*" yet in methods we are told the patient has chronic liver disease as adjudged by

ultrasonography.

Methods: line 4. Was formal staging not used to describe liver disease e.g. relating shear wave elastography to fibrosis score? Were liver function tests performed?

Methods, line 5 "*The patient was diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B recently*". This seems strange, the standard definition of chronic hepatitis B infection is the detection of hepatitis B surface antigen in serum for more than 6 months. This patient - with blood taken only one month post diagnosis would not seem to meet the definition. No hepatitis B markers results are given for the patient and so understanding of the phase of chronic illness (see EASL guidance; Journal of Hepatology 2017 vol. 67: 370–398) is not possible

Analysis - reference needed for the HBV Geno2Pheno software used.

What evidence is there that the HBV/C2 isolate sequenced is a common phenotype in chronic hepatitis B virus infection in Bangladesh? Without such evidence it is difficult to see how the conclusions "*The findings of this study will help....*" are justified. This could simply be an single instance of this virus produced through random mutation. It is therefore also difficult to understand how this could be considered a 'reference strain' for chronic hepatitis B as it may represent a single instance and further as the patient does not appear to meet a case definition of having chronic hepatitis B infection, can it be considered as a reference strain for chronic hepatitis B infection.

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Yes

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Partly

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to state that I do not consider it to be of an acceptable scientific standard, for reasons outlined above.

Author Response 08 Aug 2018

Modhusudon Shaha, National Institute of Biotechnology, Dhaka, Bangladesh

We would like to thank the reviewer for his constructive comments on the manuscript. Herein, the responses to the comments are given.

'The number of chronic cases of hepatitis B virus (HBV) is increasing rapidly in the world'- The sentence is corrected in the revised manuscript.

"with current common amino acid substitutions"- this portion of the sentence is removed from the revised manuscript.

"which makes it relatively higher risk than other infectious diseases"- the sentence is re-written with substantial clarity.

"the mutation rate of hepatitis B is high" and "hence, recombinant strains are evolving with a common pattern"- the sentence is re-written in the revised manuscript.

"a patient without liver complication"- the sentence is corrected in the revised manuscript. Particular liver function tests were not performed. However, the liver was observed normal using ultrasonography.

"The patient was diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B recently"- The sentence is edited in the revised manuscript. The detail of diagnosis of the chronicity is described in the revised manuscript.

Reference is given that study used the HBV Geno2Pheno tool.

"The findings of this study will help...."- the sentence is re-written in the revised manuscript.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 23 July 2018

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Mohammad Ariful Islam

Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

The overall level of the paper is good: even if it is quite simple, it is well written and some important considerations are highlighted.

The manuscript talks about the complete genome analysis of hepatitis B virus and represent the complete genome sequence of HBV subgenotype C2 in Bangladesh.

The study is a short research note. Although the findings of the study is limited and like a genome announcement, it signifies to be documented. The study is scientifically acceptable.

I have some minor queries

- what does the isolate NHB17965 indicates?

- any reference sequences used in this study? If used, what are these?"

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Yes

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Yes

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Author Response 01 Aug 2018

Modhusudon Shaha, National Institute of Biotechnology, Dhaka, Bangladesh

We would like to thank the reviewer for his constructive comments on the manuscript.

NHB17965 indicates the sample identification number given by the laboratory.

There are no reference sequences used in this study for the analysis. The isolated sequence was analyzed using NCBI Genotyping tool and Geno2Pheno tools as given in the manuscript.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

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