



# **Scientific review of variola virus research, 1999–2010**

December 2010

GLOBAL ALERT  
AND RESPONSE



World Health  
Organization

# **Scientific review of variola virus research, 1999–2010**

**December 2010**



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# Contents

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<b>Background .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1     <b>Smallpox vaccines.....</b></b>	<b>1</b>
Executive summary .....	2
1.1     Introduction .....	3
1.2     The history of smallpox vaccination .....	3
1.3     The WHO Smallpox Global Eradication Programme.....	4
1.4     The origin of vaccinia virus .....	5
1.5     The vaccine used to eradicate smallpox .....	6
1.6     Tissue culture and clonal smallpox vaccines .....	6
1.7     Smallpox vaccines attenuated by passage in tissue culture or through genetic recombination .....	7
1.8     Protein subunit and DNA vaccines for smallpox.....	8
1.9     Vaccination after exposure to smallpox .....	9
1.10    Future challenges of smallpox vaccination .....	9
Abbreviations .....	11
References .....	12
<b>2     <b>Laboratory diagnostics for smallpox (variola virus) .....</b></b>	<b>17</b>
Executive summary .....	18
2.1     Introduction .....	19
2.2     Collection and handling of specimens .....	19
2.3     Virus isolation .....	21
2.4     Electron microscopy .....	22
2.5     Genome or genome element–based diagnostic assays .....	22
2.5.1   Working with variola virus DNA .....	23
2.5.2   Restriction fragment length polymorphism .....	23
2.5.3   Polymerase chain reaction .....	23
2.5.4   Polymerase chain reaction–restriction fragment length polymorphism .....	24
2.5.5   Real-time PCR .....	24

2.5.6	Oligonucleotide microarray analysis .....	28
2.5.7	Sequencing .....	29
2.6	Protein-based diagnostic assays .....	29
2.7	Serology-based diagnostic assays .....	30
2.8	Summary thoughts.....	31
	Abbreviations .....	32
	References.....	33
<b>3</b>	<b>Variola genomics .....</b>	<b>37</b>
	Executive summary .....	38
3.1	The variola virus genome.....	39
3.2	Variola evolution.....	43
3.3	Poxvirus genome technologies .....	44
3.4	Guidelines for variola virus genomes .....	45
	Abbreviations .....	49
	References.....	50
<b>4</b>	<b>The status of WHO collaborating centre repositories of variola virus and nucleic acid.....</b>	<b>53</b>
	Executive summary .....	54
4.1	Introduction .....	55
4.2	The status of strains of variola virus and nucleic acid repositories at the WHO collaborating centre in the Russian Federation.....	55
4.2.1	The state of the variola virus strains collection and its repository .....	55
4.2.2	The state of the VECTOR variola virus DNA collection and its repository .....	60
4.3	The status of strains of variola virus and nucleic acid repositories at the WHO collaborating centre in the United States.....	67
	Abbreviations .....	82
	References.....	83

<b>5</b>	<b>Animal models and pathogenesis .....</b>	<b>85</b>
	Executive summary .....	86
5.1	Introduction .....	87
5.2	Animal models .....	87
5.3	Conclusion.....	95
	Abbreviations .....	97
	References.....	98
 <b>6</b>	 <b>Antiviral drug development for the treatment of smallpox – status of small-molecule therapeutics.....</b>	 <b>103</b>
	Executive summary .....	104
6.1	Introduction .....	106
6.2	Drug discovery .....	108
6.2.1	Thiosemicarbazones.....	108
6.2.2	Evaluation of approved and investigational new drugs.....	108
6.2.3	Acyclic nucleoside phosphonates.....	109
6.2.4	Inosine monophosphate dehydrogenase inhibitors .....	109
6.2.5	S-adenosylhomocysteine hydrolase inhibitors .....	110
6.2.6	Orotidine-5'-monophosphate decarboxylase inhibitors.....	110
6.2.7	Thymidylate synthase inhibitors .....	110
6.2.8	Compounds that interfere with virus assembly.....	110
6.2.9	Abl-family kinases.....	111
6.2.10	Immunobiological preparations .....	111
6.2.11	Miscellaneous compounds.....	111
6.2.12	Compounds whose structure will not be revealed until late in development .....	111
6.2.13	Molecular biology–based approach to inhibiting viral replication, such as RNA interference .....	112
6.3	Variola and monkeypox primate animal models.....	112
6.4	Human data to validate animal models.....	113
6.5	Intravenous cidofovir .....	113
6.6	Oral CMX001 .....	115
6.7	Oral ST-246.....	116
6.8	Effect of antiviral administration on vaccine protection .....	118
6.8.1	Cidofovir and Dryvax .....	118
6.8.2	ST-246 (tecovirimat), and Dryvax and ACAM2000.....	118

6.9	Drugs under clinical development .....	119
6.10	Time lines for development of smallpox therapeutics .....	120
6.11	Concluding discussion .....	121
<b>Abbreviations.....</b>		<b>123</b>
<b>References .....</b>		<b>125</b>

## Background

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The destruction of stocks of variola virus, the etiological agent of the disease smallpox, has been discussed at the World Health Assembly since 1986, following the unprecedented declaration of smallpox eradication in 1980. Several committees have held intensive discussions on whether the remaining live variola virus material should be retained for further critical public health research and to define the nature of that research using live virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research (ACVVR), which was established in 1999, oversees all research using live variola virus, based on the World Health Assembly decisions contained in WHA49.10, WHA52.10 and WHA 55.15. WHO-sanctioned repositories of live variola virus are currently maintained only at two WHO collaborating centres: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, United States of America, and the State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology VECTOR laboratory, Novosibirsk, the Russian Federation.

In May 2007, the Sixtieth World Health Assembly in resolution WHA60.1 requested the WHO Director-General to undertake a major review in 2010 of the results of the research undertaken, research currently under way, and plans and requirements for further essential research for global public health purposes, taking into account the recommendations of the ACVVR, so that the Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly may reach global consensus on the timing of the destruction of existing variola virus stocks.

In November 2007, the ACVVR proposed drafting written summaries of the research for discussion by the 2011 World Health Assembly. In November 2008, the ACVVR decided to use the following methods for the major review:

- preparation of a comprehensive review of the literature and of unpublished data concerning live variola virus research, in six distinct chapters (detailed below), by a group of scientists endorsed by the ACVVR and representing all areas of research and development on variola virus and relevant work with other orthopoxviruses;
- consideration of the scientific review by selected members of the ACVVR (December 2009 to April 2010);
- consideration of the scientific review by an external panel of independent experts from outside the variola virus field – the Advisory Group of Independent Experts to

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