ISOLATION OF JAMESTOWN CANYON AND SNOWSHOE HARE VIRUSES (CALIFORNIA SEROGROUP) FROM Aedes Mosquitoes in Western Massachusetts

EDWARD D. WALKER, MARGARET A. GRAYSON, and JOHN D. EDMAN

ABSTRACT. Three isolates of Jamestown Canyon virus and one isolate of snowshoe hare virus (California serogroup) were obtained from adult Aedes females collected in western Massachusetts in 1982. Jamestown Canyon virus was isolated from Aedes abserratus punctor once, and from Aedes intrudens twice. Snowshoe hare virus was isolated from Aedes stimulans group mosquitoes. La Crosse encephalitis (LAC) virus was not isolated from 1,552 adult Aedes triseriatus, nor from 22,557 Aedes triseriatus larvae. However, sera from 1/178 eastern chipmunks, 5/31 gray squirrels, and 8/144 white-tailed deer had neutralizing antibody to LAC virus. No sentinel rabbits placed at sites yielding virus isolates seroconverted to CAL viruses in either year.

INTRODUCTION

California serogroup (CAL) viruses have been intensively studied because of increased recognition of their role as etiologic agents of human disease (Grimstad 1988). Although La Crosse encephalitis (LAC) virus has been the major CAL virus of concern in the eastern U.S., Jamestown Canyon (JC) virus has also been associated with human illness in Michigan (Grimstad et al. 1982), New York and Ontario (Deibel et al. 1983, Srihongse et al. 1984). There has been no systematic survey for CAL viruses in western Massachusetts, although snowshoe hare (SSH), Keystone and several untyped CAL viruses were isolated from mosquitoes during surveillance for eastern equine encephalitis virus in southeast Massachusetts (H. K. Maxfield, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Encephalitis Field Station, Middleboro; personal communication).

The purpose of this study was to survey western Massachusetts for CAL viruses. Given the proximity of this region to the LAC and JC virus endemic areas in eastern New York State (Grayson et al. 1983, Boromisa and Grayson 1990), we made a special effort to search for these viruses in mosquito, sciurid rodent, and white-tailed deer populations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mosquito collection, virus isolation and virus identification: Adult female mosquitoes were collected at human bait or with dry-ice baited CDC light traps at 17 sites in Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden and Berkshire counties in western Massachusetts during 1982. Mosquitoes were killed by freezing, sorted by species into pools of 100 or fewer individuals on a chill table and stored at -85°C. Aedes triseriatus (Say) larvae were collected from tree holes and tires at the sites, reared to the fourth instar, pooled into lots of 100 and also stored at -85°C.

Pools were triturated in 7.5% bovine plasma albumin (BSA) in sterile phosphate-buffered saline (PBS, pH 7.6) supplemented with antibiotics, then centrifuged. Suckling mice (2–4 days old) were inoculated intracerebrally (i.c.) with 0.025 ml of supernatant and observed daily thereafter for signs of illness. Brains of sick mice were harvested, triturated in 0.75% BSA to make 1070 (w/v) seeds, centrifuged and passed i.c. to suckling mice. Crude antigens (20% w/v) were prepared by trituration of harvested mouse brains in borate-buffered saline and incubation at 4°C overnight, then centrifuged at 10,000 for 1 h at 4°C. After initial isolation, viruses were re-isolated from the original pools for purposes of confirmation.

Virus isolates were identified first by screening with an indirect immunofluorescent antibody (IFA) procedure described by Boromisa and Grayson (1990). Identifications were confirmed by serum dilution plaque reduction neutralization (SDPRN) tests done on Vero cell monolayers, described by Lindsey et al. (1976) as modified by Boromisa and Grayson (1990). Virus stocks were inoculated onto Vero cell culture monolayers. Virus strains used were a New York strain of LAC virus (74-32813) or prototype strains of LAC, JC, SSH, trivittatus (TVT), and Keystone (KEY) viruses (supplied by the Centers for Disease Control, Fort Collins, CO). In the IFA tests, virus identification was determined by a 2-fold or greater difference in the intensity of immunofluorescence (1–4+) from that of heterologous antibodies. Reference immune sera used in IFA and SDPRN tests were California serogroup virus/type-specific im-
mune mouse ascitic fluids (IMAFs), and a mono-
clonal antibody specific for SSH virus (no.
2B3A-2), supplied by the CDC.

Serosurvey of wild mammals and sentinel rab-
bbits: Eastern chipmunks (Tamias striatus) and
gray squirrels (Sciurus carolinensis) were live-
trapped, anesthetized and bled from the orbital
capillary nexus or heart at 9 sites in Franklin,
Hampshire, and Berkshire counties in 1980–81.
Animals were released after bleeding. Blood of
white-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus) was
obtained by aspirating the pool of blood in the
abdominal cavity of shot deer brought to check-
ing stations in Berkshire County during the 1980
shotgun season (December 1–6). Sentinel rabbits
were set out in secured metal cages at 8 of the 9
trapping sites. In 1981, 14 rabbits were placed
in early July and removed in late September; in 1982, 10 rabbits were placed in early May and
removed in early July. The rabbits were bled
(ear vein or heart) before placement and weekly
thereafter.

Mammal blood was centrifuged, and the sera
separated and stored at -40°C. Sera were
screened for antibody to CAL viruses in neu-
tralization tests done in suckling mice using a
New York strain of LAC virus as antigen. Rabbit
sera were also screened in neutralization tests
with this LAC virus isolate and a New York
State isolate of JC virus (78-30641) as antigen.
Sera that were positive in screenings were ti-
trated in neutralization index tests in suckling
mice, using a constant-serum, varying-virus di-
lution method (Lennette and Schmidt 1969).
Sera neutralizing at least 1.7 logs of virus were
considered positive.

RESULTS

Virus isolations from mosquitoes: The results
of mosquito collections are shown in Table 1. In
1981, 1,732 mosquitoes were collected in 92
pools. In 1982, 42,515 mosquitoes were collected in
669 pools. Collections consisted mainly of
spring Aedes and Aed.es triseriatus larvae and
adults. Many specimens were rubbed, so that
some similar species were lumped into species
groups (see Table 1).

Four CAL viruses were isolated from mosqui-
toes (Table 2). Snowshoe hare was isolated once
from Aedes stimulans (Walker) group, which
probably also included Aedes excrucians
(Walker) and Ae.es fitchii (Felt and Young).
These mosquitoes were collected on June 9,
1982, in the Lawrence Swamp Conservation
Area, Amherst, Hampshire County. Jamestown
Canyon virus was isolated 3 times: from Aedes
intrudens Dyar collected on June 10, 1982, in
Lawrence Swamp; from Aedes abscessus (Felt
and Young) group (including Aedes punctor
(Kirby) collected on June 22, 1982, in Lawrence
Swamp); and from A. intrudens collected on
June 29, 1982, in Warwick State Forest, Frank-
lin County. All isolates were reisolated and iden-
tified from the original pools.

A summary of virus isolation and identifica-
tion from these mosquito pools is given in Table
2. In IFA screen tests, three isolates (nos. 247,
471 and 555) gave strongly positive (3-4+) re-
actions with JC IMAF; negative or weak reac-
tions (<1+) were obtained with the other refer-
ence IMAFs. Isolate no. 235 exhibited positive
reactions (2-3+) with LAC and SSH IMAF
(which were strongly cross-reactive) but did not
react with IMAFs to JC, KEY or TVT viruses.
In the SDPRN tests (Table 2), the number of
plaques formed in control wells ranged from 82
to 139. The titer of the JC IMAF for 3 isolates
(nos. 247, 471 and 555) was at least 4-fold higher
than the other CAL serogroup IMAFs, confirm-
ing their identity as JC viruses. For isolate no.
235, there was cross-reaction between LAC and
SSH IMAF at a titer of 1:160. However, the
SSH monoclonal antibody had a titer of 1:2,560
for this isolate in the SDPRN test, while this
antibody had <1:20 titers with the heterologous
CAL viruses and with New York LAC strain no.
74-32813. We conclude that isolate no. 235 was
SSH virus.

Serosurvey of wild mammals and sentinel rab-
bbits: No sentinel rabbits seroconverted to LAC
or JC viruses in either 1981 or 1982. One of 178
**Table 2. Isolations of Jamestown Canyon and snowshoe hare viruses from Aedes mosquitoes collected in Western Massachusetts, 1982. Results of serum dilution plaque reduction neutralization tests, given as reciprocal titers in reactions with virus type-specific hyperimmune mouse ascitic fluids**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mosquito species</th>
<th>Isolate no.</th>
<th>Pool size</th>
<th>MFIR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ae. stimulans group</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1:2,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ae. intrudens</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1:1,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ae. abserratus/punctor</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1:3,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ae. intrudens</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1:1,530</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolate</th>
<th>JC</th>
<th>TVT</th>
<th>LAC</th>
<th>SSH</th>
<th>SSH Mab</th>
<th>KEY</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>2,560</td>
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<td>247</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>&lt;20</td>
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<td>NT</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>471</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>&lt;20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MFIR, minimum field infection rate; JC, Jamestown Canyon; TVT, trivittatus; LAC, La Crosse; SSH, snowshoe hare; KEY, Keystone; N, no viral antigen used (i.e., negative control); Mab, monoclonal antibody; NT, not tested.

(0.6%) eastern chipmunks, 5/31 (16%) gray squirrels and 8/144 (6%) white-tailed deer had neutralizing antibody to LAC virus. Positive animals came from widely separated sites.

**DISCUSSION**

Jamestown Canyon virus has been isolated from a variety of biting flies, including Tabanidae and Culicidae (Turrell and LeDuc 1983, Grimstad 1988). In the eastern U.S., JC virus has been associated with the Aedes communis (De Geer) group (i.e., "dark-legged" spring Aedes), Ae. abserratus and Ae. stimulans, as well as Anopheles spp. and Ae. triseriatus (Grimstad 1988). Recent studies in northern Michigan (Heard et al. 1990) and New York State (Boromisa and Grayson 1990) implicate Aedes provocans (Walker) as a vector of JC virus; minimum field infection rates for that species were high in both of those studies, ranging from 1:27 to 1:714, depending upon the site and year. We did not isolate JC virus from 2,497 Ae. provocans, even though collections were made at sites where JC virus was isolated from Ae. intrudens and Ae. abserratus/punctor. Our data indicate that Ae. intrudens and Ae. abserratus/punctor may be enzootic vectors of JC virus in western Massachusetts. Heard et al. (1990) isolated JC virus from Ae. intrudens in northern Michigan, while Main et al. (1979) isolated JC virus from Ae. abserratus in Connecticut. However, the minimum field infection rates we obtained were considerably lower than in those studies.

Isolation of SSH virus from Ae. stimulans group mosquitoes in our study is consistent with surveys in New York, where this virus was isolated numerous times from Ae. stimulans group and Ae. canadensis (Grayson et al. 1983). Previously, SSH virus was isolated from Ae. canadensis in Bristol County in southeastern Massachusetts, in 1968 (H. K. Maxfield, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Encephalitis Field Station, Middleboro; personal communication).

Results of the serosurvey of eastern chipmunks, gray squirrels and white-tailed deer showed low rates of exposure of these mammals to CAL viruses. Use of LAC virus as antigen in our neutralization tests on sera from these animals would detect antibody specifically to LAC virus or SSH virus, or possibly to heterotypic CAL viruses. Thus, we cannot conclude definitively that the seropositive mammals had been exposed to LAC virus. Considering that LAC virus was not isolated from mosquitoes collected in areas where seropositive chipmunks and squirrels were trapped, we think it more likely that they were exposed to another CAL virus, probably SSH.

Western Massachusetts seems to be a likely area for CAL viruses, including LAC virus, to occur. Forest regrowth and maturation (MacConnell 1975) created extensive woodland habitat for spring Aedes and Ae. triseriatus, as well as for sciurid rodents and white-tailed deer. Also, western Massachusetts abuts the CAL virus endemic areas of eastern New York State.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We thank Wren Withers, Chris Gates, Lynn Thoma and Jane Bain for field assistance, Robert Boromisa for help in identifying the virus isolates, and Paul Grimstad and Tracy Smith for review of the manuscript. This study was supported by NIH grant NIAID 13981, the University of Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station, and a scholarship from the Northeast Mosquito Control Association to E. D. Walker.

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