ICTV Virus Taxonomy Profile: Virgaviridae

Michael J. Adams,1,* Scott Adkins,2 Claude Bragard,3 David Gilmer,4 Dawei Li,5 Stuart A. MacFarlane,6 Sek-Man Wong,7 Ulrich Melcher,8 Claudio Ratti,9 Ki Hyun Ryu10 and ICTV Report Consortium

Abstract

The family Virgaviridae is a family of plant viruses with rod-shaped virions, a ssRNA genome with a 3'-terminal tRNA-like structure and a replication protein typical of alpha-like viruses. Differences in the number of genome components, genome organization and the mode of transmission provide the basis for genus demarcation. Tobacco mosaic virus (genus Tobamovirus) was the first virus to be discovered (in 1886); it is present in high concentrations in infected plants, is extremely stable and has been extensively studied. This is a summary of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) Report on the taxonomy of the Virgaviridae, which is available at www.ictv.global/report/virgaviridae.

Table 1. Characteristics of the family Virgaviridae

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical member: tobacco mosaic virus variant 1 (V01408), species Tobacco mosaic virus, genus Tobamovirus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VIRION

The non-enveloped, rod-shaped virus particles of members of the family Virgaviridae are helically constructed with a pitch of 2.3 to 2.5 nm and an axial canal (Table 1, Fig. 1). They are about 20 nm in diameter, with predominant lengths that depend upon the genus. In most viruses, the capsid comprises multiple copies of a single protein of about 17–24 kDa [1]. In viruses of the genera Furovirus and Pomovirus (all transmitted by plasmodiophorids), a larger minor capsid protein is also produced by translational read-through of the capsid protein-encoding gene stop codon and can be detected at the extremity of virus particles [2]. In at least some furoviruses, a further minor coat protein of 25 kDa is initiated from a CUG codon upstream of the canonical start codon [3].

Fig. 1. (Left) Model of a particle of tobacco mosaic virus. Also shown is the RNA as it is thought to participate in the assembly process. (Right) Negative contrast electron micrograph of tobacco mosaic virus particles stained with uranyl acetate. Bar, 100 nm.
GENOME

The positive-sense ssRNA genome has a 5′-cap (m7GpppG) and a 3′-terminal tRNA-like structure that accepts histidine (Tobamovirus), tyrosine (Hordeivirus) or valine (Furovirus, Pecluvirus, Pomovirus). The number of genome components depends upon the genus (Fig. 2). The largest ORF encodes a replication protein with conserved methyltransferase and helicase domains, an arrangement typical of alpha-like viruses. This protein is translated directly from the genomic RNA. In viruses of all genera except Hordeivirus, the RNA-dependent polymerase is expressed as the C-terminal part of this protein by readthrough of a leaky stop codon. All viruses encode cell-to-cell movement proteins which, depending on the genus, are either single proteins of the ‘30K’-type or a ‘triple gene block’.

REPLICATION

Tobamovirus RNA replication occurs via several steps: (a) synthesis of viral replication proteins by translation of the genomic RNA; (b) translation-coupled binding of the replication proteins to a 5′-terminal region of the genomic RNA; (c) recruitment of the genomic RNA by replication proteins onto membranes and formation of a complex with host proteins TOM1 and ARL8; (d) synthesis of complementary (negative-strand) RNA in the complex; and (e) synthesis of progeny genomic RNA [4].

TAXONOMY

There are seven genera with distinct genome organisations (Fig. 2) and other features as follows:

- **Hordeivirus.** Pollen and seed transmission. Barley stripe virus is the best known member.
- **Pecluvirus.** Poyn transmission. Tobacco mosaic virus is the best-known member.
- **Pomovirus.** Transmitted by the plasmiodiothor Polymyxa graminis. Soil-borne wheat mosaic virus is the best-known member.
- **Peachvirus.** Transmitted by plasmiodiothorids.
- **Tobamovirus.** No natural vector. This large genus includes tobacco mosaic virus, the first virus to be discovered and crystalized, and since widely studied [5, 6].
- **Tobravirus.** Nematode transmission. Tobacco rattle virus is the best-known member.

The only plant viruses with rod-shaped particles not included in the family are those classified in the genus Beny-virus, family Benyviridae. Benyviruses have polyadenylated RNAs and replication proteins only distantly related to those of viruses in the family Virgaviridae.

RESOURCES


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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.