Stable albicidin resistance in *Escherichia coli* involves an altered outer-membrane nucleoside uptake system

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Albicidin blocked DNA synthesis in intact cells of a PolA− EndA− *Escherichia coli* strain, and in permeabilized cells supplied with all necessary precursor nucleotides, indicating a direct effect on prokaryote DNA replication. Replication of phages T4 and T7 was also blocked by albicidin in albicidin-sensitive (Alb') but not in albicidin-resistant (Alb) *E. coli* host-cells. All stable spontaneous Alb mutants of *E. coli* simultaneously became resistant to phage T6. The locus determining albicidin sensitivity mapped at *tsx*, the structural gene for an outer-membrane protein used as a receptor by phage T6 and involved in transport through the outer membrane of nucleosides present at submicromolar extracellular concentrations. Albicidin does not closely resemble a nucleoside in structure. However, Alb *E. coli* strains rapidly accumulated both nucleosides and albicidin from the surrounding medium whereas the Alb mutants were defective in uptake of nucleosides and albicidin at low extracellular concentrations. An insertion mutation blocking *Tsx* protein production also blocked albicidin uptake and conveyed albicidin resistance. Albicidin supplied at approximately 0-1 nM blocked DNA replication within seconds in intact Alb *E. coli* cells, but a 100-fold higher albicidin concentration was necessary for a rapid inhibition of DNA replication in permeabilized cells. We conclude that albicidin is effective at very low concentrations against *E. coli* because it is rapidly concentrated within cells by illicit transport through the *tsx*-encoded outer-membrane channel normally involved in nucleoside uptake. Albicidin resistance results from loss of the mechanism of albicidin transport through the outer membrane.

Introduction

Chlorosis-inducing isolates of *Xanthomonas albilineans*, the sugarcane leaf scald pathogen, produce a family of antibacterial compounds in culture. The major component, named albicidin, has been partially characterized as a novel, low-molecular-mass antibiotic which is rapidly bactericidal to a range of Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria at concentrations as low as 1 ng ml−1 (Birch & Patil, 1985a). Inhibition of prokaryote DNA replication was identified as the primary mode of action of albicidin, based on studies of incorporation of labelled precursors (Birch & Patil, 1985). A combination of ultrastructural, genetic and biochemical evidence indicates that a member of the albicidin family of toxins produced by *X. albilineans* in invaded xylem causes chlorosis in sugarcane leaf scald disease by blocking plastid DNA replication, resulting in blocked chloroplast differentiation (Birch & Patil, 1983, 1987a, b). Albicidins are, therefore, of interest as phytotoxins, potential clinical antibiotics, and as tools to study prokaryotic DNA replication. We are particularly interested in bacterial genes encoding different mechanisms of albicidin resistance as candidates for transfer to plants, with the long-term aim of producing recombinant albicidin-resistant sugarcane cultivars.

We report here that stable albicidin resistance in *Escherichia coli* occurs by loss of a nucleoside transport mechanism involved in rapid, illicit intracellular accumulation of albicidin.

Methods

*Bacterial and phage strains.* *Xanthomonas albilineans* strains LS116, LS136 and LS155 were isolated from diseased sugarcane from Queensland, Australia. Strains of *E. coli* used are described in Table 1. Bacteriophages T4, T6 and T7 were obtained from Dr L. Sly, UQM culture collection (Dept of Microbiology, Univ. of Queensland).

*A Albicidin production.* Albicidins produced in culture by *X. albilineans* were purified as described previously (Birch & Patil, 1985a), except that Merck Fractogel TSK HW-40(S) replaced Sephadex LH-20 for gel-filtration in methanol. This change was necessary because all recently tested batches of Sephadex LH-20 irreversibly adsorbed albicidin. The manufacturers of Sephadex (Pharmacia) indicated that the highly aromatic structure of albicidin may result in different degrees of adsorption to different batches of LH-20.
containing 100 ng albicidin ml$^{-1}$. Resistance to phage T6 was tested by experiments, colonies were tested for resistance or sensitivity to selected for resistance to pure albicidin were not inhibited, and vice Z agar (1 g glucose, 10 g tryptone, 5 g yeast extract, 10 g NaCl, 0.4 g CaCl$_2$, 2H$_2$O, 15 g agar per litre of water) containing 100 ng albicidin ml$^{-1}$.

### Selection of albicidin-resistant mutants.
Albicidin-resistant (Alb$^b$) mutants of $E. coli$ strains were selected using a gradient-plate technique (Gerhardt, 1981), or by plating untreated cell suspensions onto plates of Z agar (1 g glucose, 10 g tryptone, 5 g yeast extract, 10 g NaCl, 0.4 g CaCl$_2$, 2H$_2$O, 15 g agar per litre of water) containing 100 ng albicidin ml$^{-1}$.

### Scoring albicidin and phage resistance.
In mapping and cloning experiments, colonies were tested for resistance or sensitivity to albicidin by patching them, using sterile toothpicks, onto Z agar plates containing 100 ng albicidin ml$^{-1}$. Resistance to phage T6 was tested by patching colonies onto Z agar plates spread with 0.1 ml of a T6 lysate (about 10$^{10}$ p.f.u. ml$^{-1}$); the results were confirmed by cross-streaking bacteria against phage on Z agar plates (Gerhardt, 1981). Dose-response relationships to albicidin were determined as previously described (Birch & Patil, 1985a), except that basal layers were of Z agar rather than minimal medium.

### Effect of albicidin on phage replication.
Multiplication of phages T4 and T7 was tested in $E. coli$ strains RRI, RRI Alb$^b$, Q358 and Q358 Alb$^b$, both in the presence and absence of albicidin. Bacterial cells from an overnight culture in Z broth were resuspended at 10$^6$ cells ml$^{-1}$ in MC buffer (Miller, 1972) with 10$^8$ p.f.u. ml$^{-1}$ of phage and allowed to adsorb for 5 min at 24 °C. Suspensions were then diluted 10-fold into Z broth or Z broth containing 100 ng albicidin ml$^{-1}$ and incubated at 37 °C with gentle shaking. Samples were withdrawn at intervals and plated in soft agar seeded with sensitive bacterial cells to detect any increase in phage titre, which would indicate replication and subsequent release after host-cell lysis. Inhibition of phage replication was indicated by absence of a burst of phage release within 3 h incubation in these one-step growth experiments.

### Table 1. $E. coli$ strains used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain designation</th>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Reaction to:</th>
<th>Source or reference†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRE2050</td>
<td>F$^-$metB ilo rpsL cytR9 deoR8 (argF-lac) U169</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSH57A</td>
<td>F$^-$ara leuB tonA lacY proC tss-67 purE galK trpE his argG malA rpsL xyl mtl dtuA metA thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMG2</td>
<td>F$^+$, wild-type</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP4</td>
<td>BRE2050 $\Phi$ (tss-lacZ) I(Hyb)</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB101</td>
<td>F$^+$hsdS(r$^-$m$^-$) recA ara proA lacY galK rpsL xyl mtl supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB101 Alb$^b$</td>
<td>$\Phi$recA ara leuB azi tonA lacZ proC tss-67 purE trpE rpsL xyl mtl metE thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KL251</td>
<td>$\Phi$recA ara leuB azi tonA lacZ proC tss-67 purE trpE rpsL xyl mtl metE thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMML1789</td>
<td>F$^-$argA pheA bio thyA deoB endA polA $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE392</td>
<td>F$^+$hsdS(r$^-$m$^-$) lacY galK galT metB trpR supE supF $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE392 Alb$^b$</td>
<td>F$^+$thr ara leu proA lacY galK rpsL xyl mtl argE thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1694</td>
<td>tss-206</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1744</td>
<td>tss-211</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1807</td>
<td>tss-212</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1808</td>
<td>tss-213</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1814</td>
<td>tss-218</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q358</td>
<td>tss-220</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q358 Alb$^b$</td>
<td>$\Phi$hsdS(r$^-$m$^-$) sup E $\phi$B808</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q358 Alb$^b$</td>
<td>$\Phi$hsdS(r$^-$m$^-$) sup E $\phi$B808</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRI</td>
<td>recA$^+$ derivative of HB101</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>RRI Alb$^b$</td>
<td>Prototrophic, Val$^+$ wild-type</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>UQM 70</td>
<td>F$^+$ (episome F13; argF lac tss-69 purE) relA spoT metB $\Delta$ corresponding to F13</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>W3747</td>
<td>F$^+$ ara leuB azi tonA lacY tss-67 purE galK trpE rpsL xyl mtl thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x148</td>
<td>Hfr proC relA spoT metB $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x478</td>
<td>lysA recA$^+$ parent of KL251</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>294 RecA$^+$</td>
<td>$\Phi$(?) hsdR(r$^-$m$^-$) recA endA thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>294 RecA$^+$ Alb$^b$</td>
<td>$\Phi$ (?) hsdR(r$^-$m$^-$) recA endA thi supE $\lambda^-$</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* R$^+$ denotes strains showing an intermediate level of Alb$^b$; see Fig. 1 (b).
† Strains denoted B. Bachmann were kindly provided by Dr Barbara Bachmann, $E. coli$ Genetic Stock Center, Yale University, CT, USA.

Unless stated otherwise, the mixture of albicidins obtained after HW-40 (S) chromatography was used in experiments reported here. To ensure that antibiotics produced by Australian isolates of $X. albilineans$ were typical of albicidins described from Hawaiian isolates (Birch & Patil 1985a, b), we confirmed that albicidin-sensitive strains of $E. coli$ were inhibited around colonies of $X. albilineans$, whereas mutants selected for resistance to pure albicidin were not inhibited, and vice versa.
Mapping and cloning of alb locus. The approximate location of the
gene controlling albicidin sensitivity (alb) was determined by estimat-
ing the frequency of cotransfer of albicidin sensitivity with selected
amino acid markers mobilized from E. coli Q358(pULB113) Rif' to the
polyauxotrophic Alb' strain CSH57A, as described by Van Gijsegem &
Toussaint (1982). Fine mapping was undertaken using the generalized
transducing phage P1 cm ts, essentially as described by Miller (1972).
Cloning into plasmid pBR322 and into cosmids pH779 used
published protocols (Pühler & Timmis, 1984) and biochemicals from
Boehringer-Mannheim.

Thymidine uptake. The rate of transport of [3H]thymidine into cells
(Hanke, 1976) was compared for several E. coli strains and related Alb'
mutants.
The effect of albicidin on thymidine uptake was determined using
Alb' E. coli strains 294 RecA' (Thy') and KMBl789 (Thy'), by the
same procedure in the presence and absence of albicidin at 100 ng ml⁻¹
and 1 μg ml⁻¹. An additional control treatment in these experiments
included 1 mm-adenosine, which is known to reduce thymidine uptake
by competing for transport across the cytoplasmic membrane (Krieger-
Brauer & Braun, 1980).

Albicidin uptake. E. coli strains were grown in Luria broth (Miller,
1972) with shaking at 37 °C for approximately 4 h to an OD₆₀₀ of 2.0.
Cells were harvested by centrifugation at 8000 g for 5 min, washed
in minimal medium (6 g Na₂HPO₄, 3 g KH₂PO₄, 1 g NH₄Cl,
2.5 g MgSO₄, 7H₂O, 2 g glucose per litre of water), then resuspended
in 0.01 times the original culture volume containing 100 ng albicidin ml⁻¹.
At intervals after addition of albicidin, 0.2 ml samples were removed and immediately centrifuged at 15 000 g for 1
min. Supernatants were removed from the cell pellets, and the cells
were washed once by resuspending in 0.2 ml minimal medium and
centrifuging at 15000 g for 1 min. Albicidin activity remaining in the
supernatant and in the wash was determined for each sample as
measured previously (Birch & Patil, 1985a) except that E. coli UQM70
was used as the assay strain. Centrifugation rather than filtration must
be used to separate cells from the surrounding medium because at these
low albicidin concentrations substantial albicidin activity is lost by
adsorption to glassfibre filters. A wash-step proved necessary to
recover albicidins weakly adsorbed to the bacterial cell-surface. With
Alb' E. coli cells this wash recovers substantial albicidin activity which
may otherwise wrongly be assumed to have been taken up by cells.

DNA replication in permeabilized cells. The concentration of albicidin
required to block replicative DNA synthesis was determined using
intact cells of the PolA' EndA' E. coli strain KMBl789, as
described previously (Birch & Patil, 1985a), and was compared with
the concentration required to inhibit DNA synthesis in toluene-
permeabilized cells of the same strain prepared and assayed as
described by Moses & Richardson (1970).

Results and Discussion

Albicidin-resistant mutants

Two classes of spontaneous albicidin-resistant mutants were obtained from gradient plates: (a) apparently
unstable or inducible mutants in which a high proportion of
the population became phenotypically albicidin-
sensitive after a single subculture on non-selective
medium; (b) stable mutants which remained resistant
after many transfers through non-selective medium.

Only the stable mutant class was obtained from Z agar
plates containing 100 ng albicidin ml⁻¹. These mutants
showed an approximate 100-fold increase in albicidin
resistance relative to their parent strains (Fig. 1). All
subsequent experiments reported here were confined to
stable mutants.

Albicidin-resistant E. coli strains carrying lysogenic
phage λ showed many turbid plaques when plated on
media containing albicidin, suggesting phage induction
by albicidin treatment. All agents which are known to
induce the lytic cycle of phage λ affect DNA replication
(Roberts & Devoret, 1983). Results discussed below
indicate that albicidin-resistant E. coli strains fail to
accumulate a lethal intracellular antibiotic concentra-
tion. However, sufficient albicidin apparently penetrates
such cells to induce prophage λ.

Approximate location and attempted cloning of the alb
locus

After patch-mating E. coli Q358(pULB113) Rif' with E.
coli CSH57A, transconjugants prototrophic for one of
seven auxotrophic mutations of CSH57A were selected.
One-hundred transconjugants of each type were patched
to test for cotransfer of albicidin sensitivity. Cotransfer
frequencies were 17% with leu, 91% with proC, 77% with
purE and 0% with ile, trp, his and met. These data
indicate that alb is located at 9 to 10 min on the E. coli
chromosome.

To confirm this approximate location, E. coli W3747
(an Alb' strain carrying episome F13 and a correspond-
ning chromosomal deletion from 6 min to 12 min) was
patch-mated with E. coli strains KL251 (an Alb' proC'-
RecA' strain) and RR1 (an Alb' ProA' RecA' strain),
selecting for transconjugants not requiring proline. All
Pro' transconjugants of KL251 remained Alb' whereas
38 of 40 Pro' transconjugants of RR1 were Alb'. This
suggested that the Alb' gene on F13 is recessive and
confers albicidin resistance only in the RecA' strain
following recombination and segregation.

Genomic libraries of E. coli strains Q358 and
Q358 Alb' were prepared by cloning fragments from
partial HindIII and Sau3AI endonuclease digests of
chromosomal DNA into plasmid pBR322 and cosmids
pHC79, followed by transformation or transfection into
suitable recipients. Although the Alb' gene was expected
to be dominant, no Alb' clones were detected from
several libraries screened. It was also expected that
cloning into recombination-proficient recipients would
allow transformants which received the recessive Alb' locus to be detected after recombination and segregation
in some of the progeny, as described above for F13.
Several Alb' transformants were obtained in this
manner, but when the plasmids in these transformants
Dose (units per well)

![Graph showing dose-response relationships for inhibition of growth of E. coli strains by albicidin.](image)

Fig. 1. Dose-response relationships for inhibition of growth of E. coli strains by albicidin. (a) Parent strains 294 (○), KL251 (□), Q358 (▲) and LE392 (▼), and spontaneous mutants 294 Alb' (●), KL251 Alb' (■), Q358 Alb' (▲) and LE392 Alb' (▼). (b) Parent strain P1694 (○), and tsx mutants P1744 (□), P1807 (▲), P1808 (▼), P1809 (●), P1814 (■) and P1816 (●). Plate-assay conditions are described in Methods. The results shown are from a typical experiment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of unselected donor marker (%)</th>
<th>lac</th>
<th>alb</th>
<th>tsx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selected marker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. tested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMG2</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>λ478</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q358 Alb'</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Linkage relationship among proC, lac, alb and tsx

were subsequently re-isolated and transformed into E. coli Q358, the Alb' gene was not transmitted with the plasmids. One possible explanation was instability of the high-copy-number plasmids carrying alb or adjacent genes.

It is known that albicidin selectively inhibits DNA synthesis without evidence of damage or binding to DNA, suggesting specific interaction with DNA polymerase or other DNA replication proteins (Birch & Patil, 1985a). Of the known E. coli genes for DNA replication proteins, only dnaZ and dnaX (coding for subunits of DNA polymerase III) map within 2 min of alb.

Phages T4 and T7 code for their own replicative polymerases, and do not require host DNA polymerase III (Nossal, 1983). We therefore tested sensitivity of these phages to albicidin. Replication of phages T4 and T7 was blocked by albicidin in Alb' E. coli RRI and Q358, but not in Alb' mutants of these strains. Accordingly, the Alb' mutations could affect albicidin uptake, albicidin inactivation or an E. coli gene involved in chromosome and in T4 and T7 replication. No such gene is known to map near the alb locus.

Results of P1 transduction experiments to map the alb locus more accurately are shown in Table 2. All Alb' transductants in these experiments were observed to be T6'. In contrast, a variable proportion of T6' transductants remained Alb'. However, a difficulty encountered in this work was the relatively high frequency at which spontaneous T6' mutants arose; this may have contributed significantly to the apparent T6' Alb' transductants. Because of the very close linkage between alb and tsx in transduction experiments, we selected more than 430 spontaneous Alb' mutants of strains 294 RecA-, Q358, HB101, LE392 and RRI and tested their sensitivity to phage T6. All Alb' mutants were found to have simultaneously become T6', showing only a few plaques on cross-streaked plates, while the parent strains were completely lysed by T6.

However, in a reciprocal experiment not all T6' E. coli strains were Alb'. We selected non-mucoid T6' (i.e. tsx) mutants of Q358, HB101 and λ342, and found that a
variable proportion remained Alb+. The proportion was dependent on the albicidin concentration in the testplates; many of the spontaneous tsx mutants selected appeared to gain resistance to low albicidin concentrations.

To examine this phenomenon further, we determined the dose-response relationships to albicidin for a series of E. coli tsx mutants known to have alterations in the structure or amount of the outer-membrane receptor protein encoded by the tsx allele, as indicated by their ability to plate extended host-range mutants of phage T6 (Manning & Reeves, 1978). Strain P1744 has a tsx protein very similar to the parent strain P1694 (Manning & Reeves, 1978) and showed similar albicidin sensitivity (Fig. 1b), whereas the other mutants with more substantially altered tsx proteins showed decreased sensitivity to albicidin.

Relationship between albicidin resistance and nucleoside uptake

The tsx gene product is an outer-membrane protein first recognized as the receptor for phage T6 and colicin K, and now known to function in the transport of all nucleosides and deoxynucleosides, except cytidine and deoxycytidine, through the E. coli outer membrane (Krieger-Brauer & Braun, 1980). The tsx protein is most effective in transport of nucleosides present at submicromolar concentrations in the surrounding medium, and supplies nucleosides for transport across the cytoplasmic membrane by two uptake systems termed nupC and nupG. These processes result in a 300- to 600-fold intracellular concentration of nucleosides within 1 min of addition to the surrounding medium (Munch-Petersen et al., 1979).

Albicidin has a molecular mass of 842 Da, three to four times that of common nucleosides (Birch & Patil, 1985b). However, albicidin supplied at approximately 0.1 μM acts within 1 min to specifically block DNA replication. This is a very low concentration for effective antibiotic activity. One hypothesis we proposed was that albicidin was actively accumulated as a nucleoside analogue via the tsx protein outer-membrane channel, leading to inhibition of DNA replication at a higher intracellular concentration. Albicidin resistance in E. coli would, therefore, result from mutations at tsx which reduced albicidin uptake. This would account for the recessive Alb+ gene located at tsx, and the difficulty encountered in cloning the alb (= tsx) gene. Other genes for outer-membrane proteins are harmful in multiple copies (Stoker et al., 1982), and cloning of the intact tsx gene has not been reported. Also consistent with this hypothesis was the observation that spontaneous Alb+ mutants of several strains tested all showed reduced nucleoside uptake (Fig. 2).

Different chemical groupings on the tsx protein are involved in receptor activities for T6 and colicin K (Hankte, 1976), and some changes in the conformation of the receptor can be matched by specific phage host-range mutants (Manning & Reeves, 1978; Riede et al., 1985). It seems probable, therefore, that some tsx mutations may alter phage receptor activity without affecting albicidin-uptake activity, which would explain the existence of T6 Alb+ mutants. The absence of the reciprocal Alb+ T6+ mutants might then indicate that albicidin transport places less constraint on conformation of the tsx protein channel than T6 receptor activity.

Relationship between albicidin resistance and albicidin uptake

Radioactive albicidin is not available for direct measurement of uptake by cells. Although albicidins can be extracted from washed albicidin-treated cells by 95% acetone, the dose-response relationship of the extracted activity differs from the applied activity, indicating alteration to albicidins in treated cells and precluding quantitative determination of uptake by this approach (data not shown). We therefore estimated albicidin uptake by following the removal of albicidin from the medium surrounding Alb+ and Alb+ E. coli cells, as described in Methods.
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The albicidin-sensitive E. coli strain Q358 rapidly removed albicidin from the surrounding medium, whereas the spontaneous Alb' mutant of this strain did not (Fig. 3a). The difference in rates of albicidin removal closely resembled the difference in rates of nucleoside uptake by these strains (Fig. 2).

To provide a more rigorous test of our hypothesis that albicidin resistance in E. coli results from mutations at tsx which reduce albicidin uptake, we investigated an isogenic pair of E. coli strains differing only in one thoroughly characterized mutation which eliminates production of the Tsx protein. E. coli strain BRE2050 is Tsx'; strain GP4 is identical to BRE2050 except for an insertion mutation that generates a tsx–lacZ protein fusion close to the amino-terminus of Tsx, so that strain GP4 does not produce any Tsx protein (Bremer et al., 1988). Strain BRE2050 is Alb' and rapidly removed albicidin from the surrounding medium; strain GP4 was Alb' and showed greatly reduced albicidin uptake (Fig. 3b).

**Effect of albicidin on DNA replication in permeabilized cells**

The hypothesis of rapid intracellular accumulation of albicidin also leads to the prediction that DNA replication in a permeabilized cell system will appear less-sensitive to albicidin than in intact cells of an albicidin-sensitive strain. This was indeed the case, as shown in Fig. 4. A 100-fold increase in albicidin concentration over that effective in intact cells was necessary to achieve rapid inhibition of DNA replication in permeabilized cells. Lower albicidin concentrations caused a slower, partial inhibition of DNA replication in permeabilized cells, presumably due to delay in contact between albicidin and its molecular target at lower concentrations. These results with the PolA−EndA− strain KMBL1789 provide direct evidence that replicative DNA synthesis is blocked by albicidin; use of the permeabilized cell system with all necessary deoxy-nucleoside triphosphates provided confirms that the target of albicidin is indeed the DNA replication machinery rather than precursor biosynthesis or uptake (Birch & Patil, 1985a).

**Absence of competition between albicidin uptake and nucleoside uptake**

Albicidin did not interfere with nucleoside uptake by E. coli (Table 3) and added nucleosides do not protect E. coli from albicidin (Birch & Patil, 1985a). This finding can be contrasted with that for the maleimide antibiotic showdomycin, which is transported across the cytoplasmic membrane by the nupC system but does not use the tsx channel. A wide variety of nucleosides protect E. coli from showdomycin by competitive inhibition of showdomycin uptake, and showdomycin-resistant mutants have an altered cell-membrane nucleoside transport system (Komatsu, 1981). The difference arises because nucleosides do not compete with each other for transport through the tsx channel, but do compete for transport across the cytoplasmic membrane (Krieger-Brauer &
Table 3. Effect of albicidin on uptake of thymidine by E. coli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E. coli strain</th>
<th>H2O control</th>
<th>Thymidine uptake in the presence of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 ng Alb ml⁻¹</td>
<td>1 μg Alb ml⁻¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>294 RecA⁻</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMBL1789</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Braun, 1980). We have not obtained stable Alb⁻ mutants of E. coli which are unaltered at tsx, so the route of albicidin transport across the cytoplasmic membrane remains unknown.

Conclusion

We conclude that albicidin is effective at very low concentrations against E. coli because it is rapidly concentrated within cells by illicit transport mediated by the tsx-encoded outer-membrane channel normally involved in nucleoside uptake. Albicidin resistance in E. coli maps at or adjacent to tsx, is accompanied by resistance to phage T6 and results from loss of the mechanism of albicidin transport through the outer membrane.

Other bacteria sensitive to low concentrations of albicidin presumably also accumulate the antibiotic intracellularly as a nucleoside analogue, but mechanisms of resistance may differ to that in E. coli. We have, for example, recently investigated albicidin resistance in Klebsiella oxytoca and discovered a gene for an albicidin-binding protein which confers high-level albicidin resistance when expressed in E. coli (Walker et al., 1988).

It may be possible to detect other mechanisms of spontaneous albicidin resistance in E. coli by plating a Thy⁻ strain on media containing albicidin and a low concentration of the required nucleoside. Any resulting Alb⁻ mutants would be expected to have an altered nucleoside-uptake system capable of excluding albicidin while transporting thymidine, or to have a different mechanism such as an albicidin-resistant target. We are interested in such mechanisms as they may prove applicable to obtain albicidin-resistant plant cells by selection or genetic transformation.

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References


