Development of an in-house loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP) assay for detection of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and evaluation in sputum samples of Nepalese patients

Basu Dev Pandey,1,2 Ajay Poudel,3 Tomoko Yoda,4 Aki Tamaru,4 Naozumi Oda,5 Yukari Fukushima,6 Binod Lekhak,3 Basista Risal,3 Bishnu Acharya,2 Bishwa Sapkota,7 Chie Nakajima,5 Tooru Taniguchi,8 Benjawan Phetsuksiri9 and Yasuhiko Suzuki6

Correspondence
Yasuhiko Suzuki
suzuki@czc.hokudai.ac.jp

1Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal
2Everest International Clinic and Research Center, Kathmandu, Nepal
3Department of Microbiology, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal
4Department of Infectious Diseases, Osaka Prefectural Institute of Public Health, Japan
5Asahi Kasei Co. Ltd, Shizuoka, Japan
6Research Center for Zoonosis Control, Hokkaido University, Hokkaido, Japan
7Department of Research and Biotechnology, Anandaban Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal
8Section of Bacterial Infections, Research Collaboration Center on Emerging and Re-emerging Infections, Osaka University, Nonthaburi, Thailand
9National Institute of Health, Department of Medical Sciences, Ministry of Public Health, Nonthaburi, Thailand

Received 8 July 2007
Accepted 9 December 2007

A number of nucleic acid amplification assays (NAAs) have been employed to detect tubercle bacilli in clinical specimens for tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis. Among these, loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP) is an NAA possessing superior isothermal reaction characteristics. In the present study, a set of six specific primers targeting the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* 16S rRNA gene with high sensitivity was selected and a LAMP system (MTB-LAMP) was developed. Using this system, a total of 200 sputum samples from Nepalese patients were investigated. The sensitivity of MTB-LAMP in culture-positive samples was 100 % (96/96), and the specificity in culture-negative samples was 94.2 % (98/104, 95 % confidence interval 90.5–97.9 %). The positive and negative predictive values of MTB-LAMP were 94.1 and 100 %, respectively. These results indicate that this MTB-LAMP method may prove to be a powerful tool for the early diagnosis of TB.

INTRODUCTION

Tuberculosis (TB), caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, is a common human disease, with 5.1 million new cases and 1.6 million deaths worldwide in 2005 (WHO, 2007). Although TB is often associated with developing nations and disadvantaged economic conditions, it is also gaining ground in many industrialized nations due to immigration, the emergence of drug-resistant strains and the AIDS epidemic.

Abbreviations: AFB, acid-fast bacilli; LAMP, loop-mediated isothermal amplification; NAA, nucleic acid amplification assay; TB, tuberculosis.

Among the countries substantially affected by TB, Nepal has an elevated annual risk of infection, with an estimated 45 % of the total population being infected. In 2005, approximately 48 000 people suffered from active TB, of whom 22 000 had infectious smear-positive pulmonary disease (WHO, 2007). Although the introduction of the Directly Observed Treatment, Short-course (DOTS) method has reduced the number of deaths, over 6000 people in Nepal continue to die of TB every year (NTP, 2004).

Diagnosis of TB involves clinical evaluation, including the tuberculin skin test, chest radiography and bacteriological tests. Currently, bacteriological tests depend on microscopic observation of acid-fast bacilli (AFB) in clinical
specimens and bacterial cultures from processed sputum samples, which has been the traditional method for many decades (Kent & Kubica, 1985). Although these techniques have been continuously refined and improved, they still have several limitations. Although sensitivity and specificity are insufficient, microscopic observation of AFB is widely used due to its rapidity. In contrast, bacteriological testing using bacterial cultures is considered the most accurate test due to its high sensitivity and specificity. However, this technique is both labour-intensive and time-consum ing, requiring 6–8 weeks to achieve maximum sensitivity (Kent & Kubica, 1985). An additional technique, nucleic acid amplification assay (NAA), allows the rapid, sensitive and specific detection of M. tuberculosis in sputum samples by amplifying and detecting specific nucleic acid sequences (CDC, 1992). In addition to the widely used PCR, several other methods of nucleic acid amplification have been used for M. tuberculosis detection (Jonas et al., 1993; Ruiz-Serrano et al., 1998; Iwamoto et al., 2003; Takakura et al., 2005), including loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP), a novel NAA which enables the detection of trace amounts of DNA under isothermal conditions, namely at 64 °C (Notomi et al., 2000). LAMP showing high amplification efficiency has been used for the diagnosis of several diseases (Notomi et al., 2000; Iwamoto et al., 2003; Kuboki et al., 2003; Parida et al., 2004, 2005; Kimura et al., 2005; Yoda et al., 2007).

Here, we established an M. tuberculosis detection system using LAMP, and compared its sensitivity, specificity and applicability with results from culture, microscopic observation of acid-fast stained smears and chest radiography.

**METHODS**

**Establishment of a LAMP method for the detection of M. tuberculosis.** More than 50 of six primers recognizing eight distinct regions of the 16S rRNA gene were designed using the PrimerExplorer V3 software (Eiken Chemical; https://primerexplorer.jp/lamp3.0.0/index.html). A primer set was composed of outer primers F3 and B3, inner primers FIP and BIP, and loop primers FLP and BLP. From our preliminary experiments, a set was selected based on its high sensitivity. The specificity of the selected primer set was examined by LAMP reaction on extracted DNA from various bacterial strains, including Mycobacterium tuberculosis, Mycobacterium bovis, Mycobacterium microti, Mycobacterium kansasi, Mycobacterium avium, Mycobacterium intracellulare, Mycobacterium shimoidei, Mycobacterium non-chromogenicum, Mycobacterium xenopi, Mycobacterium scrofulaceum, Mycobacterium gordani, Mycobacterium chelonae, Mycobacterium fortuitum, Achromobacter xylosidans, Acinetobacter haemolyticus, Bacillus cereus, Escherichia coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Legionella pneumophila, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Shigella boydii, Staphylococcus aureus and Streptococcus haemolyticus. Genomic DNA from bacterial strains was prepared from colonies by mechanical disruption as previously described (Suzuki et al., 1995) and dissolved in 300 μl TE buffer consisting of 10 mM Tris/HCl (pH 8.0) and 1 mM EDTA. LAMP reactions were performed in a total volume of 25 μl consisting of 30 pmol each of inner primers FIP and BIP, 5 pmol each of outer primers F3 and B3, 20 pmol each of loop primers FLP and BLP, 1.4 mM dNTP mixture, 50 mM Tris/
would facilitate the initiation of clinical TB treatment. Here, detection of *M. tuberculosis* using the MTB-LAMP system was developed and evaluated.

**Development of LAMP for the detection of *M. tuberculosis***

Among more than 50 sets of primers examined during our preliminary study, a set was selected based on its high sensitivity for purified DNA of *M. tuberculosis* H37Ra. As shown in Fig. 1(a), these primers targeted the first variable region of the *rrs* gene. Positions and orientations of F3, F2, FL, F1c, B1, BL, B2c and B3c primers (Notomi et al., 2000) are shown by arrows in Fig. 1(b). The sequences of MTB-FIP, MTB-BIP, MTB-F3, MTB-B3, MTB-FLP and MTB-FLP primers are shown in Fig. 1(c).

We first examined the specificity of MTB-LAMP for genomic DNA from various bacterial species. Efficient DNA amplification by MTB-LAMP was observed in the *M. tuberculosis* complex including *M. tuberculosis*, *M. bovis*, *M. africanum* and *M. microti* (Fig. 2a). In contrast, no DNA amplification was observed with the remaining bacterial species evaluated. This absence of amplification was also observed using larger amounts of bacterial genomic DNA (10 ng) (data not shown). These results suggest that the primer set used for LAMP is highly specific for the *M. tuberculosis* complex. The specificity of MTB-LAMP was further confirmed using DNA from *M. tuberculosis*, the *M. avium* complex and *M. kansasii* clinical isolates. MTB-LAMP reactions were positive for all 121 *M. tuberculosis* samples and negative for all 17 *M. avium* complex and 18 *M. kansasii* clinical isolates (Table 1). These results clearly demonstrate the high specificity of the LAMP system in detecting *M. tuberculosis*. Further confirmation of the selected primer set sensitivity was obtained by serially diluting DNA from *M. tuberculosis* H37Ra. Specific DNA amplification by MTB-LAMP was observed with starting DNA amounts as low as 100 fg (Fig. 2b). Because the weight of 4.5 billion base pairs from one bacterial genome is estimated at 5 fg, this result suggests that as few as 20

![Diagram](http://jmm.sgmjournals.org)
copies of *M. tuberculosis* DNA can be detected using our primer set. Using a bacterial culture of the same NaOH-treated sputum samples, the minimum detectable number of live *M. tuberculosis* species in a sputum sample by MTB-LAMP was determined to be 10 (data not shown). These observations show that MTB-LAMP is more sensitive than a LAMP method used in a previous study, in which the detection of *M. tuberculosis* targeting the *gyrB* gene was estimated to require a minimum of 50 copies of DNA (Iwamoto et al., 2003).

**Evaluation of MTB-LAMP for the detection of *M. tuberculosis* in clinical specimens**

Application of MTB-LAMP to clinical specimens was evaluated by comparing LAMP results with acid-fast smear tests, bacterial cultures and chest radiographs of 200 patients in Nepal. Results are summarized in Table 2. In culture-positive (C+) samples, *M. tuberculosis* was detected by MTB-LAMP in all 90 smear-positive (S+) and 6 smear-negative (S-) samples. The sensitivity of MTB-LAMP in C+ specimens was 100% (96/96). This result suggests that MTB-LAMP may be superior to the acid-fast smear test and comparable with bacterial culture testing, though the number of C+ and S- samples was not large enough to strongly conclude this. In culture-negative (C-) samples, MTB-LAMP reactions were positive in 1 of 5 S+ X-ray-negative (X-) cases; 2 of 13 S- X+ cases; and in 3 of 81 S- X- cases. No positive MTB-LAMP reaction was observed in the five S+ X+ patients. MTB-LAMP specificity in C- samples was 94.2% (98/104; 95% confidence interval 90.5–97.9%). The positive and negative predictive values of MTB-LAMP were 94.1 and 100%, respectively. These results from C- patients may suggest that MTB-LAMP is possibly highly sensitive in the detection of a small number of tubercle bacilli released from hidden foci in sputum.

*M. tuberculosis* was detected by MTB-LAMP in all C+ and a number of C- samples. Compared with results from standard culture testing, acid-fast staining and chest radiography, our results demonstrate the high clinical performance of MTB-LAMP in the rapid detection of *M. tuberculosis* from sputum samples. A study by Iwamoto et al. (2003) on LAMP sensitivity in sputum samples indicated that the detection limit of their LAMP assay is equivalent to that of the Amplicor assay (Roche Diagnostics). In some C- sputum samples, however, their system was unable to detect *M. tuberculosis*. In contrast, the sensitivity of our MTB-LAMP appears to be superior

**Table 1. Reactivity of MTB-LAMP with 10 ng DNA from *M. tuberculosis*, *M. avium* complex and *M. kansasii* clinical isolates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical isolates</th>
<th>LAMP reaction</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M. tuberculosis</em></td>
<td>121/121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M. avium</em> complex</td>
<td>0/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M. kansasii</em></td>
<td>0/18</td>
</tr>
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**Table 2. Comparison of MTB-LAMP results with smear, culture and chest radiograph results**

The table shows the percentage of *M. tuberculosis* LAMP-positive cases (no. of positive/total cases).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture (+) X-ray (+)</th>
<th>Culture (-) X-ray (-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smear (+) 100% (90/90) 0% (0/0) 0% (0/5) 20% (1/5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smear (-) 100% (5/5) 100% (1/1) 15% (2/13) 3.7% (3/81)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% (96/96) 5.8% (6/104)</td>
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</table>

**Fig. 2.** Specificity and sensitivity of MTB-LAMP determined by real-time turbidimetry. The amount of DNA amplification byproduct (Mg-pyrophosphate) was monitored by measuring turbidity (590 nm). NC, Negative control. (a) Specificity of MTB-LAMP analysed using extracted DNA from various bacterial species. Only results for the *M. tuberculosis* complex are shown. No positive reaction was observed with DNA from the other bacterial species. (b) Sensitivity of MTB-LAMP analysed using various concentrations of *M. tuberculosis* H37Ra DNA.
because of the detection of \textit{M. tuberculosis} in all 96 C\textsuperscript{+} samples (100\% sensitivity). A multicentre study on \textit{M. tuberculosis} detection showed the feasibility of using the LAMP method in developing countries (Boehme \textit{et al}., 2007). The study evaluated a prototype LAMP assay targeting the \textit{gyrB} gene and using a simplified manual DNA extraction method. The sensitivity of MTB-LAMP was 97.7\% (173/177) in S\textsuperscript{-} and C\textsuperscript{+} sputum samples and 48.8\% (21/43) in S\textsuperscript{-} and C\textsuperscript{+} sputum samples. This is lower than in the present results, with a sensitivity of 100\% (90/90) and 100\% (6/6) for C\textsuperscript{+} S\textsuperscript{+} and S\textsuperscript{-} sputum samples, respectively. Although our MTB-LAMP method is more time-consuming regarding sputum sample manipulation, it has the advantage of being highly sensitive.

In conclusion, this MTB-LAMP assay is an NAA method that allows direct identification of \textit{M. tuberculosis} in processed sputum samples. Due to its ease of use in developing countries and its high sensitivity and specificity, this assay may facilitate the identification of \textit{M. tuberculosis} in S\textsuperscript{-} cases, as well as the confirmation of diagnosis in suspected but sputum S\textsuperscript{-} clinical TB cases.

\section*{ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS}

We gratefully thank Dr M. Mondro and Mr Chaman Shrestha from the Department of Research and Biotechnology, Anandaba Leprosy Hospital, Nepal, as well as Mr Kiran Pandey at the Everest International Clinic and Research Center, Kathmandu, Nepal, for their technical help. We would also like to thank the Director and staff of the Nepal Tuberculosis Center for providing the culture facility. This work was supported in part by Grants-in-Aid for the Program of Founding Research Center for Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, Japan, to Y. S.

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