Letter to the Editor

Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus Strain- and Cell Type-Specific Inhibition of Type I Interferon Pathways

The interaction of noncytopathogenic bovine viral diarrhea virus type 1 (BVDV-1ncp) with antigen-presenting cell (APC) subsets is of great interest due to the recent increase in severe acute BVDV outbreaks attributed to this genotype (1, 12, 13). We report the effect of a BVDV-1ncp strain (Ho916ncp [13]) causing severe acute infection on in vitro type I interferon (alpha/beta interferon [IFN-α/β]) production compared to that of a mild-acute strain (Ky1203ncp) (15). Ho916ncp but not Ky1203ncp induced IFN-α/β in only lineage-negative (LIN-) cells, a recently described enriched IFN-α/β-producing cell population in cattle (A. Gibson, S. Miah, P. Griebel, J. Brownlie, and D. Werling, submitted for publication). In agreement with published data, monocytes and monocyte-derived dendritic cells (moDC) did not produce IFN-α/β in response to either strain (4, 11, 17).

Experimental infection of calves with BVDVncp results in the detection of IFN-α/β and the IFN-α/β-inducible gene Mx (5, 20) as well as serum IFN-α/β activity in pregnant dams and the fetus (22). The identification of IFN-α/β-producing cells within the lymph nodes of BVDVncp-infected calves (4) and of enriched circulating IFN-α/β-producing cells (Gibson et al., submitted) points to an APC subset as a cellular source of IFN-α/β during in vivo BVDVncp infections. In the present study, monocytes, moDC, and LIN- cells, generated from the same animal (11, 24–26, 28; Gibson et al., submitted), were exposed to either strain at a multiplicity of infection (MOI) of 0.1 and IFN-α/β was assessed after 48 h, using a previously described Mx-CAT (chloramphenicol acetyltransferase) reporter assay (4–6, 9). LIN- cells, but not monocytes or moDC, produced significant amounts of IFN-α/β in response to Ho916ncp but not to Ky1203ncp or mock-infected control (Fig. 1). To assess whether these observed differences in IFN-α/β production were due to differences in viral replication, the presence of BVDV was determined by immunoperoxidase staining using a bovine hyperimmune serum, similar to what was described previously (11). Astonishingly, no clear differences in abilities to infect the different cell types were seen for the two BVDVncp strains (Fig. 2). As differences in viral replication did not explain differences in IFN-α/β production, we next assessed the potential effects of both BVDVncp strains on interferon response factors (IRFs). BVDVncp is known to inhibit IFN-α/β production through viral proteins Npro (2, 3, 10, 14) and Epro (16, 18, 19), which block IFN-α/β production by targeting IRF-3 for degradation by polyubiquitination (7, 14) or by degrading viral RNA (19). Translocation of IRF-3 occurs during infection but not binding to DNA (2). In contrast, IRF-7 is neither activated nor translocated to the nucleus (2).

We assessed the impact of both strains on IFN-α/β signaling components IRF-3 and IRF-7 by Western blotting,
which showed that IRF-3 and IRF-7 were increased in all three cell types infected with Ho916ncp compared to mock-infected controls. In contrast, Ky1203ncp induced a reduction of IRF-7 expression in monocytes and moDC and a reduction in IRF-3 expression in all three cell types. IRF-7 remained unchanged in LIN[H11002] cells, potentially indicating cell type-specific degradation in monocytes and moDC for Ky1203ncp (Fig. 3). Ho916ncp-induced IFN-α/β production by LIN[H11002] cells appears to be independent of IRF-3 or IRF-7 modulation; however, LIN[H11002] cells, unlike monocytes or moDC, express TLR7 (27; Gibson et al., submitted), which has been recently implicated in the recognition of other pestiviruses, such as West Nile virus and dengue virus (8, 21, 23). Ho916ncp, as a severe acute BVDV-1ncp strain could be more readily accessible to the endosomal compartment within LIN[H11002] cells, thus producing cell type-restricted IFN-α/β through TLR7. Our data show for the first time differences in BVDV-1ncp strains with regard to a cell-specific
IFN-α/β response and offer some suggestions for this modulation.

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