Acta Scientific Veterinary Sciences (ISSN: 2582-3183)

Volume 5 Issue 11 November 2023

Conceptual Paper

Mycobacterium: A Veterinary Introduction

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Received: September 25, 2023

Published: October 20, 2023

Mycobacterium spp. (Species) collectively refer to various species withinthe Mycobacterium genus, which is a diverse group of bacteria known for their unique cell wall structure and their ability to cause a wide range of diseases in humans and animals. Here are some notable Mycobacterium species

Mycobacterium tuberculosis: This bacterium is responsible for human tuberculosis (TB). TB primarily affects the lungs but can also involveother organs, and it remains a primary global health concern.

Mycobacterium leprae: The causative agent of leprosy, also known asHansen's disease. Leprosy primarily affects the skin, peripheral nerves,and mucous membranes and has been a historically stigmatized disease.

Mycobacterium bovis: This species can cause tuberculosis in cattle and other animals, and it can also be transmitted to humans through consuming contaminated milk or meat.

Mycobacterium avium complex (MAC): This group includes several Mycobacterium species, such as *M. avium* and *M. intracellular,* which can cause infections in people with weakened immune systems.

Mycobacterium smegmatis: A nonpathogenic species commonly used in laboratories for research purposes. It serves as a model organism for studying the genetics and biology of mycobacteria.

- ***Mycobacterium marinum:*** This bacterium can cause skin infections in fish and occasionally infects humans who come into contact with contaminated water or fish. It is sometimes referred to as "fish tank granuloma."
- ***Mycobacterium ulcerans*:** Responsible for Buruli ulcer, a neglected tropical disease that primarily affects subcutaneous tissues and canlead to disfigurement if not treated promptly.
- ***Mycobacterium chelonae*:** A rapidly growing Mycobacterium species that can cause skin and soft tissue infections, especially in immunocompromised individuals.
- ***Mycobacterium kansasii*:** Known to cause pulmonary infections in humans, particularly in individuals with compromised immune systems.

These are just a few examples of Mycobacterium species, and there aremany more within this genus, each with its characteristics and potential

- **Wildlife Conservation:** Mycobacterial infections can also impact wildlifepopulations. Wildlife veterinarians and conservationists investigate and manage Mycobacterial infections in endangered species to prevent thespread of the disease and support conservation efforts.
- **Exotic Animals and Pets**: Mycobacterial infections can affect exotic animals and pets, necessitating special veterinary care. Veterinariansshould be aware of these infectious diseases when treating these animals and take precautions to prevent their spread.
- **Diagnostic Challenges**: Mycobacterial infections can be challenging todiagnose due to their slow growth and unusual cell wall structure.

Veterinary laboratories often use special tests to identify and characterize these bacteria, making accurate diagnosis critical for treatment and appropriate management.

- **Research:** Mycobacterial species are used in research laboratories to investigate various aspects of microbiology, immunology, and genetics.Researchers use these bacteria as model organisms to better understand the biology of mycobacteria, including pathogenic species.
- **Vaccine Development:** Veterinary scientists are working to developvaccines against mycobacterial infections in animals, especially tuberculosis and other economically important diseases. Vaccinationcan be an important tool in disease control.
- **Public Health**: The study of mycobacterial infections in animals has implications for public health because some of these infections can spread to the human population. Veterinarians play an important role inthe prevention of zoonotic infections and the control of potential outbreaks.

In summary, mycobacterial species are important in veterinary science because of their impact on animal health, zoonotic potential, diagnostic challenges, and relevance to wildlife conservation, research, and public health. Understanding and effectively managing mycobacterial infections is an important component of modern veterinary medicine.

Cellular components of mycobacteria

Mycobacteria exhibit distinctive cellular components that set them apartfrom other bacteria.

- **Wax Cell Wall:** Mycobacteria possess a robust cell wall primarily composed of a lipid-rich substance known as mycolic acid. This waxlayer renders the cell wall hydrophobic (resistant to water) and highly impervious to many antibiotics. This feature underlies the challenge oftreating mycobacterial infections effectively.
- **Peptidoglycan:** Beneath the mycolic acid layer, mycobacteria contain athinner layer of peptidoglycan, a structural element commonly found inbacterial cell walls. In comparison to conventional bacteria, mycobacteria have a reduced peptidoglycan layer.
- **Arabinogalactan**: Mycobacteria possess a complex arabinogalactan polysaccharide layer sandwiched between layers of peptidoglycan and mycolic acid. This component provides additional structural support tothe cell wall.
- **Plasma Membrane:** Beneath the cell wall, mycobacteria maintain astandard plasma membrane surrounding the cytoplasm. These membranes play crucial roles in various cellular processes.
- **Cytoplasm:** The cytoplasm of mycobacteria houses genetic material(DNA), ribosomes for protein synthesis, and other essential cellular components necessary for growth and metabolism.
- **Rope Factors:** Mycobacteria produce glycolipids referred to as rope factors within their cell walls. Rope factors play a role in the formation of elongated cell aggregates, resembling cords, and contribute to thevirulence of these bacteria.

The distinctive composition of the mycobacterial cell wall is a chief reason behind the resistance of Mycobacterial species to antibiotics thatare effective against typical bacteria. The wax layer acts as a formidable barrier, impeding the penetration of many drugs into the cell and their subsequent action on their targets.

Understanding the cellular makeup of mycobacterial species is of paramount importance for effectively addressing mycobacterial infections and conducting research on these bacteria, which are responsible for diseases such as tuberculosis and leprosy in humans and various animal infections.

Cultivation and growth of mycobacterial species

Cultivating mycobacterial species, including Mycobacterium tuberculosis, necessitates specific culture media and conditions owing to their unique cellular structure and slow growth rate. The primary medium employed for cultivating mycobacteria is the Lowenstein-Jensen (LJ) medium, although alternative options are available. Here are the commonly used media and growth conditions.

Lowenstein-Jensen (LJ) Medium

- LJ medium is among the most widely used media for cultivating Mycobacterial species.
- It comprises agar enriched with malachite green, glycerol, and various nutrients.
- Malachite green serves to inhibit the growth of contaminants.
- LJ medium presents as a solid medium, with mycobacterial colonies appearing raised, rough, and creamy white.

Middlebrook 7H10 and 7H11 Agar

- These agar-based media are specifically formulated for the isolation and growth of mycobacteria.
- Middlebrook media are available in both solid and liquid forms.
- They contain diverse nutrients, including oleic acid, albumin, dextrose, and catalase.
- The solid agar versions facilitate the growth of individual colonies.

Middlebrook 7H9 Broth

- This liquid medium is suitable for mycobacterial growth, particularly in liquid cultures.
- It shares nutritional components with 7H10 and 7H11 agar. "Middlebrook 7H9 broth is often used in conjunction with othersupplements tailored to specific Mycobacterial species.

Sauton's medium

- Sauton's medium is another liquid medium employed for the growth of Mycobacteria.
- It consists of asparagine, glycerol, potassium dihydrogen phosphate, and additional nutrients.
- Sauton's medium is often employed for cultivating non-tuberculousmycobacteria (NTM).

Stonebrink's Medium

- Stonebrink's medium is employed for the isolation of Mycobacterium tuberculosis from clinical specimens.
- It comprises glycerol, ammonium sulfate, citric acid, and malachitegreen.

Ogawa Medium

- Ogawa medium is a liquid medium utilized for the cultivation of Mycobacterium tuberculosis from saliva samples.
- It includes asparagine, glycerol, and other nutrients.

Cultivating mycobacterial species can be a time-intensive process due totheir slow growth rate, often requiring several weeks for visible coloniesto develop. Additionally, the handling of Mycobacterial cultures necessitates stringent biosafety precautions within a Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2) laboratory environment due to their potential pathogenicity.

Successful cultivation necessitates specialized incubation conditions, typically maintained at an elevated temperature, usually 37°C.

Mycobacterial virulence

Mycobacterial species, notably Mycobacterium tuberculosis (the causative agent of tuberculosis) and Mycobacterium leprae (the causative agent of leprosy), are renowned for their heightened virulence. Virulence denotes the capability of a microorganism to induce disease ina host. Several pivotal factors contribute to the virulence of the genus.

- **Mycobacterial species:** Different Mycobacterial species show variable virulence levels.
- **Cell Wall Composition:** Mycobacteria features a unique and intricate cell wall characterized by an abundance of lipids, includingmycolic acids. This waxy cell wall constitutes a significant aspect of their virulence, conferring protection against the host's immunesystem and various antibiotics.
- **Intracellular Lifestyle:** Mycobacteria adopt a facultative intracellular pathogenic strategy, allowing them to thrive and multiply within host cells, particularly macrophages. This intracellular lifestyle enables the evasion of immune responses andpersistence within the host.
- **Slow Growth:** Mycobacteria exhibit a leisurely growth rate, with generation times spanning hours to days. This protracted growth hampers the host's immune response and renders the bacteria lesssusceptible to antibiotic intervention.
- **Cord Factor:** Certain Mycobacterium species produce a glycolipidknown as cord factor. The cord factor contributes to the formationof elongated, cord-like cell aggregates and is associated with thebacteria's virulence.
- **Antigenic Variation:** Mycobacteria possess the capacity to modifytheir surface antigens, evading immune recognition. This adaptability bolsters their ability to establish chronic infections.
- **Immune Evasion:** Mycobacteria employ diverse mechanisms to elude host immune responses. For instance, they can impede thefusion of lysosomes with phagosomes within macrophages, thwarting their destruction.
- **Granuloma Formation:** Mycobacteria incite the development of granulomas—organized clusters of immune cells—in response to infection. Granulomas can serve to contain and control the infection but also offer a niche for bacterial persistence.
- **Production of Toxins and Enzymes:** Certain Mycobacterium species have the capability to produce toxins and enzymes that possess the potential to harm host tissues and hinder the effectiveness of the immune responses
- **Persistence:** Mycobacteria exhibit a remarkable capacity for persistence within the host's body. They can reside in a dormant orlatent state for extended periods, which may lead to the reactivation of the disease at a later stage in life
- **Drug Resistance:** Notably, Mycobacterium tuberculosis has acquired resistance to a multitude of antibiotics, including forms categorized as multidrug-resistant (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant (XDR-TB). This resistance poses significant challenges in treatment, augmenting the overall virulence of thebacterium.

It is essential to recognize that while Mycobacterium tuberculosis and Mycobacterium leprae are renowned for their virulence, not all Mycobacterium species share the same level of pathogenicity. Many mycobacterium species are nonpathogenic or induce only mild infections.

Comprehending the factors contributing to the virulence of Mycobacterium species stands as a pivotal step in the development of efficacious treatments and vaccines against diseases such as tuberculosis and leprosy, which persist as substantial global health concerns.

Mycobacterium diseases of veterinary importance

M. bovis	Tuberculosis in cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat, guinea pig, rabbit
M. tuberculosis	Tuberculosis in human, monkey, dog, guineapig
M. Paratuberculosis	Jhone's disease, Paratuberculosis, Chronic Bacillary Dysentery
M. avium	Tuberculosis in birds and pigs
M.micoti	Similar to *M. tuberculosis* used in vaccine development
M. laparemurium	Rat and Feline Leprosy
M. marinum	Infect Fishes and amphibians

Table 1