Complementing the IPD-IMGT/HLA database by Complete Genomic Characterization of Non-Rare HLA-DRB1 Alleles

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Introduction

The IPD-IMGT/HLA database (release 3.41.0) currently comprises 2377 HLA-DRB1 alleles. However, for most alleles (96%) only exons 2 and 3 have been reported. Furthermore, the 118 full-genome characterized alleles are not the most common ones but often represent recently discovered rare variants. This lack of complete sequence information for many common or well defined HLA-DRB1 alleles disrupts the advantage of NGS for HLA genotyping. Therefore, we initiated a project aiming for the full-genome characterization of all HLA-DRB1 alleles down to a frequency of 0.0001 in European populations.

Sample Selection & PCR

Full-genome HLA-DRB1 characterization is challenging because of the varying length of the gene, 11 to 16 kb depending on the allele, as well as long homopolymer stretches and repetitive sequences. These obstacles were overcome by the development of an robust allele-length specific amplification strategy (EFI 2019: https://dkms-lab.de/data/EFI2019_DRB1fullLength.pdf).

To extend the sequences of the most frequently partial known alleles in the IPD/IMGT-HLA database, we selected 624 samples harboring 125 distinct HLA-DRB1 alleles with the following criteria:

- DNA concentration > 20 ng/µl
- Allele genotyped at least 50 times in the high throughput workflow between 2016 and 2019
- availability of at least 5 independent samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-Range PCR Group</th>
<th>Alleles</th>
<th>Allele Length</th>
<th>PCR Failure Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>DRB1*03/03/01/15/16</td>
<td>11 – 12 kb</td>
<td>20% 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>DRB1*03/08/13/13/12/13/14</td>
<td>13 – 14 kb</td>
<td>7% 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>DRB1*04/07/09</td>
<td>15 – 16 kb</td>
<td>44% 39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: PCR failure rates of grouped known HLA-DRB1 alleles. Pretyped samples are assigned to their respective group(s) using first field information.

IPD-IMGT/HLA database

In total, 315 sequences were submitted to IPD-IMGT/HLA using TypeLoader2. This includes the characterization of 112 unique alleles that had been selected for full gene characterization. Additionally, 51 novel alleles and 152 allele confirmations were submitted.

Conclusion

We characterized and submitted 315 full-length HLA-DRB1 alleles to the IPD-IMGT/HLA database, thereby extending the sequence of 112 common or well defined alleles. But even though we raised the proportion of full-length known HLA-DRB1 alleles from 4% to 10%, about 90% of HLA-DRB1 alleles are still lacking a complete genomic sequence. Therefore, we encourage other HLA genotyping laboratories to use the described allele-length specific amplification strategy to submit HLA-DRB1 full-genome sequences in the future.

References


Dual Redundant Sequencing Strategy

Using our dual redundant reference sequencing (DR25) pipeline, we combined short-read illumina sequences with long-read PacBio Sequel sequences to generate highest quality error corrected consensus sequences.

Results

Figure 2: Growth of the IPD-IMGT/HLA database for HLA-DRB1 alleles from July 2014 to January 2021. The submissions described in this study are colored in green, submissions from other laboratories are colored in grey.

Figure 3: Full-genome characterized alleles (orange) and partially known alleles (grey) before (release 3.41) and after (release 3.43) this characterization effort sorted by number of observations in the DKMS Life Science Lab. The cumulative allele frequency of fully characterized HLA-DRB1 alleles has been increased from 93% to 99%, thereby strongly improving the basis for NGS based HLA-DRB1 genotyping.