



Short communication

Diagnostic performance of near-patient testing for influenza

Christiane Beckmann^a, Hans H. Hirsch^{a,b,c,*}^a Division of Infection Diagnostics, Department Biomedicine (Haus Petersplatz), University of Basel, Switzerland^b Transplantation & Clinical Virology, Department Biomedicine (Haus Petersplatz), University of Basel, Switzerland^c Infectious Disease & Hospital Epidemiology, University Hospital Basel, Basel, Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Background: Rapid diagnosis of influenza is important for controlling outbreaks and starting antiviral therapy. Direct antigen detection (DAD) is rapid, but lacks sensitivity, whereas nucleic acid amplification testing (NAT) is more sensitive, but also more time-consuming.

Objectives: To evaluate the performance of a rapid isothermal NAT and two DADs.

Study design: During February–May 2014, we tested 211 consecutive patients with influenza-like illness using a commercial isothermal NAT (AlereTM Influenza A&B) as well as the DAD Sofia[®] Influenza A + B and BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B for detection of influenza-A and -B virus. RespiFinder-22[®] a commercial multiplex NAT served as reference test. Serial 10-fold dilutions of influenza-A and -B cell culture supernatants were examined. Another 225 patient samples were tested during December 2014–February 2015.

Results: Compared to RespiFinder-22[®], the isothermal NAT AlereTM Influenza A&B, and the DAD Sofia[®] Influenza A + B and BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B had sensitivities of 77.8%, 59.3% and 29.6%, and specificities of 99.5%, 98.9% and 100%, respectively, for the first 211 patient samples. AlereTM Influenza A&B showed 85.7% sensitivity and 100% specificity in the second cohort. Isothermal NAT was 10–100-fold more sensitive compared to DAD for influenza virus culture supernatants with a lower limit of detection of 5000–50,000 copies/mL. The average turn-around time (TAT) of isothermal NAT and DADs was 15 min, but increased to 110 min for AlereTM Influenza A&B, 30 min for BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B, and 45 min for Sofia[®] Influenza A + B, when analyzing batches of 6 samples.

Conclusion: Simple sample processing and a TAT of 15 min render isothermal NAT AlereTM Influenza A&B suitable for sequential near-patient testing, but the TAT advantage is lost when testing of larger series.

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1. Background

Rapid and sensitive diagnostic tests for influenza virus permit timely treatment decisions and infection control measures in emergency rooms, hospital wards, and nursing homes [1–3]. The current methods used for the laboratory diagnosis of influenza include virus isolation by cell culture, direct antigen detection (DAD), and nucleic acid amplification testing (NAT). Virus isolation by cell culture permits identification of infectious virus with fairly high sensitivity, but is time- and resource-consuming and largely limited to specialized laboratories. DAD has been widely used because of its short turn-around time (TAT), but is limited by its lower sensitivity, especially in adult patients and those presenting several days

after symptom onset [4,5]. NAT is characterized by high sensitivity and specificity, semi-quantification in real-time formats, and its amenability to automation and multiplexing [6]. However, NAT requires a molecular diagnostic laboratory with skilled personnel, appropriate instrumentation, but rarely delivers results with TAT of <6 h.

2. Objective

To evaluate the performance of the isothermal PCR for influenza (AlereTM Influenza A&B) and two DADs (Sofia[®] Influenza A + B and BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B) versus a commercial multiplex NAT (RespiFinder-22[®]).

3. Study design

Between February 2014 and May 2014, we tested a first cohort of 211 consecutive nasopharyngeal swabs from patients with influenza-like illness by the isothermal NAT AlereTM Influenza A&B

* Corresponding author at: Department Biomedicine (Haus Petersplatz), University of Basel, Petersplatz, 10, CH-4009 Basel, Switzerland. Tel.: +41 61 267 3266; fax: +41 61 267 3283.

E-mail address: hans.hirsch@unibas.ch (H.H. Hirsch).

(Alere, Wädenswil, Switzerland) and the DADs Sofia[®] Influenza A + B (Quidel Corp., San Diego, CA; USA) and BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B (Alere, Wädenswil, Switzerland). RespiFinder-22[®] served as the primary reference test. A second prospective series of 225 samples submitted between December 2014 and February 2015 (cohort 2) compared only Alere[™] Influenza A&B with RespiFinder-22[®]. Discordant results were retested using the local in-house QNAT [7].

The 436 nasopharyngeal swabs were taken from 178 females and 258 males (median age, 4 years; interquartile range [IQR] 0–49 years) for influenza diagnostics between February 2014 and May 2014 and December 2014 and February 2015. Of the 275 pediatric patients, 140 (50.9%) were less than 1 year old. Of the 161 adult patients, 69 (42.9%) were older than 60 years. 423 samples (97.0%) were analyzed prospectively from fresh samples, 211/436 were examined in parallel with all 4 methods (DADs, isothermal NAT and multiplex NAT). For 13 (3.0%), testing was done retrospectively from frozen samples.

Alere[™] Influenza A&B, BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B, and Sofia[®] Influenza A + B testing was performed as described by the manufacturer. The average assay time was 15 min for Alere[™] Influenza A&B and BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B, and 20 min for Sofia[®] Influenza A + B. RespiFinder-22[®] (PathoFinder, Maastricht, The Netherlands) had a TAT of 16 h [6,8]. Discordant samples were resolved by in-house QNAT for influenza [7] with a TAT of 6 h. Total nucleic acids were extracted from 200 µl of the respiratory sample using the Corbett CAS-1200 system (Qiagen Hilden, Germany).

4. Results

In total, 57/436 samples (13.1%) were positive for influenza-A (25 in the first and 32 in the second cohort) and 5/436 samples (1.1%) for influenza-B (2 in the first, and 3 in the second cohort) by RespiFinder-22[®]. The Alere[™] Influenza A&B identified 47/436 (10.8%) influenza-A, and 4/436 (0.9%) influenza-B. Of the 57 influenza-A positive samples, 16 could be classified as subtype H1N1 (28.1%), 41 as subtype H3N2 (71.9%). The BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B detected influenza-A in 8/211 (3.8%) specimens and no influenza-B, the Sofia[®] Influenza A + B assay identified influenza-A in 14/211 (6.6%), influenza-B in 2/211 (0.9%) samples. Discordant results of 12 samples were resolved by influenza-specific QNAT. The performance of all three rapid tests compared to the reference method for influenza-A and -B combined is shown in Table 1. Using multiplex NAT as reference, Alere[™] Influenza A&B, Sofia[®] Influenza A + B, and BinaxNOW[®] Influenza A&B had sensitivities of 82.3%, 59.3% and 29.6%, and specificities of 99.7%, 98.9% and 100%, respectively.

Specificity of the test could be confirmed with influenza-negative samples that had been tested with RespiFinder-22[®] ($n=373$). Multiplex NAT detected 14 other pathogens in these samples including rhinovirus/enterovirus, coronavirus OC43, NL63, 229E and HKU1, human bocavirus, RSV A and RSV B, adenovirus, parainfluenza-3, parainfluenza-4, human metapneumovirus and the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis* and *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*. None of the 11 false-negative samples were positive for another pathogen. Overall, the sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), negative predictive value (NPV) and κ values (inter-observer agreement) for influenza-A and -B were slightly higher for specimens from pediatric patients (89.5%).

The limit of detection for the tests was evaluated using serial dilutions of fresh cell culture supernatant of influenza-A H3N2 and H1N1 and influenza-B grown on LLC-MK2 cells (Fig. 1). For influenza-A, the detection limit of the Alere[™] Influenza A&B according to QNAT was approximately 5,000 GEq/mL (H3N2), 50,000 GEq/mL (H1N1), and 10,000 GEq/mL for Influenza-B. Overall, the sensitivity of both DADs (Sofia[®] Influenza A+B and

Table 1
Performance of Alere[™], Sofia[®] and BinaxNOW[®] influenza A and B assays.

Alere [™] Inf A&B	TP	FP	TN	FN	Total	% Sensitivity (95% CI)	% Specificity (95% CI)	PPV (95% CI)	NPV (95% CI)	κ
Study period 1	21	1	183	6	211	77.8 (57.7–91.3)	99.5 (97.0–99.9)	95.5 (77.1–99.2)	96.8 (93.2–98.8)	0.84
Study period 2	30	0	190	5	225	85.7 (69.7–95.1)	100 (98.1–100)	100 (88.3–100)	97.4 (94.3–99.2)	0.91
Study period 1 + 2	51	1	373	11	436	82.3 (70.5–90.8)	99.7 (98.5–100)	98.1 (89.7–99.7)	97.1 (94.3–98.6)	0.88
Sofia [®] Inf A + B										
Study period 1	16	2	182	11	211	59.3 (38.8–77.6)	98.9 (96.1–99.8)	88.9 (65.2–98.3)	94.3 (90.0–97.1)	0.68
BinaxNOW [®] Inf A&B										
Study period 1	8	0	183	19	210	29.6 (13.8–50.2)	100 (98.0–100)	100 (62.9–100)	90.6 (85.7–94.2)	0.42

TP: True positives; FP: False positives; TN: True negatives; FN: False negatives; PPV: Positive predictive value; NPV: Negative predictive value; CI: Confidence interval; κ : Interobserver agreement; Study period 1: February 2014–May 2014; Study period 2: December 2014–February 2015; data for influenza-A and -B were taken into account.

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