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Roles of Interleukin-6 and Macrophage Inflammatory Protein–2 in Pneumolysin-Induced Lung Inflammation in Mice

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Pneumolysin (PLY), a toxin synthesized by Streptococcus pneumoniae, is an important virulence factor in pneumococcal disease. This study evaluated the effects of PLY in lungs of mice. Intranasal inoculation with PLY was associated with a dose-dependent influx of polymorphonuclear leukocytes (PMNL) in bronchoalveolar lavage fluid (BALF) and increased concentrations of interleukin (IL)–6, macrophage inflammatory protein (MIP)–2, and KC in BALF. PLY mutants with either reduced cytolytic activity or reduced cytolytic and complement-activating activities were less potent in inducing PMNL recruitment to the lung (P < .05), which suggests that PLY cytolytic activity is very important for the inflammatory response. IL-6 and MIP-2 also played a role in PLY-induced PMNL recruitment; this response was partially diminished in IL-6 gene-deficient mice and in mice treated with anti–MIP-2 antiserum. PLY may play an important role in the induction of an inflammatory response in the pulmonary compartment in the early phase of pneumococcal pneumonia.

Community-acquired pneumonia occurs in >4 million persons per year in the United States, and Streptococcus pneumoniae is isolated from 40%–75% of these patients. Because resistance of the pneumococcus to current antimicrobial agents is increasing and of concern, knowledge of pathogenetic processes during pneumococcal pneumonia is important for the development of alternative treatment modalities.

Pneumococcal virulence is largely attributable to the anti-phagocytic effects of its capsule. In addition, cell wall components and toxins are thought to play a role in the induction of an inflammatory response during pneumococcal infection [1]. Pneumolysin (PLY), a toxin produced by all S. pneumoniae clinical isolates, is a major determinant of virulence, as evidenced by findings in mice that infections induced by a PLY-deficient pneumococcal strain follow a less severe course than infections induced by a PLY-producing strain [2, 3].

The mechanisms by which PLY interacts with host defense are only partly elucidated. PLY is a pluripotent toxin with distinct cytolytic and complement-activating effects. At sublytic concentrations, PLY inhibits several functions of polymorphonuclear leukocytes (PMNL) in vitro, including respiratory burst, degranulation, chemotaxis, and bactericidal activity [4].

Knowledge of the in vivo effects of PLY in the pulmonary compartment is limited. In rats, instillation of PLY in the ligated apical lobe of the lung reproduced histologic features of pneumonia [5]. However, important inflammatory responses, such as recruitment of PMNL and production of cytokines, were not directly addressed in that study. In the present study, we further evaluated the effects of PLY in lungs of mice.

Materials and Methods

Animals. BALB/c mice were purchased from Harlan Sprague Dawley. Interleukin (IL)–6−/− BALB/c mice were provided by M. Kopf (Basel Institute for Immunology). Experiments were done with 8-week-old female mice.

Reagents. PLY and PLY mutants were provided by the Laboratory for Vaccine Research, National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM). Three modified PLY preparations were used, of which one (PdT) lacks cytolytic properties, one (PdB) lacks cytolytic and complement-activating activity, and one (PdT) shows no toxicity at all. PLY preparations were purified as described elsewhere [6, 7]. Lipopolysaccharide (LPS) contamination was < 40 pg/μg of PLY for all PLY preparations, as determined by limulus amebocyte lysate (LAL) assay (Laboratory of the Control of Biological Products, RIVM). Anti–mouse MIP-2 antiserum was gener...
Effects of pneumolysin (PLY) on cellular composition of and cytokine production in bronchoalveolar lavage fluid (BALF).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>250</th>
<th>500</th>
<th>1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total cells</td>
<td>3.5 ± 0.5</td>
<td>11.8 ± 2.8</td>
<td>18 ± 4.5</td>
<td>19.5 ± 3.8</td>
<td>77.5 ± 13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMNL</td>
<td>0.8 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.1 ± 0.3</td>
<td>4.6 ± 1.0</td>
<td>13.6 ± 3.9</td>
<td>62 ± 18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMs</td>
<td>2.6 ± 0.7</td>
<td>10.0 ± 1.9</td>
<td>13.9 ± 4.1</td>
<td>5.5 ± 1.1</td>
<td>14.5 ± 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lymphocytes</td>
<td>0.04 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.4 ± 0.14</td>
<td>0.1 ± 0.04</td>
<td>0.4 ± 0.1</td>
<td>0.7 ± 0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-6</td>
<td>0.03 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.03 ± 0.0</td>
<td>0.2 ± 0.0</td>
<td>5.1 ± 0.5</td>
<td>2.24 ± 0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC</td>
<td>0.38 ± 0.09</td>
<td>0.33 ± 0.04</td>
<td>0.62 ± 0.34</td>
<td>1.38 ± 0.36</td>
<td>2.08 ± 1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIP-2</td>
<td>0.07 ± 0.02</td>
<td>0.11 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.08 ± 0.01</td>
<td>0.59 ± 0.32</td>
<td>0.59 ± 0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE. Data are mean ± SEM (×10^5/mL of BALF for cell influx and ng/mL of BALF for cytokine concentrations) of 4–6 mice/dose group, 6 h after intranasal administration of PLY. Control mice (no PLY) received sterile isotonic saline. AMs, alveolar macrophages; IL, interleukin; MIP, macrophage inflammatory protein; PMNL, polymorphonuclear leukocytes.

*P < .05 vs. control mice.
Pneumococcal pneumonia is associated with local production of cytokines and chemokines at the infection site. Earlier studies suggested that PLY may contribute to this response. PLY was found to stimulate the production of IL-1 and TNF by human monocytes in vitro [11]. In addition, serum IL-6 levels were relatively higher after intravenous injection of wt S. pneumoniae than after administration of PLY-negative mutant S. pneumoniae in mice [2]. We believe that our study is the first to describe the capacity of PLY to induce the production of IL-6 and the CXC chemokines, KC and MIP-2, in the pulmonary compartment. However, in contrast to earlier in vitro observations [11], PLY did not induce production of TNF in mouse lungs.

The cytolysis activity of PLY also seemed to be the most important factor for inducing the production of IL-6, MIP-2, and KC, as indicated by the fact that both PLY with reduced cytolytic activity and PLY with reduced cytolytic and complement-activating activities demonstrated a reduced capacity to induce these mediators, when compared with wt PLY. Since PLY was capable of inducing the production of IL-6 and the CXC chemokines, KC and MIP-2, in the pulmonary compartment. However, in contrast to earlier in vitro observations [11], PLY did not induce production of TNF in mouse lungs.

We found that mutated forms of PLY with reduced cytolytic activity or with reduced cytolytic and complement-activating activity were equally less potent than wt PLY in eliciting PMNL recruitment to the lung. These data suggest that cytolytic activity is the main property contributing to the inflammatory response, whereas the ability of PLY to activate complement seems less important. However, since mutated PLY in which only complement-activating activity was reduced (and cytolytic activity was intact) was not available, it remains possible that both PLY activities are equally important but non-additive.

Pneumococcal pneumonia is associated with local production of cytokines and chemokines at the infection site. Earlier studies suggested that IL-6 may have a proinflammatory role during bleomycin-induced lung injury [12]. However, other studies have indicated that endogenous IL-6 serves an anti-inflammatory role during...
endotoxin-induced lung inflammation in mice. Indeed, IL-6−/− mice had an enhanced influx of PMNL in BALF and higher lung MIP-2 concentrations than IL-6+/+ mice after intrapulmonary delivery of endotoxin [14]. Hence, the role of lung-derived IL-6 may differ, depending on the bacterial or inflammatory stimulus that is administered. Anti–MIP-2 reduces PMNL influx after PLY administration. In accordance, endogenous lung-derived IL-6 may differ, depending on the bacterial or inflammatory stimulus that is administered. Anti–MIP-2 reduces PMNL influx after PLY administration. In accordance, endogenous MIP-2 was important for PMNL recruitment during murine Klebsiella pneumonia [8] and endotoxin-induced lung inflammation [13]. In the current study, both IL-6−/− and anti–MIP-2−treated mice had diminished KC levels in BALF after inoculation with PLY, which suggests that PMNL contribute to KC production.

PLY contributes to the virulence of S. pneumoniae. In this study, we demonstrated that PLY can induce an acute inflammatory reaction in the mouse lung, characterized by PMNL influx, lung damage, and local IL-6 and CXC chemokine production, after intranasal instillation. PLY-induced PMNL influx likely is predominantly caused by its cytolysis activity and is mediated by MIP-2 and, to a lesser extent, by IL-6. PLY, conceivably together with cell wall constituents of S. pneumoniae, may play a significant role in mounting an inflammatory response in the pulmonary compartment during pneumococcal pneumonia.

Acknowledgments

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References