Hospitalized premature infants are colonized by related bacterial strains
with distinct proteomic profiles

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Abstract

During the first weeks of life, microbial colonization of the gut impacts human immune system maturation and other developmental processes. In premature infants, aberrant colonization has been implicated in the onset of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), a life-threatening intestinal disease. To study the premature infant gut colonization process, genome-resolved metagenomics was conducted on 343 fecal samples collected during the first three months of life from 35 premature infants housed in a neonatal intensive care unit, 14 of which developed NEC, and metaproteomic measurements were made on 87 samples. Microbial community composition and proteomic profiles remained relatively stable on the time scale of a week, but the proteome was more variable. Although genetically similar organisms colonized many infants, most infants were colonized by distinct strains with metabolic profiles that could be distinguished using metaproteomics. Microbiome composition correlated with infant, antibiotics administration, and NEC diagnosis. Communities were found to cluster into seven primary types, and community type switched within infants, sometimes multiple times. Interestingly, some communities sampled from the same infant at subsequent time points clustered with those of other infants. In some cases, switches preceded onset of NEC; however, no species or community type could account for NEC across the majority of infants. In addition to a correlation of protein abundances with organism replication rates, we found that organism proteomes correlated with overall community composition. Thus, this genome-resolved proteomics study demonstrates that the contributions of individual organisms to microbiome development depend on microbial community context.

Importance

Humans are colonized by microbes at birth, a process that is important to health and development. However, much remains to be known about the fine-scale microbial dynamics that occur during the colonization period. We conducted a genome-resolved study of microbial community composition, replication rates, and proteomes during the first three months of life of both healthy and sick premature infants. Infants were found to be colonized by similar microbes, but each underwent a distinct colonization trajectory. Interestingly, related microbes colonizing different infants were found to have distinct proteomes, indicating that microbiome function is not only driven by which organisms are present, but also largely depends on microbial responses to the unique set of physiological conditions in the infant gut.

Introduction

Infants have high levels of between-individual variation in microbiome composition compared with adult humans (1, 2). Variation in the infant microbiome exists at both the species and strain level (3, 4). During the first one to two years of life, the gut microbiome of infants begins to converge upon an adult-like state (2, 5). However, aberrations in this process may contribute to diseases such as type 1 and 2 diabetes, irritable bowel disease, and necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) in premature infants (6-11). Because establishment of the microbiome is a key driver of immune system development, changes in the process of colonization may have life-long implications, even if they do not result in drastically different microbiome composition later in life (12, 13).

Infants born prematurely have lower diversity microbial communities compared

with full term infants, and are susceptible to life-threatening diseases such as NEC (4, 14-

17). While it has long been thought that bacterial infection may contribute to NEC

pathogenesis, strain-resolved microbial community analysis has not identified a single

pathogen that is responsible for the disease (3). However, it is still likely that microbial

communities play an important role, with the context-dependent metabolism of specific

strains potentially critical to infant health and disease. Recent studies have applied

proteomics and metabolomics to premature infant gut microbiomes to measure functional

profiles in healthy premature infants and those that went on to develop NEC (18, 19).

These studies reported temporal variation in the infant proteome and identified

metabolites associated with NEC. However, further study is required to better understand

the range of functional and developmental patterns during the microbial colonization

process.

To investigate microbial community assembly, and how microbes modulate their

metabolism and replication rate during colonization, we conducted a combined

metagenomics and metaproteomics study of the microbiome of both healthy premature

infants and infants that went on to develop NEC. Microbiome samples were collected

during the first three months of life with the goal of measuring the physiological changes

of dominant and ubiquitous bacterial species. Genomes assembled from metagenomes

enabled analysis of microbial community membership, and tracking of both community

composition and replication rates over time. The availability of genome sequences made

it possible to map protein abundance measurements to bacterial species and strains.

Microbial communities were clustered into distinct types in order to provide context for

proteomics analyses. Statistical analyses showed that, while species and strain-specific

proteomic profiles correlated with overall community composition, the proteomes of

members of the same species and strain were largely infant-specific. These analyses also

show that bacterial proteome features are correlated with infant development, health

status, and antibiotics administration.

Results

Metagenome sequencing and genome binning

In order to study the developing gut microbiome, stool samples were collected during the

first three months of life for 35 infants born prematurely and housed in the neonatal

intensive care unit at Magee-Womens Hospital at the University of Pittsburgh Medical

Center. Two of the infants in the study cohort developed sepsis (N1_017 and N1_019)

and 14 infants developed necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC; **Table 1**). To study the gut

microbiome, we analyzed 1,149 Gbp of DNA sequences generated by our laboratory (3,

4, 20). These sequences were from 343 metagenomes (average of 3.3 Gbp sequencing per

sample; **Supplemental Figure 1 and Supplemental File 1a**). Metagenomes were

assembled into 6.79 Gbp of scaffolds ≥1 Kbp that represented 92% of all sequenced

DNA.

Scaffolds assembled from metagenomes were grouped into 3,643 bins, 1,457 of

which were ≥50% complete with ≤5% contamination; **Supplemental Figure 2**,

Supplemental File 2). These genomes were assigned to 270 groups approximating

different bacterial sub-species based on sharing ≥98% average nucleotide identity (ANI)

(**Supplemental File 1b**). These genomes account for 91% of the total sequencing.

Genomes suitable for iRep replication rate analysis (≥75% complete with ≤175

fragments/Mbp and ≤5% contamination) were available for 193 genome clusters (21).

Protein quantification by metaproteomics

Across all metagenomes, 5,233,047 proteins were predicted, 897,520 of which were from

a non-redundant set of representative genomes clustered at 98% ANI. Proteins clustered

into 121,746 putative families (**Supplemental File 3**). Metaproteomics measurements

were conducted on 87 metagenome-matched samples that spanned 16 infants, six of

which developed NEC and one of which was diagnosed with sepsis (N1_019;

Supplemental Figure 1). Conducting metagenomics and metaproteomics on the same

samples was critical for obtaining an appropriate database for matching peptides to

proteins. On average, 71,676 unique bacterial spectral counts were detected per sample,

with an average of 33% of predicted bacterial proteins identified (**Supplemental Figure**

1, **Supplemental File 1b, and Supplemental File 4**).

Premature infants were colonized by genetically similar organisms, and microbial

communities clustered into seven primary types

The majority of infants were colonized by *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*,

and *Staphylococcus epidermidis* (**Figure 1a,b**). Overall, infants that developed NEC were

colonized by organisms genetically similar to those colonizing other infants, and most

genotypes were seen in only one infant. No individual species was strongly associated

with NEC (**Supplemental Figure 3**).

The premature infant microbiome was found to be highly variable. In some cases,

samples collected from an infant at subsequent time points were as different from earlier

samples as those collected from other infants (**Figure 1c**). Communities were clustered

based on species membership and abundance in order to identify microbial consortia

common during the colonization process. In order to account for both genomic

differences and organism abundance, clustering was conducted based on weighted

UniFrac distances, where the tree used for calculating UniFrac was constructed using

genome ANI. Nine distinct community types were identified, seven of which were

comprised of samples collected from multiple infants and were thus considered primary

types (**Figure 1d, Supplemental Figure 4, and Supplemental Figure 5**). Each

community type is characterized by the dominance of different community members

(**Supplemental Figure 6**). Microbiomes from different infants clustered into the same

community type, and the microbiome of individual infants was found to switch types,

sometimes multiple times, during the colonization process (**Figure 2**). Although infants

shared community types, overall colonization patterns were not replicated across infants.

Microbiomes associated with infants that did and did not go on to develop NEC were

often classified in the same community type. In some cases, switches preceded onset of

NEC, but no type or switch could explain all cases of NEC.

Microbial replication rates and proteins

iRep is a newly-developed method that enables measurement of bacterial replication rates

based on metagenome sequencing data when high-quality draft genome sequences are

available (21). We applied the iRep method using genomes recovered from metagenomes

sequenced for each infant in the study, and quantified 1,328 iRep replication rates from

330 samples. Sample clustering was conducted based on community iRep profiles,

identifying nine distinct iRep types that were correlated with community type (Mantel

test p-value = 1 x 10^{-3}, **Figure 2a**). Likewise, analysis of protein family abundance

clustered samples into four distinct proteome types, which also correlated with

community type (Mantel test p-value = 1 x 10^{-3}, **Figure 2b**). Interestingly, there are

several cases in which iRep and/or proteome type switched when community type was

constant, or when community type switched but iRep and/or proteome type remained

constant.

Microbiome development

Peptide spectral counts were matched to infant-specific databases containing both human

and microbial proteins. This allowed for the relative proportions of human and microbial

proteins to be determined for each time point. Samples are dominated by human proteins

during the first 10 days of life (DOL), and then microbial proteins become dominant

around DOL 18. Ratios of human versus bacterial protein abundances show that the

premature infant gut microbiome is established over a period of approximately two weeks

(**Figure 3a**).

The presence of multiple data types (microbial community abundance and iRep,

microbial community proteome composition, and human proteome composition) enabled

tracking of various aspects of human and microbiome development during the first

months of life (**Figure 3b,c**). All measurements from an infant were stable within the

time scale of a week, but diverged over time. Interestingly, communities from different

infants neither converged nor diverged over time in terms of similarity based on three of

these five metrics. However, we observed that human proteome measurements and

microbial protein family abundances from different infants became increasingly different

when samples with time separations of greater than three weeks were compared. Overall,

the microbial proteome was more variable (higher variance) than community composition

(**Figure 3d,e**). After approximately two weeks, both microbial community abundance

and proteome measurements collected from the same infant became as different from

each other as samples collected from other infants.

The majority of human and microbiome features recorded in our analyses were

correlated with one another (**Figure 3f**). However, an exception is that microbial

community abundance and iRep were not correlated with human proteome composition

(Mantel test p-value >0.01). This is interesting in that it shows that there is no strong

connection between the overall human proteome and either the composition or replication

activity of the microbiome.

As shown in **Figure 3g**, microbial features were also correlated with a variety of

infant factors, including infant health and development (gestational age and weight), as

well as antibiotics administration (Mantel or permutational analysis of variance,

PERMANOVA, p-value ≤0.01). Notably, whether or not an infant developed NEC

(condition) correlated with several microbiome factors (infant genome inventory, and

both community composition and iRep), but not with proteome measurements. However,

these correlations were in part driven by antibiotics, as only iRep was correlated with

infant condition when excluding samples collected during or within five days of

antibiotics administration. Regardless of the influence of antibiotics on the microbiome,

microbial responses to treatment likely impact infant health.

Different species expressed varying amount of their proteome in the infant gut

Microbes present in the gut environment are not expected to express their complete

complement of proteins at all times. In order to investigate the extent of proteome

expression for different bacteria, we compared depth of proteome sampling for each

organism to the percent of the predicted proteome that could be detected (**Figure 4**). The

median proteome detection across all samples was 11%, but this was largely due to low

sampling depth. Higher depth of proteome sampling corresponded with detection of a

larger fraction of the predicted proteins. The median percent of the proteome detected for

organisms with the best detection in each sample was 31% (max. 48%). For several

frequently detected colonists, including *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Klebsiella oxytoca*, and

members of the genus *Enterobacter,* maximum proteome expression was ~50%.

However, *Propionibacterium sp.*, *Anaerococcus vaginalis*, and members of the genus

Bifidobacterium expressed a greater proportion of their encoded genes than other

organisms. We infer that these bacteria may be specifically adapted to environments and

resource availability within the infant gut, whereas other bacteria may maintain capacities

that enable adaption to other environments.

Members of the same bacterial species replicated at different rates during colonization

Across all infants, *Streptococcus agalactiae*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Klebsiella*

pneumoniae, and members of the genera *Veillonella* and *Clostridium* exhibited some of

the highest replication rates (**Supplemental File 1c**). iRep values for organisms sampled

in this cohort during or immediately after antibiotics administration were not significantly

different from those at other time points (**Figure 5a**). This indicates that populations

present after antibiotics administration are both resistant to antibiotics and are continuing

to replicate. Members of several species were replicating quickly during or immediately

following antibiotic treatment (*Veillonella sp.*, *Streptococcus agalactiae*, *Finegoldia*

magna, and others). However, we did not detect overall higher iRep values following

antibiotics administration, although this was reported previously (21). Most species were

found only to be replicating in the absence of antibiotics, consistent with their

susceptibility to the treatment.

Species-specific proteomic profiles are associated with infant and microbiome features

Relative protein abundance levels were determined for each genome and tracked across

samples. This identified population-specific proteome profiles and enabled us to test for

correlations with various human and microbial properties (**Figure 3h**, **Supplemental**

Figure 1, **and Supplemental File 1d**). *Veillonella spp., Klebsiella pneumoniae,*

Escherichia coli, and *Propionibacterium sp.* all had infant-specific profiles

(PERMANOVA p-value ≤0.01), indicating that although similar organisms are

colonizing different infants, each population is expressing a different complement of

proteins. *K. pneumoniae* and *Veillonella spp.* proteomes also correlated with community

type, as did the *Bifidobacterium breve* proteome (Mantel test p-value ≤0.01), showing

that populations respond to overall microbial community context. Interestingly, both

Enterococcus faecalis and *Propionibacterium sp.* exhibited proteomes that were also

correlated with infant development, and the *K. pneumoniae* proteome correlated with

both iRep and infant health. Although overall microbial proteome correlated with

antibiotics administration, species-specific proteome profiles did not; however, this may

be due to a lack of available data for the same species in multiple samples with and

without antibiotics.

Because of the existence of 35 samples in which ≥10% of the *K. pneumoniae*

proteome could be detected (max. = 38%, median = 25%), correlations between

individual protein abundances and iRep could be determined. Amongst proteins

positively correlated with iRep were a transcriptional regulator (LysR), proteins involved

in cell wall biogenesis, and ribosomal proteins (Pearson ≥0.5, q-value ≤0.01, observed in

≥15 samples; **Supplemental File 1e**).

Infants were colonized by different strains with distinct proteomes

The finding that *K. pneumoniae, E. coli, Propionibacterium sp.*, and *Veillonella spp.* have

infant-specific proteomes raised the question of whether or not each infant was being

colonized by different strains. Genome sequences ≥50% complete with ≤5%

contamination that were assembled for each species from each infant were compared with

one another, and hierarchical clustering conducted on pairwise ANI values was used to

delineate strains (**Supplemental Figure 7**). Clustering showed that in most cases each

infant was indeed colonized by distinct strains, which proteomics analysis showed are

functionally distinct. However, there were a few notable exceptions. Twin infants

N2_069 and N2_070, as well as infant N1_003 were all colonized by the same strain of *K.*

pneumoniae. The proteomic profiles for the strains colonizing N2_069 and N2_070 were

more similar to one another than they were to profiles recovered from other strains;

however, they were still distinguishable (**Figure 6**). Likewise, the same strain of

Propionibacterium sp. colonized twin infants N2_038 and N2_039. As with shared

strains of *K. pneumoniae*, their functional profiles clustered together but were still

distinguishable from one another (**Supplemental Figure 8**).

Analysis showed that few proteins were responsible for distinguishing proteomes

of the same bacterial types in different infants (**Figure 6, Supplemental Figure 8, and**

Supplemental File 1d). Common amongst these were proteins involved in nucleotide,

amino acid, carbohydrate and lipid metabolism. Also notable were several proteins

produced by *K. pneumoniae* involved in central carbohydrate metabolism, and both

galactose degradation and D-galacturonate degradation, indicating different carbon

preferences for strains colonizing different infants (**Figure 6**). Proteins involved in

bacterial secretion were differentially abundant between *K. pneumonia* colonizing

different infants, indicating variations in secretion potential that could affect human-

microbe interactions. Relatedly, the abundance of proteins involved in transport of metals,

ions, citrate, and several sugars also differed between infants.

Low microbiome diversity was associated with both antibiotics administration and NEC

Microbiome diversity was lower during or within five days of antibiotics administration

compared with other time points (Mann-Whitney U test, MW, p-value = 2.6×10^{-9};

Figure 7a), and the microbiome of infants that developed NEC was typically less

diverse compared with healthy infants (MW p-value = 4×10^{-4}; **Figure 7b**). However, the

difference in diversity between healthy and NEC infants was driven by the fact that NEC

infants more frequently receive antibiotics (**Figure 2**). When comparing within either

periods with or without antibiotics, microbiome diversity for healthy and NEC infants

(pre-NEC diagnosis) was indistinguishable (**Figure 7c**). When excluding antibiotics

samples, both groups of infants had higher diversity microbial communities later in

development (post GA + DOL 220; **Figure 7d**).

Microbial community composition was correlated with infant health

Premature infants that developed NEC had different microbial community abundance

profiles (PERMANOVA p-value = 3×10^{-3}; **Supplemental Figure 4g**). Interestingly,

there were a variety of species detected in healthy infants, but never detected in those that

developed NEC; however, the opposite was not true. It should be noted that species

unique to healthy infants were not consistently detected. No species identified five days

prior to NEC diagnosis showed a significant difference in abundance, or was unique to

NEC infants.

Overall community composition was also correlated with each infant, antibiotics

administration, birth weight, gestational age, and gestational age corrected day of life

(GA + DOL; PERMANOVA or Mantel test p-value ≤0.01; **Supplemental Figure 4**).

Several species were more abundant members of communities associated with infants

that developed NEC: *Enterobacter sp.*, *Propionibacterium sp.*, and *Peptostreptococcus sp.*

(edgeR q-value ≤0.01 after excluding samples collected within five days of antibiotics

administration; **Supplemental File 1f**). *Vellonella sp.* replicated faster in NEC infants,

while several groups of organisms were replicating faster in control infants, including

members of the genera *Anaerococcus, Klebsiella, Actinomyces, Eggerthella,*

Streptococcus, Clostridiales, and *Bifidobacterium* (MW p-value ≤0.01 after excluding

samples collected within five days of antibiotics administration; **Supplemental File 1c**).

Several different species were active in control infants, but were not detected in infants

that went on to develop NEC. However, combined iRep values collected from infants that

did and did not go on to develop NEC were not statistically different, even when

considering only samples collected within the five days prior to NEC diagnosis (**Figure

5b**).

Microbial proteins associated with proteome type, antibiotics administration, and NEC

As described above, we used protein abundance patterns to cluster microbial community

proteomes into functionally distinct proteome types. Statistical analysis identified 3,085

differentially abundant proteins distinguish proteome types (edgeR q-value ≤ 0.01;

Supplemental File 1g). Of these, 461 were found to distinguish only one proteome type

from all others. Notable amongst all of these proteins were those involved in central

carbohydrate metabolism and energy metabolism (**Supplemental Figure 9**). Proteome

types differ in terms of the amount and variety of carbon degradation enzymes, as well as

the propensity for aerobic versus anaerobic respiration (based on the abundance of

oxidases and reductases).

Samples collected during antibiotics treatment were enriched in 56 different

proteins (identified in more than one treated infant, edgeR q-value ≤0.01; **Supplemental**

File 1g). Amongst these proteins were those involved in secretion, transcription, and

DNA degradation. Along with iRep results, the findings indicate that a subset of

organisms remain active in the presence of antibiotics.

Although overall community proteome abundance profiles were not correlated

with NEC, microbial proteins from 160 different protein families, many with no known

function, were more abundant in samples from infants that went on to develop NEC

(identified in more than one NEC infant, edgeR q-value ≤0.01; **Supplemental File 1g**).

Annotated proteins were dominantly involved in transport of ions, metals, and other

substrates, iron acquisition, and both motility and chemotaxis. Among proteins

responsible for iron scavenging was subunit E of enterobactin synthase, a high-affinity

siderophore involved in iron acquisition, which is often used by pathogenic organisms.

Also more abundant was outer membrane receptor FepA, which is involved in

transporting iron bound by extracellular enterobactin. Subunit F of enterobactin synthase

was also identified in NEC infants, as were an iron-enterobactin ABC transporter

substrate-binding protein, and an enterobactin esterase. The abundance of this protein

suggests a possible role for iron acquisition by organisms that may contribute to disease

onset. Interestingly, 21 *K. pneumoniae* proteins were correlated with NEC, including a

ferrous iron transporter (family 2834) that was 3.9-fold more abundant in two infants that

developed NEC. The abundance of this protein was also correlated with infant, proteome

type, community type, and antibiotics administration.

Discussion

Most studies to date have focused on the composition of the gut microbiome, typically at

the low-resolution afforded by 16S rRNA gene amplicon methods. We used genome-

resolved time-series metagenomics in conjunction with iRep replication rate and

metaproteomics measurements to obtain a more comprehensive view of the colonization

process. The dataset included information about the gut colonization trajectories of both

healthy infants and infants that went on to develop NEC, enabling exploration of

microbiome variability, at both the community composition and organism functional

levels.

Microbial communities were classified into types based on the mixture of

organisms present. Interestingly, most types occurred in multiple infants, a result that

indicates the tendency of gut colonizing bacteria to form networks of interaction, possibly

based on metabolic complementarity. An important factor determining the community

type present may be the specific organisms that are introduced, and the extent to which

they are able to colonize. Other factors that may dictate the community type include

human genetic selection, diet, and antibiotics administration. Within a single infant,

community types often switched several times over the observation period. Given the

lack of evidence for consistent transitions from one type to another across multiple

infants, the high degree of variation in iRep replication rates observed for members of the

same species, and a lack of convergence of communities in different infants, we conclude

that colonization is a chaotic process.

Overall microbial physiology, as measured by whole proteome abundance

patterns, was more dynamic than community composition. Thus, metagenomics-enabled

proteomic analyses indicate functional flexibility that does not depend on addition or loss

of organisms. Shifts in the importance of specific pathways or metabolisms with

environmental conditions would not be apparent in studies that only use organism

identification or metabolic potential predictions.

It is possible that onset of NEC is due to fast growth rates of potential pathogens

within communities that are imbalanced due to low species richness, ultimately resulting

in overgrowth by a pathogen. For this reason, we compared microbial community

diversity and composition, growth rates, and metabolic features in infants that did and did

not develop NEC. A clear finding of this study, and evident from prior research (17), is

that microbial communities associated with infants that develop NEC are of lower

diversity compared with control infants. However, this was due to the frequency of

antibiotics administration for NEC infants. Regardless of the cause of the lower-diversity

communities, microbial activities throughout the colonization process, including during

periods of antibiotics administration, are likely important to infant health.

Several different species had higher relative abundance in infants that developed

NEC, but none of these species were consistently associated with the disease. The

correlation could be the consequence of the loss of other organisms from the community

rather than their higher absolute abundance. Interestingly, *Veillonella spp.* were found to

replicate more quickly in NEC versus control infants. This may be medically important,

but additional examples are needed to establish a link between rapid growth and NEC.

Surprisingly, whether or not an infant developed NEC was not correlated with

overall proteome composition. However, there were specific proteins that were associated

with NEC, notably several involved in iron scavenging. Given that this is an important

process often associated with pathogenesis, it is possible that increased activity of iron

scavenging pathways could contribute to organism proliferation and onset of NEC. In

addition, the *Klebsiella pneumoniae* proteome was correlated with NEC, including a

protein involved in transport of iron. This is intriguing considering the prior finding that

supplementation of lactoferrin, an abundant breast milk protein involved in modulating

iron levels in the gut, decreases risk of developing necrotizing enterocolitis (22, 23).

Overall, these findings indicate that fine-scale, species-specific proteins are important for

understanding disease onset. Although the microbial community, and specific microbial

proteins were correlated with NEC, no individual organism or protein was significantly

more abundant in all cases. This finding supports the hypothesis that NEC is a

multifaceted disease with multiple routes that lead to onset.

Although species-specific proteome profiles were correlated with community

composition, they were largely infant specific. This is an interesting observation because

it implies a feedback between human physiological conditions in the gut, which likely

vary substantially from infant to infant and over time, and microbiome function.

Methods

Sample collection and metagenome sequencing

Samples were collected, processed for metagenome sequencing, and sequenced as part of

three prior studies (**accession numbers in Supplemental File 1a**) (3, 4, 20). Stool

samples were collected from infants and stored at −80°C. DNA was extracted from

frozen fecal samples using the MO BIO PowerSoil DNA Isolation Kit, with

modifications (4). DNA libraries were sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq for 100 or 150

cycles (Illumina, San Diego, CA). All samples were collected with parental consent.

Metagenome assembly and genome binning

We re-assembled and analyzed metagenomes generated as part of a prior study, referred

to as NIH1 (4). The data were processed in a manner consistent with the two other prior

studies analyzed, referred to as NIH2 (20) and NIH3 (3). All raw sequencing reads were

trimmed using Sickle (https://github.com/najoshi/sickle). Each metagenome was

assembled separately using IDBA_UD (24). Open reading frames (ORFs) were predicted

using Prodigal (25) with the option to run in metagenome mode. Predicted protein

sequences were annotated based on USEARCH (–ublast) (26, 27) searches against

UniProt (28), UniRef100 (29), and KEGG (30, 31). Scaffold coverage was calculated by

mapping reads to the assembly using Bowtie2 (32) with default parameters for paired

reads.

Scaffolds from NIH1 infants were binned to genomes using Emergent Self-

Organizing Maps (ESOMs) generated based on time-series abundance profiles (15, 33).

Reads from every sample were mapped independently to every assembly using SNAP

(34), and the resulting coverage data were combined. Coverage was calculated over non-

overlapping three Kbp windows. Coverage values were normalized first by sample, and

then the values for each scaffold fragment were normalized from zero to one. Combining

coverage data from scaffolds assembled from different samples prior to normalization

made it possible to generate a single ESOM map for binning genomes assembled

independently from each sample. ESOMs were trained for ten epochs using the Somoclu

algorithm (35) with the option to initialize the codebook using Principal Component

Analysis (PCA). Genomes were binned by manually selecting data points on the ESOM

map using Databionics ESOM Tools (36). Binning was aided by coloring scaffold

fragments on the map based on BLAST (37) hits to the genomes assembled in the prior

study.

As part of the NIH2 and NIH3 studies, scaffolds were binned based on their GC

content, DNA sequence coverage, and taxonomic affiliation using ggKbase tools

(ggkbase.berkeley.edu). Genome bins from all three datasets were classified based on the

consensus of taxonomic assignments for predicted protein sequences. Genome

completeness and contamination were estimated for all genomes using CheckM with the

taxonomy_wf option (38). Genomes with extra single copy genes, but with ≤175

fragments/Mbp (normalized for contamination) that were estimated to be ≥75% complete

were manually curated based on scaffold GC content and coverage.

Clustering genomes into sub-species groups

Genomes were clustered into sub-species groups based on sharing ≥98% average

nucleotide identity (ANI), as estimated by MASH (39). Representative genomes were

selected for each cluster as the largest genome with the highest expected completeness

and smallest amount of contamination. Genomes were classified based on the lowest

possible consensus of taxonomic assignments for predicted protein sequences.

Taxonomic assignments for representative genomes were checked manually based

on hits to ribosomal protein S3, or visual inspection of protein taxonomic assignments. In

order to identify cases in which the same bacterial strain was present in multiple samples,

sub-species groups were further analyzed with the ANIm algorithm (40) implemented in

dRep (41).

Measuring microbial community abundance and replication rates

In order to achieve accurate abundance and replication rate measurements from read

mapping, databases of representative genomes were created for each sample. Each

database was constructed in order to include a representative genome from important sub-

species groups. Priority was given to high-quality draft genome sequences reconstructed

from the same sample. Genomes were classified as high-quality draft based on the

requirements for iRep replication rate analysis

(https://github.com/christophertbrown/iRep): ≥75% complete, ≤2.5% contamination, and

≤175 scaffolds per Mbp of sequence (21). Genomes were selected to represent sub-

species groups using the following priority scheme: 1) high-quality draft genome

assembled from the same sample, 2) high-quality draft genome from the same infant, 3)

high-quality draft genome representative of sub-species group from any infant (if group

had ≥5 representatives), 4) best genome from infant (if a genome was available). iRep

was conducted using reads that mapped to genome sequences with ≤1 mismatch per read

sequence. In cases where iRep values were ≥3, coverage plots were inspected and values

were removed if there was evidence of strain variation.

479   We considered bacterial sub-species to be present in a sample if ≥97% of the

480 genome was covered by an average of ≥2 reads. Abundance and iRep measurements were

481 compared across samples by linking sample-specific representative genomes to sub-

482 species groups. Relative abundance measurements for each sub-species group were

483 calculated by converting DNA sequencing coverage values to a percentage. UniFrac (42)

484 analysis was conducted based on rarefied abundance data and a tree constructed based on

485 pairwise genome ANI values measured using MASH (-ms 5000000).

486 ***Metaproteomics analysis***

487 Metaproteomics sequencing was conducted on 0.3 g of stool as previously described (18).

488 Each sample was suspended in 10 mL cold phosphate buffered saline. Samples were

489 filtered through a 20 µm size filter to enrich for microbial cells and proteins. Microbial

490 cells were collected by centrifugation, boiled in 4% sodium dodecyl sulfate for 5 minutes,

491 and sonicated to lyse cells. The resulting protein extract was precipitated with 20%

492 trichloroacetic acid at -80°C overnight. The protein pellet was washed with ice-cold

493 acetone, solubilized in 8 M urea, reduced with 5 mM dithiothreitol, and cysteines were

494 blocked with 20 mM iodoacetamide. Then sequencing grade trypsin was used to digest

495 the proteins into peptides. Proteolyzed peptides were then salted and acidified by

496 adjusting the sample to 200 mM NaCl, 0.1% formic acid, followed by filtering through a

497 10 kDa cutoff spin column filter to collect tryptic peptides.

498   Peptides were quantified by BCA assay and 50 µg peptides of each sample were

499 analyzed via two-dimensional nanospray LC-MS/MS system on an LTQ-Orbitrap Elite

500 mass spectrometer (Thermo Scientific). Each peptide mixture was loaded onto a biphasic

501 back column containing both strong-cation exchange and reverse phase resins (C18). As

previously described, loaded peptides were separated and analyzed using a 11-salt-pusle

MudPIT protocol over a 22-h period (43). Mass spectra were acquired in a data-

dependent mode with following parameters: full scans were acquired at 30 k resolution (1

microscan) in the Orbitrap, followed by CID fragmentation of the 20 most abundant ions

(1 microscan). Charge state screening and monoisotopic precursor selection were enabled.

Unassigned charge and charge state +1 were rejected. Dynamic exclusion was enabled

with a mass exclusion width of 10 ppm and exclusion duration of 30 seconds. Two

technical replicates were conducted for each sample.

Protein databases were generated for each infant from protein sequences predicted

from assembled metagenomes. The database also included human protein sequences

(NCBI Refseq_2011), common contaminants, and reverse protein sequences, which were

used to control the false discovery rate (FDR). Collected MS/MS spectra were matched to

peptides using MyriMatch v2.1 (44), filtered, and assembled into proteins using IDPicker

v3.0 (45). All searches included the following peptide modifications: a static cysteine

modification (+57.02 Da), an N-terminal dynamic carbamylation modification (+43.00

Da), and a dynamic oxidation modification (+15.99). A maximum 2% peptide spectrum

match level FDR and a minimum of two distinct peptides per protein were applied to

achieve confident peptide identifications (FDR <1%). To alleviate the ambiguity

associated with shared peptides, proteins were clustered into protein groups by 100%

identity for microbial proteins and 90% amino acid sequence identity for human proteins

using USEARCH (26). Spectral counts were balanced between shared proteins, and

proteins were considered to be present if ≥2 unique peptides were identified.

Identification of putative protein families

Putative protein families were identified in order to track the presence and abundance of

different protein types across samples. ORFs were first pre-clustered at 95% identity

using USEARCH (-cluster_smallmem -target_cov 0.50 -query_cov 0.95 -id 0.95), and

then all-versus-all protein searches were conducted (–ublast -evalue 10e-10 -strand both).

Protein families were delineated from within the all-versus-all network graph using the

MCL clustering algorithm (-I 2 -te 10) (46). The most common annotation observed

across all protein sequences in the group was selected as the annotation for the putative

protein family. Proteins were also grouped based on sharing 97% amino acid identity

using USEARCH (-cluster_smallmem -target_cov 0.50 -query_cov 0.95 -id 0.97).

Tracking human and bacterial protein abundances

Human and bacterial protein abundances were normalized using the weighted trimmed

mean method from EdgeR (47). Species-specific proteomic profiles were normalized as

the percent of total balanced spectral counts.

Sample clustering and statistical analyses

Sample clustering was conducted based on microbial community abundance and iRep

profiles, and bacterial protein family abundance profiles. In each case, the number of

clusters was determined using the gap statistic (48), and then samples were grouped into

the appropriate number of clusters using hierarchical clustering (average linkage method).

Microbial community data was clustered based on weighted UniFrac distances, and

protein data using Bray-Curtis distance. EdgeR was used to calculate statistically

significant differences between conditions using quasi-likelihood linear modeling

(glmQLFTest).

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Author Contributions

MJM oversaw sample collection, RB collected all samples and managed metadata, and

BF coordinated sample processing for DNA sequencing and proteomics analysis. CTB

and MRO assembled and annotated the metagenome data. CTB and JFB carried out the

genome binning and curation. CTB conducted the microbial community time series

abundance and iRep analyses. WX and RLH generated the proteomics data, which was

analyzed by CTB. CTB, MRO, and BCT provided bioinformatics support. CTB and JFB

wrote the paper, and all authors provided input to the final text.

Disclosure Declaration

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

Figures

**Figure 1 | Premature infant gut microbial communities associated into seven

primary types.** Genomes reconstructed from metagenomes were clustered into sub-

species groups based on sharing 98% average nucleotide identity (ANI). **a,** The number

of genomes assigned to each group and **b,** the number of infants with a reconstructed

genome from the group. Shown are groups comprised of five or more genomes. **c,**

Pairwise weighted UniFrac distances calculated between all microbiome samples based

on genome sequence ANI and abundance. **d,** PCoA clustering of samples based on

weighted UniFrac distances. Samples are colored based on community type assignment.

Figure 2 | Microbial colonization patterns for preterm infants. Samples were

clustered into types based on microbial community composition ("community type"),

bacterial iRep profiles ("iRep type"), and overall bacterial proteome composition

("proteome type"). Microbial community type is shown along with iRep **(a)** and

proteome **(b)** types. Infants are arranged based on hierarchical clustering of unweighted

UniFrac distances calculated based on the set of genomes recovered from each infant

(**Supplemental Figure 3**). Antibiotics administration is indicated with pink bars and

NEC diagnoses with red bars. DOL stands for day of life.

Figure 3 | Microbiome stability and correlations. a, The relative contribution of human

and bacterial proteins to overall proteome composition during development of the

premature infant gut. **b,** Similarity measurements for microbiomes sampled either from

the same infant or **c,** from different infants. Comparison of similarity measurements

calculated between samples collected either form the same or different infants based

either on weighted microbial community UniFrac (**d**), or weighted microbial proteome

BrayCurtis (**e**) measurements. Human proteome and microbial community correlations

calculated between one another (**f**), with infant metadata (**g**), and determined based on

microbial species (**h**). Shown are PERMANOVA or Mantel test p-values (**f-h**). Microbial

proteome "family" refers to protein family analysis, and "group" refers to analysis of

proteins clustered at 97% amino acid identity.

Figure 4 | Proteome detection for species colonizing premature infants. Depth of

proteome sampling for organisms in each sample is compared against the percent of

predicted proteins that could be detected. Data point sizes and histograms are scaled

based on organism abundance as determined by metagenome sequencing.

Figure 5 | Replication rates for bacteria colonizing premature infants. a, Replication

rates for bacteria sampled during periods with or without antibiotics administration and **b,**

associated with infants that did and did not go on to develop NEC. Statistically

significant differences between replication rates observed for individual species under

different conditions are indicated with an asterisk (MW p-value ≤0.01). Shown are all

species with at least five observations.

Figure 6 | *Klebsiella pneumonia* proteins with infant-specific abundance profiles.

Hierarchical clustering was conducted on all *K. pneumonia* protein families, showing that

strains colonizing different infants have distinct proteomic profiles. Infant and species

metadata are shown for each sample. Metadata significantly correlated with the *K.*

pneumonia proteome are indicated with an asterisk (PERMANOVA or Mantel test p-

value ≤0.01). Protein families that correlated with at least one infant are shown in the

heatmap (edgeR q-value ≤0.01). Samples colonized by the same *K. pneumonia* strain are

shown with red text.

Figure 7 | Microbial community diversity. Shannon diversity measurements for

microbial communities associated with infants during periods with or without antibiotics

administration (**a**), and between infants that did and did not go on to develop NEC (**b-d**).

Significant differences are indicated with an asterisk (MW p-value ≤0.01). "Early"

samples were collected prior to GA + DOL 220. Samples collected after NEC diagnosis

were excluded from **c** and **d**.

Tables

Table 1 | Infant medical information.

infant	campaign	sex	delivery	mult. gest.	gestational age (weeks)	birth weight (g)	feeding	condition	NEC diagnosis (DOL)
N1_003	NIH1	F	C-section	Single	26	822	Breast	control	n/a
N1_004	NIH1	F	C-section	N1_005	32	1450	Formula	control	n/a
N1_008	NIH1	F	Vaginal	Single	32	1230	Formula	NEC	9
N1_009	NIH1	M	C-section	Single	29	1820	Combination	control	n/a
N1_011	NIH1	M	C-section	N1_012	26	523	Combination	NEC	34, 62
N1_014	NIH1	M	Vaginal	Single	32	2035	Combination	control	n/a
N1_017	NIH1	F	Vaginal	Single	26	748	Combination	NEC	11
N1_018	NIH1	M	C-section	Single	29	1133	Combination	control	n/a
N1_019	NIH1	F	C-section	N1_020, N1_021	24	731	Combination	control	n/a
N1_021	NIH1	F	C-section	N1_019, N1_020	24	697	Breast	NEC	32
N1_023	NIH1	F	Vaginal	Single	27	875	Breast	control	n/a
N2_031	NIH2	M	C-section	Single	26	773	Formula	control	n/a
N2_035	NIH2	M	Vaginal	Single	25	795	Breast	control	n/a
N2_038	NIH2	F	C-section	N2_039	30	1381	Combination	control	n/a
N2_039	NIH2	F	C-section	N2_038	30	1470	Combination	NEC	24
N2_060	NIH2	M	C-section	Single	30	1878	Combination	control	n/a
N2_061	NIH2	M	Vaginal	Single	28	1184	Combination	NEC	9, 34
N2_064	NIH2	M	Vaginal	Single	28	1100	Combination	control	n/a
N2_065	NIH2	F	Vaginal	Single	25	841	Combination	control	n/a
N2_066	NIH2	F	Vaginal	Single	28	1028	Breast	control	n/a
N2_069	NIH2	M	C-section	N2_070	26	637	Breast	NEC	32
N2_070	NIH2	F	C-section	N2_069	26	633	Combination	control	n/a
N2_071	NIH2	M	C-section	Single	25	754	Combination	NEC	31
N2_088	NIH2	F	C-section	N2_089	28	1057	Formula	control	n/a
N2_093	NIH2	M	C-section	Single	26	924	Breast	NEC	12
N3_172	NIH3	M	C-section	Single	28	1250	Breast	NEC	37, 54
N3_173	NIH3	M	C-section	Single	29	1530	Breast	NEC	25
N3_174	NIH3	F	C-section	Single	30	980	Breast	control	n/a
N3_175	NIH3	M	Vaginal	Single	29	1480	Combination	control	n/a
N3_176	NIH3	M	C-section	Single	28	990	Combination	control	n/a
N3_177	NIH3	F	Vaginal	Single	28	900	Combination	control	n/a
N3_178	NIH3	M	Vaginal	Single	32	2050	Combination	NEC	16
N3_182	NIH3	M	C-section	Single	39	3010	Combination	NEC	6
N3_183	NIH3	M	Vaginal	Single	32	2410	Combination	NEC	11
S2_010	NIH3	M	C-section	Single	32	1810	Combination	control	n/a

Supplemental Materials

Supplemental Figures

Supplemental Figure 1 | Metagenome sequencing and metaproteomics conducted on microbiome samples collected from premature infants. Frequency of sample collection for metagenomics (**a**) and metaproteomics (**b**) based on infant day of life

(DOL). **c,** Metagenome sequencing, and **d**, the percentage of each metagenome

represented by assembled genome sequences ≥50% complete with ≤5% contamination. **e,**

The number of proteomics spectral counts that could be uniquely assigned to human or

bacterial proteins. **f,** The percent of predicted proteins that could be detected in each

sample. **g,** The percent of species-specific proteomes that could be detected for species

where ≥10% of the proteome could be detected in at least one sample. **h,** Histogram

showing the distribution of the maximum percent of the proteome detected for all species

present in each sample.

Supplemental Figure 2 | ESOM genome binning. Genome binning was conducted

based on Emergent Self-Organizing Map (ESOM) clustering of scaffolds assembled from

individual metagenomes. Data points represent 3 Kbp fragments of assembled scaffolds.

Coloring is based on the species-level assignment of reconstructed genomes. The map is

periodic, and red boxes indicate a single period.

Supplemental Figure 3 | Infants that developed NEC and healthy controls are

colonized by genetically similar bacteria. Presence (dark boxes) and absence (white

boxes) of members of bacterial sub-species in microbial communities from different

infants. Sub-species were identified based on sharing ≥98% genome average nucleotide

identity (ANI), and were determined to be present if ≥97% of the genome was covered by

an average of ≥2 reads. Hierarchical clustering was conducted based on unweighted

UniFrac distances calculated between infant genome inventories.

Supplemental Figure 4 | Studied infant gut microbial communities associate into

seven primary community types. a, Hierarchical clustering was conducted based on the

abundance of bacterial sub-species using weighted UniFrac distances. Microbial

community types are identified by colored boxes. Metadata are shown for each sample,

and indicated with an asterisk if significantly correlated with microbial community

abundance data (PERMANOVA or Mantel test p-value ≤0.01). **b-i**, PCoA clustering of

microbial communities with associated metadata: antibiotics administration (**b**), infant (**c**),

developmental age (**d**; number of days since conception: gestational age + day of life, GA

+ DOL), proteome type (**e**), iRep type (**f**), infant health (**g**), days prior to NEC diagnosis

(**h;** DOL – NEC diagnosis), and human proteome type (**i**).

Supplemental Figure 5 | Microbial community abundance and replication rate

profiles. Relative abundance (bars) and iRep replication rate (scatter plot) values for

bacterial sub-species colonizing studied premature infants. The five days following

antibiotics administration are indicated with a color gradient.

Supplemental Figure 6 | Microbial community types are distinguished by their

abundant members. Rank abundance curves showing the average and range (95%

confidence interval) of relative abundance values for sub-species groups associated with

each community type.

Supplemental Figure 7 | Hierarchical clustering of genomes for members of the

same sub-species group. dRep results show ANI clustering of assembled genomes.

Genome names indicate the metagenome that each genome was assembled from (**see**

Supplemental File 1b). Clustering dendrograms show that most infants are colonized by

different strains.

Supplemental Figure 8 | Multiple species have infant-specific proteome profiles. a,

Analysis of *Veillonella spp.* genomes shows the presence of four different species. **b-e**,

Proteome profiles for different species colonizing premature infants. Hierarchical

clustering was conducted based on all detected protein families, and shows that strains

colonizing different infants typically have distinct proteomic profiles. Infant and species

metadata are shown for each sample. Metadata significantly correlated with the species

proteome are indicated with an asterisk (PERMANOVA or Mantel test p-value ≤0.01).

Protein families that correlated with at least one infant are shown in the heatmap (edgeR

q-value ≤0.01). Samples colonized by the same strain are shown with colored text.

Supplemental Figure 9 | Proteome types are distinguished by the abundance of

proteins from different KEGG modules. Hierarchical clustering of proteome types was

conducted based on the abundance of proteins associated with KEGG modules. The

relative abundance of proteins associated with each module was summed for each sample,

and then the average was taken across all samples associated with each proteome type.

Supplemental Files

Supplemental File 1a | DNA sequencing and metaproteomics statistics.

Supplemental File 1b | Genomes reconstructed from metagenomes.

Supplemental File 1c | Species iRep replication rates and statistical analysis.

Supplemental File 1d | Species-specific microbial protein family abundance and

statistical analysis.

Supplemental File 1e | Correlation of species-specific protein family abundances

with iRep replication rates and gestational age corrected day of life (GA + DOL).

Supplemental File 1f | Species relative abundance and statistical analysis.

Supplemental File 1g | Microbial protein family abundance and statistical analysis.

Supplemental File 2 | Scaffolds binned to reconstructed genomes.

Supplemental File 3 | Proteins assigned to putative families.

Supplemental File 4 | Metaproteomics spectral counts.

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Figure 1

Figure 2

a

iRep type: 1
iRep type: 2
iRep type: 3
iRep type: 4
iRep type: 5
iRep type: 6
iRep type: 7
iRep type: 8
iRep type: 9
community type: 2
community type: 3
community type: 6
community type: 7
community type: 8
community type: 9
community type: 1
community type: 4
community type: 5

infant

UniFrac distance

DOL

UniFrac PCoA

b

community type

proteome type: 2
proteome type: 3
proteome type: 4
proteome type: 1
community type: 2
community type: 3
community type: 6
community type: 7
community type: 8
community type: 9
community type: 1
community type: 4
community type: 5

9 clusters based
on community composition
(i.e. "community types")

PC2: 7.9%

PC1: 74.3%

number of clusters

infant

UniFrac distance

DOL

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7