# Antibody responses to Zika virus proteins in pregnant and non-pregnant macaques

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## Abstract

The specificity of the antibody response against Zika virus (ZIKV) is not well-characterized. This is due, in part, to the antigenic similarity between ZIKV and closely related dengue virus (DENV) serotypes. Since these and other similar viruses co-circulate, are spread by the same mosquito species, and can cause similar acute clinical syndromes, it is difficult to disentangle ZIKV-specific antibody responses from responses to closely-related arboviruses in humans. Here we use high-density peptide microarrays to profile anti-ZIKV antibody reactivity in pregnant and non-pregnant macaque monkeys with known exposure histories and compare these results to reactivity following DENV infection. We also compare cross-reactive binding of ZIKV-immune sera to the full proteomes of 28 arboviruses. We independently confirm a purported ZIKV-specific IgG antibody response targeting ZIKV nonstructural protein 2B (NS2B) that was recently reported in ZIKV-infected people and we show that antibody reactivity in pregnant animals can be detected as late as 127 days post-infection (dpi). However, we also show that these responses wane over time, sometimes rapidly, and in one case the response was elicited following DENV infection in a previously ZIKV-exposed animal. These results suggest epidemiologic studies assessing seroprevalence of ZIKV immunity using linear epitope-based strategies will remain challenging to interpret due to susceptibility to false positive results. However, the method used here demonstrates the potential for rapid profiling of proteome-wide antibody responses to a myriad of neglected diseases simultaneously and may be especially useful for distinguishing antibody reactivity among closely related pathogens.

## Author summary

ZIKV has emerged as a vector-borne pathogen capable of causing serious illness in infected adults and congenital birth defects. The vulnerability of communities to future ZIKV outbreaks will depend, in part, on the prevalence and longevity of protective immunity, thought to be

mediated principally by antibodies. We currently lack diagnostic assays able to differentiate

ZIKV-specific antibodies from antibodies produced following infection with closely related DENV,

and we do not know how long anti-ZIKV responses are detectable. Here we profile antibodies

recognizing linear epitopes throughout the entire ZIKV polyprotein, and we profile cross-

reactivity with the proteomes of other co-endemic arboviruses. We show that while ZIKV-

specific antibody binding can be detected, these responses are generally weak and ephemeral,

and false positives may arise through DENV infection. This may complicate efforts to discern

ZIKV infection and to determine ZIKV seroprevalence using linear epitope-based assays. The

method used in this study, however, has promise as a tool for profiling antibody responses for a

broad array of neglected tropical diseases and other pathogens and in distinguishing serology of

closely-related viruses.

## Introduction

Serologic assays designed to detect Zika virus (ZIKV) infection suffer from cross-reactivity with

antibodies to closely related dengue virus (DENV), due to the high level of amino acid sequence

identity (average ~55%) and structural similarity [1-4] between the two viruses. Humoral cross-

reactivity with other similar arboviruses has been reported as well [1-2]. Serologic assays have

been developed to detect past ZIKV infection, reporting sensitivity varying from 37% to 97% and

specificity varying from 20% to 90% [5-8]. Most of these assays detect antibodies to the ZIKV

envelope protein or nonstructural protein 1 (NS1) [7,9-11]. A recent publication by Mishra et al.

employed a high-density peptide microarray to identify antibodies to linear ZIKV epitopes

lacking cross-reactivity with other flaviviruses [12]. This group identified an IgG immunoreactive

peptide sequence in the ZIKV nonstructural protein 2B (NS2B) which induced little antibody

binding in serum from ZIKV-naive people and was bound in early convalescence in most cases

of symptomatic ZIKV infection [12]. This group did note seropositivity in a ZIKV-naive, DENV-

immune individual and in one individual with no known flavivirus infection history.

Because ZIKV, DENV, and other arboviruses are similar in structure and acute clinical

syndrome, are spread by the same mosquito vectors [13], and are co-endemic [14-15], it is

difficult to identify people who have unequivocally been exposed to ZIKV only, adding

uncertainty to efforts to profile ZIKV-specific antibody responses in humans. In contrast,

macaques raised in indoor colonies can be infected specifically with ZIKV, DENV, or other

pathogens. Macaque models of ZIKV infection provide a close approximation of human ZIKV

infection in regards to natural history [16-19], tissue tropism [16-17,20-21], and transmission

[17,22-25]. Importantly, macaques infected with ZIKV during pregnancy provide insight into the

pathogenesis of congenital ZIKV infection [17-18,21-22,26-29]. Since the strain, dose, and

timing of macaque model ZIKV infection is exactly known, the kinetics and specificity of humoral

immune responses can be profiled in macaques with better resolution than is possible in cross-

sectional human studies.

The peptide microarray technology we use in this study allows for one serum sample to be

assayed against six million unique 16-residue peptides, or for 12 samples to each be assayed

against 392,000 peptides, on a single chip (Roche Sequencing Solutions, Madison, WI). The

technology has been used in proteome-wide epitope mapping [30], profiling of antibody

responses in autoimmune disease [31], profiling venom toxin epitopes [32], determining

functions of cellular enzymes [33], *de novo* binding sequence discovery [34], epitope validation

following phage display screening [35], and screening for tick-borne disease seroprevalence

[36]. We previously used this tool to examine antibody responses in simian pegivirus (SPgV)

and simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) infections [37]. As mentioned above, a recent

publication explored use of this technology in profiling human antibody responses against

flaviviruses [12]. This linear peptide microarray technology has advantages over previous

assays through its capacity to screen for reactivity to a large number of pathogens while

simultaneously mapping reactive epitopes precisely, and it has the distinct advantage of

allowing detection of unexpected epitopes due to its capacity to assay the entirety of a virus's

proteome.

Here, we used high-density peptide microarrays to map macaque IgG epitopes in full-length

ZIKV and DENV polyproteins and to compare cross-reactivity to 27 other arboviruses. Our study

takes advantage of this technology's capacity to assess binding to linear epitopes throughout a

virus' entire proteome to identify an epitope in ZIKV NS2B, a protein made intracellularly which

embeds in the host cell's endoplasmic reticulum and thus would not be expected to induce

strong antibody responses. We also demonstrate the potential of this technology, through its

ability to survey binding throughout many whole viral proteomes simultaneously, to differentiate

seroreactivity to an infecting virus from cross-reactivity against a great variety of other similar

viruses. These unique aspects of this recently developed peptide microarray technology

highlight its capacity to efficiently screen for and identify previously unknown epitopes in a large

number of neglected disease-causing pathogens simultaneously and to distinguish infection

histories of NTDs, potentially impacting the development of future diagnostics and vaccines.

**Methods**

**Macaque study design**

Animal demographics, inoculation strain, dose, and route, serum sample collection timelines,

and array design used for each animal are described in Table 1. Gestational details and

outcomes for pregnant animals are described in Table 2. Additional details on the study

histories of the animals in this study can be found at https://go.wisc.edu/b726s1.

**Table 1.** Animal demographics.

| Cohort | Animal | Public animal identifier* | Species | Sex | Flavivirus infection history | Inoculation strain | Inoculation dose and route | Time points of sample collection (days post infection, dpi) | Peptide array design |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | A1 | cy0879 | *Macaca fascicularis* | female | none | SIVmac239 | 7,000 TCID50, intrarectal | pre-infection, 125 dpi | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |
| | A2 | cy0886 | *Macaca fascicularis* | female | none | SIVmac239 | 7,000 TCID50, intrarectal | pre-infection, 126 dpi | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |
| B | B1 | 411359* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28, 67 and 99 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| C | C1 | 295022* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/R.macaque-tc/UGA/1947/MR766-3329 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28, 67 and 98 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| D | D1 | 448436* | *Macaca mulatta* | male | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28 and 621 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| | D2 | 861138* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28 and 582 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| F | F1 | 393422* | *Macaca mulatta* | male | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1, 12 and 9.5 months prior | Dengue 2 New Guinea C | 10E5 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28 dpi | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |
| | F2 | 826226* | *Macaca mulatta* | male | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1, 12 and 9.5 months prior | Dengue 2 New Guinea C | 10E5 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28 dpi | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |
| F | F3 | 912116* | *Macaca mulatta* | male | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1, 12 and 9.5 months prior | Dengue 2 New Guinea C | 10E5 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 28 dpi | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |
| G | G1 | 660875* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 7, 21, 43, 78, 127 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |

| | G2 | 827577* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/FRA/2013/FrenchPolynesia-01_v1c1 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | 0, 7, 21, 35, 71, 113 days after primary infection | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | H1 | 146523* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/PUR/2015/PRVABC59 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 7, 21, 70 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| | H2 | 858972* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/PUR/2015/PRVABC59 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 7, 21, 70 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| H | H3 | 419969* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | none | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/PUR/2015/PRVABC59 | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 7, 21, 70 dpi | Offset by 1, overlap of 15 |
| I | I1 | 776301* | *Macaca mulatta* | female | Dengue 3 Slenman/78, 9 months prior | Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/PUR/2015/PRVABC59 bar code virus | 10E4 PFU, subcutaneous | pre-infection, 8, 29, 57, 78 dpi | Offset by 4, overlap of 12 |

120  *Public animal identifiers are used in studies on the Zika Open Research Portal

121  (https://zika.labkey.com/project/home/begin.view?).

123  **Table 2**. Gestational details.

| Animal | Gestational days (gd) at inoculation | Pregnancy outcome |
|---|---|---|
| G1 | 36 | delivery at 158 gd (122 dpi) |
| G2 | 38 | delivery at 158 gd (120 dpi) |
| H1 | 46 | fetectomy at 116 gd (70 dpi) |
| H2 | 47 | fetectomy at 117 gd (70 dpi) |
| H3 | 43 | fetectomy at 111 gd (68 dpi) |
| I1 | 35 | delivery at 155 gd (120 dpi) |

**Ethics**

All monkeys were cared for by the staff at the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center

(WNPRC) in accordance with the regulations and guidelines outlined in the Animal Welfare Act

and the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals and the recommendations of the

Weatherall report (https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2006/weatherall-report/).

Per WNPRC standard operating procedures for animals assigned to protocols involving the

experimental inoculation of an infectious pathogen, environmental enhancement included

constant visual, auditory, and olfactory contact with conspecifics, the provision of feeding

devices which inspire foraging behavior, the provision and rotation of novel manipulanda (e.g.,

Kong toys, nylabones, etc.), and enclosure furniture (i.e., perches, shelves). Per Animal Welfare

Regulations (Title 9, Chapter 1, Subchapter A, Parts 1–4, Section 3.80 Primary enclosures) the

animals were housed in a nonhuman primate Group 3 enclosure with at least 4.3 square feet of

floor space and at least 30 inches of height. This study was approved by the University of

Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (animal

protocol numbers G005401 and G005443).

**Virus stocks**

SIVmac239 (GenBank accession: M33262) stock was prepared by the WNPRC Virology

Services Unit. Vero cells were transfected with the SIVmac239 plasmid. Infectious supernatant

was then transferred onto rhesus PBMC. The stock was not passaged before collecting and

freezing. ZIKV strain H/PF/2013 (GenBank accession: KJ776791) was obtained from Xavier de

Lamballerie (European Virus Archive, Marseille, France) and passage history is described in

Dudley et al. [16]. ZIKV strain MR766, ZIKV strain PRVABC59, and DENV-2 strain New Guinea

C were generously provided by Brandy Russell (CDC, Ft. Collins, CO). ZIKV strain MR766

passage history has been described in Aliota et al. [38]. A molecularly-barcoded version of ZIKV

strain PRVABC59 (Zika virus/H.sapiens-tc/PUR/2015/PRVABC59; GenBank accession:

KU501215) was constructed as described in Aliota et al. [39]. DENV-2 strain New Guinea C

(GenBank accession: FJ390389), originally isolated from a human in New Guinea, underwent

17 rounds of amplification on cells and/or suckling mice followed by a single round of

amplification on C6/36 cells; virus stocks were prepared by inoculation onto a confluent

monolayer of C6/36 mosquito cells. DENV-3 strain Sleman/78 was obtained from the NIH; virus

stocks were prepared by a single passage on C6/36 cells.

**Multiple sequence alignment**

Full-length ZIKV and DENV polyprotein sequences were extracted from the National Center for

Biotechnology Information (NCBI) database into Geneious Pro 9.1.8 (Biomatters, Ltd.,

Auckland, New Zealand). These sequences included the ZIKV and DENV polyprotein

sequences described above (see "Virus stocks"), as well as DENV-1 strain VR-1254 (GenBank

accession: EU848545) and DENV-4 strain VID-V2055 (GenBank accession: KF955510). These

amino acid sequences were aligned using the Geneious alignment algorithm as implemented in

Geneious Pro 9.1.8 using default parameters (global alignment with free end gaps, cost matrix:

Blosum62).

**Peptide array design and synthesis**

Viral protein sequences were selected and submitted to Roche Sequencing Solutions (Madison,

WI) for development into a peptide microarray as part of an early access program. Sequences

included three ZIKV polyproteins (an Asian strain, ZIKV-FP, GenBank accession: KJ776791.2;

an African strain, ZIKV-MR766, GenBank accession: KU720415.1; and an American strain,

ZIKV-PR, GenBank accession: KU501215.1), four DENV polyproteins (DENV-1, GenBank

accession: EU848545.1; DENV-2, GenBank accession: KM204118.1; DENV-3, GenBank

accession: M93130.1; and DENV-4, GenBank accession: KF955510.1), and one SIVmac239

env protein (GenBank accession: AAA47637.1), which were used for most analyses in this

study. Sequences used for cumulative distribution function (CDF) plots (see Figure 3) and

analysis include sequences for mosquito-borne viruses found in Africa and known to infect

humans [40], as well as one Japanese encephalitis virus strain (GenBank accession:

KX945367.1). Accession numbers used to represent each viral protein are listed in the

supplemental material (Table S7). Proteins were tiled as non-redundant 16 amino acid peptides,

overlapping by 12 or 15 amino acids. The array designs are publicly available at

https://go.wisc.edu/b726s1.

The peptide sequences were synthesized *in situ* with a Roche Sequencing Solutions Maskless

Array Synthesizer (MAS) by light-directed solid-phase peptide synthesis using an amino-

functionalized support (Geiner Bio-One) coupled with a 6-aminohexanoic acid linker and amino

acid derivatives carrying a photosensitive 2-(2-nitrophenyl) propyloxycarbonyl (NPPOC)

protection group (Orgentis Chemicals). Unique peptides were synthesized in random positions

on the array to minimize impact of positional bias. Each array is comprised of twelve subarrays,

where each subarray can process one sample and each subarray contains up to 392,318

unique peptide sequences.

**Peptide array sample binding**

Macaque serum samples were diluted 1:100 in binding buffer (0.01M Tris-Cl, pH 7.4, 1% alkali-

soluble casein, 0.05% Tween-20). Diluted sample aliquots and binding buffer-only negative

controls were bound to arrays overnight for 16-20 h at 4°C. After binding, the arrays were

washed 3x in wash buffer (1x TBS, 0.05% Tween-20), 10 min per wash. Primary sample binding

was detected via 8F1-biotin mouse anti-primate IgG (NIH Nonhuman Primate Reagent

Resource) secondary antibody. The secondary antibody was diluted 1:10,000 (final

concentration 0.1 ng/µl) in secondary binding buffer (1x TBS, 1% alkali-soluble casein, 0.05%

Tween-20) and incubated with arrays for 3 h at room temperature, then washed 3x in wash

buffer (10 min per wash) and 30 sec in reagent-grade water. The secondary antibody was

labeled with Cy5-Streptavidin (GE Healthcare; 5 ng/µl in 0.5x TBS, 1% alkali-soluble casein,

0.05% Tween-20) for 1 h at room temperature, then the array was washed 2x for 1 min in 1x

TBS, and washed once for 30 sec in reagent-grade water. Fluorescent signal of the secondary

antibody was detected by scanning at 635 nm at 2 µm resolution and 25% gain, using an

MS200 microarray scanner (Roche NimbleGen).

**Peptide array data processing**

The datafiles and analysis code for figures are available from https://go.wisc.edu/b726s1. All

figures use the log base 2 of the raw fluorescence signal intensity values. For each sample,

each unique peptide was assayed and processed once; then results from peptides redundant to

multiple proteomes (i.e. were present in more than one strain represented) were restored to

each protein.

For cumulative distribution function (CDF) plots, fluorescence signal intensities were log base 2

transformed and background reactivity in the blank (binding buffer only) control sample was

subtracted for each peptide. The fold change from 0 dpi was calculated by subtracting reactivity

at 0 dpi from reactivity at 28 dpi. To reduce instrument-related variance, the data was then

filtered by taking the minimum intensity of two consecutive peptides with 1 amino acid offset,

thereby reducing peptide outliers by ensuring measured reactivity occurs in multiple consecutive

peptides.

**Validation of peptide array findings**

To confirm the validity of our findings from this recently-developed peptide microarray platform,

we assessed its performance against the humoral response produced by infection with simian

immunodeficiency virus (SIV), which has been well-characterized by conventional methods such

as enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISAs), enzyme-linked immunosorbent spot assays

(ELISPOTs), epitope-prediction methods, or other protein arrays. We synthesized linear 16-mer

peptides, overlapping by 12 amino acids, representing the SIVmac239 envelope protein (env)

and analyzed serum from two Mauritian cynomolgus macaques for SIV-specific IgG reactivity

before and approximately 125 days after SIVmac239 infection (Table 1). (We have previously

plotted data procured from peptide array assays of these samples [37] while investigating the

antibody response to SIV in the context of simian pegivirus infection; here we show the same

data using the updated, improved data processing pipeline described above). Post-infection

samples showed fluorescence intensity as high as 1,000 times the intensity in pre-infection

samples (Supplemental figure S1). Regions of higher-fold increases in fluorescence intensity

corresponded to previously defined variable domains of env which are known antibody targets,

the variable loop regions, as well as others corresponding to known epitopes [41,42]. Taken

together, these results validate epitope definition on the peptide microarray platform and show

this platform to be capable of high-resolution virus-specific IgG epitope identification using the

analytic methods utilized here.

# Results

**Identification of linear B cell epitopes in the ZIKV polyprotein**

We sought to determine antibody binding, or reactivity, to the ZIKV polyprotein following ZIKV

infection. We tiled 16-residue (16-mer) peptides overlapping by 15 amino acids representing

different ZIKV polyproteins and evaluated the antibody binding of serum samples from animals

with recent ZIKV-FP (animals B1, D1, and D2) or ZIKV-MR766 (animal C1) infections (Table 1).

Animals in both groups had demonstrated neutralizing antibody responses at 28 dpi, measured

by 90% plaque reduction neutralization tests (PRNT$_{90}$) as described previously [16,38,23].

Peptides were defined as reactive if the signal intensity was greater after infection with a

cognate strain (e.g., increased signal intensity against ZIKV peptides in an animal infected with

ZIKV) than it was before infection. Peptides were defined as cross-reactive if the signal intensity

was greater after infection with a noncognate strain (e.g., increased signal intensity against

ZIKV peptides in an animal infected with DENV). Statistical significance of the change in signal

intensity versus no change was calculated using a two-tailed log-ratio t-test. True epitopes were

expected to induce antibody binding to multiple peptides with overlapping sequences; thus

regions were only considered epitopes when there was a statistically significant increase in

intensity in a post-infection sample relative to intensity in a pre-infection sample in three or more

consecutive peptides.

Reactivity was most commonly observed in three regions of the flavivirus polyprotein: envelope

protein, NS2B, and nonstructural protein 3 (NS3); therefore, most of the analysis in this paper is

limited to these regions. Antibody binding to peptides from the envelope protein was seen in all

four animals at 28 dpi; antibody binding in the NS3 region was seen in three out of four animals

(Figure 1; reactivity throughout the entire ZIKV polyprotein can be seen in supplemental figure

S2). The four animals exhibited similar responses against an Asian ZIKV strain, ZIKV-FP

(Figure 1), as against an African strain and an American strain (ZIKV-MR766 and ZIKV-PR

respectively, supplemental figure S3).

**Figure 1.** Reactivity of ZIKV-convalescent animals against the ZIKV-FP polyprotein. Serum from

rhesus macaques infected with ZIKV-FP (animals B1, D1, and D2) and with ZIKV-MR766

(animal C1) was assayed for IgG recognition of the ZIKV-FP polyprotein. Reactivity prior to

infection and at 28 dpi is shown. The $\text{NS2B}_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 epitope is highlighted in grey.

All four animals exhibited antibody binding to the ZIKV NS2B epitope similar to that documented

in humans [12]. Though other reactive epitopes were identified in other proteins in multiple

animals, this epitope was the only epitope in our study for which all ZIKV-infected animals

showed reactivity. All ten ZIKV-infected animals in this study were used to determine statistical

significance of this epitope in order to avoid making statistical inferences using very small

sample sizes [43]. Area under the curve (AUC) values and corresponding receiver operating

characteristic (ROC) curves were calculated (supplemental figure S4) to identify ten peptides at

positions 1427-1436 in the polyprotein (for a total of 25 amino acids, sequence

RAGDITWEKDAEVTGNSPRLDVALD) as the best-performing epitope for which a statistically

significant change from 0 dpi was observed, hereafter referred to as NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 (AUC of

0.9375, 95% confidence interval of 0.89065 to 0.9375). Using the mean signal intensity across

the ten peptides, the change of signal intensity from 0 dpi to 21-28 dpi was statistically

significant versus no change by a two-tailed log-ratio t-test (p-value = 0.000501 < 0.05, df = 9).

This epitope is slightly longer than that found by Mishra et al. (nine 12-mer peptides, for a total

of 20 amino acids, sequence DITWEKDAEVTGNSPRLDVA) [12].

**Cross-reactivity of ZIKV-convalescent serum with DENV polyproteins and with**

**arbovirus proteomes**

DENV polyproteins share an average of 55% sequence identity with ZIKV polyproteins [1,2],

and the region of DENV NS2B corresponding to the immunoreactive ZIKV NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25

epitope shares an average of 41% identity (Figure 2 A). To examine cross-reactivity, we

analyzed the antibody binding of samples from the ZIKV-convalescent animals against DENV

polyproteins represented on the array (Figure 2 B-E). Cross-reactivity was apparent, with

antibodies from the ZIKV-convalescent/DENV-naive animals recognizing regions of DENV

polyproteins. All four animals showed some cross-reactivity against the DENV envelope protein

and DENV NS3. Animals exhibited comparable cross-reactivities to all four DENV serotypes,

with the highest single instance of cross-reactivity observed against a DENV-3 epitope in the

NS3 region. No significant cross-reactivity against the DENV NS2B protein was observed for

these or any ZIKV-infected animals in this study (p-value = 0.548, df = 9).

**Figure 2**. Cross-reactivity of ZIKV-convalescent animals against polyproteins of the four DENV

serotypes. DENV serotypes share an average of 41% sequence similarity with the aligned ZIKV

NS2B epitope (A). Serum from rhesus macaques infected with ZIKV-FP (animals B1, D1, and

D2) or ZIKV-MR766 (C1) was assayed for cross-reactivity against polyproteins of DENV

serotypes 1-4 (B-E, respectively). The segment of DENV NS2B which aligns with the ZIKV

$NS2B_{1427-1451}RD25$ epitope is highlighted in grey.

Given this array's capacity to screen for antibody binding to peptides representing many

different virus proteomes at once, we also assessed cross-reactivity against the 27 other

arboviruses (for a total of 28 arboviruses) represented. We plotted the fold change in reactivity

from 0 to 28 dpi for each peptide in each virus's proteome using cumulative distribution function

(CDF) plots (Figure 3). CDF plots were used to determine whether the sum of reactivity across a

viral proteome could distinguish reactivity to the infecting pathogen (in this case, ZIKV) from

cross-reactivity to a variety of other similar or dissimilar pathogens (in this case, 27 other

arboviruses). Cross-reactivity in peptides in other arboviruses was observed, but it was rare

compared with the reactivity seen in the ZIKV peptides. The greatest degree of cross-reactivity

occurred among flaviviruses, in particular Ntaya virus, Spondweni virus, Bagaza virus, and

DENV-3 (Figure 3 C). Pooled t-tests showed significant differences between reactivity against

ZIKV strains and other viruses for each of the four animals (Table 3). In animal B1, reactivity

against ZIKV was significantly different from cross-reactivity against all other arboviruses (p-

values ranging from <0.0001 to 0.0006). Animal C1's reactivity against ZIKV was significantly

different (p-values <0.05) for all viruses assayed except Babanki virus, Banzi virus, DENV-4,

Uganda S virus, and yellow fever virus. D1 showed reactivity against ZIKV that was significantly

different from reactivity against all other viruses except Spondweni virus. D2 showed more

significant cross-reactivity with other arboviruses; in D2, ZIKV reactivity differed significantly

from reactivity to all other viruses except Bwamba virus, Chikungunya virus, DENV-1,

Middelburg virus, Ndumu virus, Rift Valley fever virus, Spondweni virus, and Uganda S virus. Of

note, D2 did also exhibit the smallest increase in fold change from 0 to 28 dpi in reactivity

against ZIKV; this higher likelihood of cross-reactivity may be attributable to the minimal overall

amount of reactivity present. Reactivity for the two ZIKV strains compared, one African strain

(ZIKV-MR766, GenBank accession: NC_012532.1) and one Asian/American strain (GenBank

accession: NC_035889.1) was not significantly different for any animal (p-values ranging from

0.62 to 0.88).

**Figure 3**. Cross-reactivity of sera from ZIKV-convalescent animals against the complete

polyproteins or proteomes of 27 arboviruses represented on the array. Cumulative distribution

function (CDF) plots of fold change from 0 dpi to 28 dpi by of animals' reactivity and cross-

reactivity to different viral proteomes are shown; data for animals infected with ZIKV-FP (B1, D1,

and D2) and ZIKV-MR766 (C1) are shown. Reactivity to two ZIKV strains, one African and one

Asian/American, is compared against all viruses on the array of order Bunyavirales (A), of family

Togaviridae (B), of family Flaviviridae (C), and with the averages of reactivity of all viruses in

Bunyavirales, of all viruses in Togaviridae, and of all viruses in Flaviviridae (D). The region of

interest is shown large in the figure, while the full CDF plot is shown as an inset. ZIKV strains

demonstrate significantly increased fold change in reactivity compared to the majority of other

viruses represented on the array (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Significance of difference from ZIKV of summed reactivity.

| Arbovirus species | p-value for t-test against Asian/American ZIKV strain | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B1 | C1 | D1 | D2 |
| Babanki | <0.0001 | 0.0924* | 0.0188 | 0.0004 |
| Bagaza | <0.0001 | 0.0010 | 0.0001 | <0.0001 |
| Banzi | <0.0001 | 0.0609* | 0.0060 | 0.0062 |
| Bunyamwera | <0.0001 | 0.0094 | 0.0001 | 0.0202 |
| Bwamba | <0.0001 | 0.0019 | 0.0030 | 0.2367* |
| Chikungunya | <0.0001 | 0.0452 | 0.0002 | 0.0562* |
| Dengue 1 | <0.0001 | 0.0010 | 0.0015 | 0.2522* |
| Dengue 2 | <0.0001 | 0.0006 | 0.0053 | 0.0074 |
| Dengue 3 | 0.0001 | 0.0067 | 0.0017 | <0.0001 |
| Dengue 4 | <0.0001 | 0.1880* | <0.0001 | 0.0038 |
| Japanese encephalitis | 0.0002 | 0.0349 | 0.0045 | 0.0447 |
| Middelburg | <0.0001 | 0.0081 | 0.0006 | 0.2074* |
| Ndumu | <0.0001 | 0.0008 | <0.0001 | 0.1681* |
| Ngari | <0.0001 | 0.0110 | 0.0015 | 0.0997* |
| Ntaya | 0.0002 | 0.0002 | <0.0001 | 0.0476 |
| Nyando | <0.0001 | 0.0027 | <0.0001 | 0.0001 |
| Rift Valley fever | <0.0001 | 0.0085 | 0.0001 | 0.1868* |
| Semliki Forest | <0.0001 | 0.0118 | <0.0001 | 0.0053 |
| Sindbis | <0.0001 | 0.0417 | 0.0010 | <0.0001 |
| Spondweni | 0.0006 | 0.0015 | 0.5734* | 0.2896* |
| Uganda S | <0.0001 | 0.0608* | <0.0001 | 0.2134* |
| Usutu | <0.0001 | 0.0129 | 0.0084 | 0.0053 |
| Wesselsbron | <0.0001 | 0.0032 | 0.0005 | 0.0002 |
| West Nile lineage 1 | <0.0001 | 0.0007 | 0.0035 | <0.0001 |
| West Nile lineage 2 | <0.0001 | 0.0009 | 0.0052 | 0.0016 |
| Witwatersrand | <0.0001 | 0.0083 | 0.0034 | 0.0289 |
| Yellow fever | <0.0001 | 0.5379* | 0.0003 | 0.0002 |
| Zika, African | 0.7952* | 0.6184* | 0.8688* | 0.7304* |

*Non-significant values (p-value > 0.05).

**Anti-ZIKV antibody response during pregnancy**

Given the importance of determining an accurate ZIKV infection history in pregnancy, we sought

to characterize the gestational anti-ZIKV antibody response. We used the peptide microarray to

evaluate serum samples from six pregnant animals. Animals were inoculated with ZIKV at 35-47

days post-conception (gestational date, gd) (Table 2). Two animals (G1 and G2) had no history

of flavivirus exposure and were inoculated with ZIKV-FP at 36-38 gd. Three more flavivirus-

naive animals (H1, H2, and H3) were infected with ZIKV-PR at 45-47 gd. One animal (I1) had a

history of exposure to DENV-3 nine months prior to inoculation with a barcoded clone of ZIKV-

PR at 35 gd [39]. Serum samples collected approximately one week post-infection and at two to

six week intervals thereafter were analyzed against ZIKV polyproteins represented on the

peptide array (Figure 4). All six pregnant animals exhibited anti-NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 reactivity by

the early convalescent phase (21-29 dpi), though time of initial appearance and duration of the

response varied between animals.

**Figure 4.** IgG reactivity against ZIKV NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 during pregnancy. Serum samples

taken throughout the course of six animals' pregnancies were evaluated against the ZIKV-FP

polyprotein represented on peptide microarrays. Two animals (G1 and G2) were infected with

ZIKV-FP at 36-38 gd. Three animals (H1, H2, H3) were infected with ZIKV-PR at 45-47 gd. One

animal (I1) had been infected with DENV-3 nine months prior and was infected with a barcoded

clone of ZIKV-PR at 35 gd. The NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 epitope is highlighted in grey. Reactivity

against the ZIKV-FP envelope and NS3 proteins can be found in supplemental figure S5.

All pregnant animals showed a similar pattern of anti-ZIKV reactivity, with some differences in

time to peak reactivity and duration of detectable reactivity. In G1, elevated baseline intensity in

the ZIKV NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 region was present prior to inoculation with ZIKV-FP. Reactivity

peaked in the acute phase (7 dpi) and subsequently decreased but remained above pre-

infection levels through 127 dpi, after G1 had given birth. In G2, reactivity was not appreciable

until the early convalescent phase (21 dpi) and peaked at 35 dpi, remaining elevated relative to

pre-infection levels through the latest time point analyzed (113 dpi). Animals H1 and H3 showed

elevated pre-infection intensity against NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25. All three animals in cohort H showed

reactivity by 21 dpi. H1 and H2 continued to exhibit increased reactivity through the latest time

point measured (70 dpi), while H3 had peak reactivity at 21 dpi and decreased after. I1, an

animal nine months post-DENV-3 infection, showed a pattern of reactivity similar to that in other

animals, with anti-NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 IgG reactivity first appearing at 8 dpi and peaking at 29 dpi

at a level 3.6 times pre-infection reactivity (Figure 4). Reactivity remained close to peak

reactivity through 78 dpi.

All pregnant animals' cross-reactivity against DENV polyproteins mirrored that seen in non-

pregnant animals (supplemental figure S6).

**Differentiating DENV serology in ZIKV-immune animals**

Previous assays have struggled to distinguish DENV serologic responses from ZIKV serologic

responses [5-8]. We investigated whether the peptide microarray technology, and specifically

reactivity patterns using the ZIKV NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 epitope, could distinguish DENV from ZIKV

infections. Three animals (cohort F) had been challenged twice with ZIKV-FP 12 months prior

and 9.5 months prior [16]; we collected serum from these animals, infected them with DENV-2,

and collected serum 28 days after. These samples were analyzed against 16-mer peptides, with

amino acid overlap of 12, representing DENV-2 and ZIKV-FP (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Antibody reactivity to DENV and ZIKV polyproteins of animals with recent DENV

infection. Three macaques (F1, F2, and F3), with history of challenge and rechallenge with

ZIKV-FP 12 and 9.5 months prior, were infected with DENV-2 and serum samples taken before

DENV infection and at 28 dpi were assessed. Reactivity of these animals against peptides

representing the envelope, NS2B, and NS3 proteins of DENV-2 (A) and ZIKV-FP (B) is shown.

The ZIKV NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 epitope (in B) is highlighted in grey.

These animals showed reactivity against all four DENV polyproteins in regions representing the

DENV envelope protein, DENV NS3, and others (Figure 5A) and cross-reactivity against

corresponding regions of the ZIKV polyprotein (Figure 5B). One animal (F3) out of the three

showed significant reactivity to the NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 epitope, though this reactivity was slightly

outside the area of typical NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 reactivity (peptides 1421-1444 rather than 1427-

1451). Another (F1) showed elevated pre-DENV infection intensity in NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 that did

not change following DENV infection, possibly as a result of the animal's prior ZIKV exposure.

Animal F2 showed no detectable NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 reactivity before or after exposure.

**Discussion**

We describe the antibody binding of the anti-ZIKV IgG response in non-pregnant and pregnant

rhesus macaques and compare this to the anti-DENV response. Using a recently developed

high-density peptide microarray we show that macaques infected with ZIKV produce IgG

antibodies which bind throughout the ZIKV polyprotein, including conserved antibody binding to

an epitope in ZIKV NS2B, NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25, which is apparent regardless of the ZIKV strain

used for infection. We establish that cross-reactivity exists between anti-ZIKV and anti-DENV

antibodies for the ZIKV and DENV polyproteins, and we show this technology can be used to

differentiate anti-ZIKV reactivity from cross-reactivity to many other arboviruses. Additionally, we

show the anti-NS2B$_{1427\text{-}1451}$RD25 IgG response is susceptible to false positives in the context of

DENV infection and may be susceptible to false-positives in flavivirus-immune individuals. Thus,

while this epitope may be broadly useful for serosurveillance, it should be used with caution in

the diagnosis of individual infections.

As has been seen in previous assays [2,12,44-46], we observed antibody cross-reactivity

between ZIKV- and DENV-immune sera, though reactivity to the ZIKV $NS2B_{1427-1451}$RD25

epitope was observed in all cases of recent ZIKV infection (10 out of 10 ZIKV-infected animals),

and in only one out of three cases of recent DENV infection in animals with history of ZIKV

exposure. Reactivity to the NS2B epitope was conserved whether the infecting strain was

African, Asian, or American in origin. All ZIKV-infected animals produced anti-ZIKV IgG against

the $NS2B_{1427-1451}$RD25 epitope, though reactivity was sometimes small in magnitude (as in

animal D2) or was measurable for only a short duration (as in animal H3). The lack of uniformity

of the anti-ZIKV IgG response is especially relevant since all ZIKV-exposed animals could be

followed, in contrast to studies in humans where there may be a selection bias for individuals

with symptomatic ZIKV, which is thought to account for only approximately half of ZIKV

infections [12,47]. Though anti-$NS2B_{1427-1451}$RD25 reactivity was consistently detectable in early

convalescence, it decayed in all but one case, that of a pregnant animal with previous DENV

exposure, during the time period assessed. These findings corroborate findings in humans, in

which symptomatic ZIKV infection was strongly associated with detectable anti-NS2B antibodies

in the early convalescent phase (96%), but was less likely six months post-infection (44%) [12].

These results demonstrate the need for further investigation into the longevity and kinetics of

the anti-ZIKV humoral response. Given that no other purported ZIKV-specific epitopes have

been identified to date, these results also call into question how useful current serological

methods may be in differentiating past ZIKV exposure from exposure to other flaviviruses.

Additionally, one animal (F3) with a history of previous ZIKV infections showed reactivity against

the ZIKV $NS2B_{1427-1451}$RD25 epitope following experimental DENV infection, indicating that a

history of ZIKV infection or a recent DENV infection has potential to confound results using this

epitope. Thus, while this epitope appears to be more ZIKV-specific than most, its utility in

guiding development of diagnostics will likely be limited.

The ability of the peptide array to differentiate seroreactivity against ZIKV from cross-reactivity

to other viruses and to show cross-reactivity to 27 other mosquito-borne arboviruses suggests

this technology, with additional optimization, could be useful for determining the etiology of fever

of unknown origin and other non-specific symptoms in areas where mosquito-borne diseases

are common. All ZIKV-infected animals showed the greatest fold change in reactivity against

ZIKV proteomes. Though these differences in fold change did not always reach significance for

all strains in all animals, the tendency to show the greatest reactivity in ZIKV strains, even in

comparisons against very closely-related flaviviruses, for ZIKV-infected animals demonstrates

the potential of this technology in guiding diagnostic development in the future.

This assay detected anti-NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 reactivity in all pregnant macaques exposed to

ZIKV. Production of IgG antibodies has relevance to both mother and fetus, since maternal IgG

crosses the placenta and transport of IgG across the placental barrier increases throughout the

course of pregnancy [48]. It can be presumed the anti-ZIKV IgG produced by these animals also

reached their fetuses, but whether these anti- NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 antibodies provide protection,

contribute to the pathogenesis of ZIKV disease and ZIKV congenital effects, or are irrelevant in

ZIKV pathology is currently unknown. Though we did not note any variation in outcomes with

differences in antibody responses, it is possible deviations in antibody responses during

pregnancy could help explain differences in outcomes following gestational ZIKV infection.

Several pregnant animals also showed elevated pre-infection intensity at the NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25

epitope. This phenomenon may be due to innate immunodominance of the NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25

epitope, or it may be due to molecular mimicry, though we have not found this epitope present

in any other pathogen. These findings merit further and more thorough investigation than this

current study can provide.

The peptide array technology used in this study has several limitations. The assay's utility could

be increased by the addition of quantitative capacities. We currently use a 1:100 antibody

dilution since we have found this to produce an optimal signal:noise ratio, but it is possible serial

dilutions could allow for measurement of quantitative results. Greater confidence in this assay's

results could be derived from assessing its ability to identify the binding of well-characterized

monoclonal antibodies. Once validated in this way, the array could then be used to determine

the specificity of new monoclonal antibodies as they are discovered. Additionally, our study

defined a positive response as an increase from an animal's pre-infection intensity; human

patients usually cannot give pre-infection samples and must rely upon controls determined from

humans having no known history of exposure to certain pathogens. The development of such a

control would raise the specificity of the assay at the expense of sensitivity, and thus would risk

missing some true positive results when definitive pre-infection samples from the same

individual are not available.

The peptide array approach is also limited due to its reliance on continuous linear epitopes.

Many documented ZIKV epitopes are conformational discontinuous epitopes [49-55]. Other

epitope discovery methods will likely remain superior in defining discontinuous epitopes, but this

technology is useful in identifying immunoreactive regions not previously considered as potential

epitopes. Past work from our laboratory, including results from some of the animals whose sera

was analyzed here, has shown anti-ZIKV neutralizing antibody titers measured by $PRNT_{90}$ do

not drop off but remain elevated as late as 64 dpi [16]. The discordance between levels of anti-

$NS2B_{1427-1451}RD25$ IgG and neutralizing antibody titers may indicate the anti-$NS2B_{1427-1451}RD25$

antibodies do not play a role in protection against future infections, which may explain the drop-

off in their production observed in macaques and in humans.

In the future, this technology could be expanded for use in profiling antibody responses to many

other pathogens. This tool was able to detect known and previously unknown epitopes

throughout the ZIKV proteome, including epitopes in unexpected regions such as NS2B. This

approach could be applied to other NTDs to advance diagnostic and vaccine development. The

array used in this study simultaneously evaluates antibody responses against the entire

proteomes of every mosquito-borne virus known to infect humans in Africa. Building off what we

have learned through this and other peptide array analyses, we intend to use this array to

survey antibody reactivity in African populations, through which we may identify previously

unknown epitopes for some of the rare pathogens represented on the array. Additionally, we

plan to use this assay to evaluate and compare both IgM and IgG responses in these analyses,

which may help elucidate the kinetics of the immediate and long-term antibody response to

pathogens.

In summary, this work in macaques demonstrates the capacity of a recently developed peptide

microarray to profile the binding of distinct anti-ZIKV and anti-DENV IgG antibody responses in

experimental infections. Our work shows the anti-NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 IgG response is

characterized by relatively rapid decay and is susceptible to confounding, mirroring results seen

in humans. The peptide microarray technology used shows particular promise in evaluating full-

proteome antibody binding for a large number of pathogens efficiently and may be especially

useful for neglected tropical diseases for which diagnostics are rudimentary or non-existent.

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## Conflict of interest

This manuscript describes the use of a platform provided on an early-access basis by Roche Sequencing Solutions. While scientists from Roche were involved in the experimental design and data analysis, the manuscript was prepared independently from Roche and did not require pre-approval from Roche prior to submission. RSP, EB, HL, JP, and JCT are employed by Roche Sequencing Solutions.

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**Supplemental material**

**Supplemental figure S1**. SIV env epitopes identified by a high-density peptide microarray

overlap known epitopes in variable loop regions. Serum from two Mauritian cynomolgus

macaques (animals A1 and A2) before and after infection with SIVmac239 was evaluated for

reactivity to overlapping peptides representing the SIVmac239 env protein sequence on a linear

peptide microarray. SIV env variable loop regions [41] are highlighted in grey.

**Supplemental figure S2**. Reactivity of B1, C1, D1, and D2 against the complete polyprotein of

ZIKV-FP. The NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 epitope is highlighted in grey.

**Supplemental figure S3**. Reactivity of B1, C1, D1, and D2 against ZIKV-MR766 (A) and ZIKV-

PR (B). The NS2B$_{1427-1451}$RD25 epitope is highlighted in grey.

**Supplemental figure S4**. ROC curves for best-performing epitope and multidimensional scaling

(MDS) plot for different time points. ROC curves (A) were generated using data from the 8

animals analyzed against ZIKV polyproteins tiled as 16 amino acid peptides overlapping by 15

amino acids since this was the most complete dataset. ROC curves were created using the 8

samples collected at 0 DPI as the control group and the same 8 samples collected at 21-28 DPI

samples as the test group. We chose consecutive peptides within the NS2B region that

maximized the differences of mean log-normalized intensities between the controls and test

samples. The decision threshold was determined by maximizing the AUC and the resulting

ROCs of 9 to 13 peptides were plotted. ROC curves overlapped. MDS plots (B) of distances

between the log-normalized gene expression profiles were created using Limma plot MDS R

library. Only the 10 peptides in the identified $NS2B_{1427-1451}RD25$ epitope were used. Based on

MDS analysis, pre-infection samples (blue), samples from early convalescence (21-28 dpi, red),

and samples from any later time (>43 dpi, yellow) clustered in separate groups.

**Supplemental figure S5.** Reactivity of cohort G (ZIKV-FP infection during first trimester), H

(ZIKV-PR infection during first trimester), and I (history of DENV-3 infection, ZIKV-PR infection

during first trimester) against the ZIKV-FP polyprotein. The $NS2B_{1427-1451}RD25$ epitope is

highlighted in grey.

**Supplemental figure S6.** Reactivity of cohort G (ZIKV-FP infection during first trimester), H

(ZIKV-PR infection during first trimester), and I (history of DENV-3 infection, ZIKV-PR infection

during first trimester) against the DENV-2 polyprotein. The region of the DENV-2 polyprotein

corresponding to the ZIKV $NS2B_{1427-1451}RD25$ epitope is highlighted in grey.

**Supplemental Table S7.** Arboviral proteins and polyproteins used for CDF plot analysis.