

**HTLV-2 in Central Africa: HTLV-2 subtype B strains similar to those found in Amerindian tribes are endemic in Bakola Pygmies from south Cameroon but not in surrounding Bantus and Baka Pygmies**

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MEETING ABSTRACT

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# HTLV-2 in Central Africa: HTLV-2 subtype B strains similar to those found in Amerindian tribes are endemic in Bakola Pygmies from south Cameroon but not in surrounding Bantus and Baka Pygmies

Philippe Mauclère<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Laurent Meertens<sup>1</sup>, Philippe Afonso<sup>1</sup>, Sabine Plancoulaine<sup>1,3</sup>, Claudia Filippone<sup>1</sup>, Edouard Betssem<sup>1,4</sup>, Sara Calattini<sup>1</sup>, Alain Froment<sup>5</sup>, Monique Van Beveren<sup>1</sup>, Guy de Thé<sup>1</sup>, Luis Quintana-Murci<sup>6</sup>, Renaud Mahieux<sup>1</sup>, Antoine Gessain<sup>1\*</sup>

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## Background

Presence and origin of endemic foci of HTLV-2 infection in Africa remain a matter of debate.

## Material and methods

To better appreciate the epidemiological and molecular determinants of HTLV-2 infection in Central Africa, we performed a survey in 3903 inhabitants of a South Cameroon forest area, including 1051 Bakola Pygmies, 815 Baka Pygmies and 2037 Bantus living in their neighboring. HTLV-1 and HTLV-2 infection was determined by both specific serological (IFA and WB) and molecular (different generic and specific PCR) methods.

## Results

HTLV-1/2 prevalence was of 3% (117/3903) with 90 HTLV-1 (2.3%) and 27 HTLV-2 (0.7%). Surprisingly, HTLV-2 infection was restricted to Bakola Pygmies (27/1051 2.5%) with no HTLV-2 infection in any of the 2852 Baka or Bantus individuals. In Bakola Pygmies, HTLV-2 seroprevalence increased with age, reaching 6.5% in the elder persons. Ongoing intrafamilial HTLV-2 transmission was evidenced. Lymphoid T cell lines (CD8+ or CD4+, CD25+) producing HTLV-2 antigens, were established from PBMCs cultures of HTLV-2

infected individuals. Sequences of a 672 nucleotide LTR fragment, obtained from 7 HTLV-2 samples, showed a very high degree of homologies among samples (< 1% nucleotide divergence) but also surprisingly with Amerindian HTLV-2 B strains. Complete sequence (8954 bp) of one isolate confirmed a typical HTLV-2 B strain.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates clearly a HTLV-2 endemic population, with ongoing transmission, in Central Africa. Furthermore, it gives insights into several central questions regarding the origin and evolution rate of HTLV-2 and the migrations of infected populations.

## Author details

<sup>1</sup>Unité EPVO, CNRS URA 3015, Institut Pasteur, Paris, France. <sup>2</sup>Centre Pasteur du Cameroun, Yaoundé, Cameroun. <sup>3</sup>Laboratoire GHMI, INSERM, U.550, Paris, France. <sup>4</sup>Faculté de Médecine et des Sciences Biomédicales, Université de Yaoundé, Cameroun. <sup>5</sup>IRD, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, France. <sup>6</sup>HEG Unit, CNRS URA 3012, Institut Pasteur, Paris, France.

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\* Correspondence: [agessain@pasteur.fr](mailto:agessain@pasteur.fr)

<sup>1</sup>Unité EPVO, CNRS URA 3015, Institut Pasteur, Paris, France

Full list of author information is available at the end of the article