

Concept of SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine Design to Fight COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review Insight

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Abstract

Cluster of pneumonia infection emerged in Wuhan, China due to severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Additionally, more than 190 countries have confirmed 82 million cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection. Currently, there is a SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, and no effective prophylactic methods are available. A vaccine is considered as an effective method to restrict an epidemic. Several vaccine designing techniques have been established, which is enabling researchers from various institutes for developing vaccine towards SARS-CoV-2 infections. In this review, we condense the development of vaccine research against SARS-CoV-2.

Keywords: COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, Vaccine Design.

Introduction

A cluster of pneumonia infections emerged in Wuhan Hospital, China which started from December 2019 up to now. The infection was reported to be caused due to a type of beta-coronavirus, which named by World Health Organization (WHO) as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)^{1,2}. As per reports till March 26th 2021, the pathogen had infected more than 120 million individuals and caused 2.7 million deaths worldwide¹.

SARS-CoV-2 had a material genetic of positive-stranded RNA and belongs to *Betacoronavirus* genera. Studies have revealed that SARS-CoV-2 genome consists of 29,700 nucleotides, and shares approximately 79.5%

similarity to the genome of SARS-CoV^{3,4}. Furthermore, SARS-CoV-2 is known to have an ORF1ab polyprotein at the 5'-end which had a role in coding for viral non-structural proteins. Genes at 3'-end had been known to encode the structural proteins such as spike (S), nucleocapsid (N), membrane (M), and envelope (E)^{5,6}. Several studies have reported that SARS-CoV-2 binds to angiotensin converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) receptor on the host cell. The receptor played a key role in viral entry mechanism and related pathogenesis^{7,8} (Figure 1).

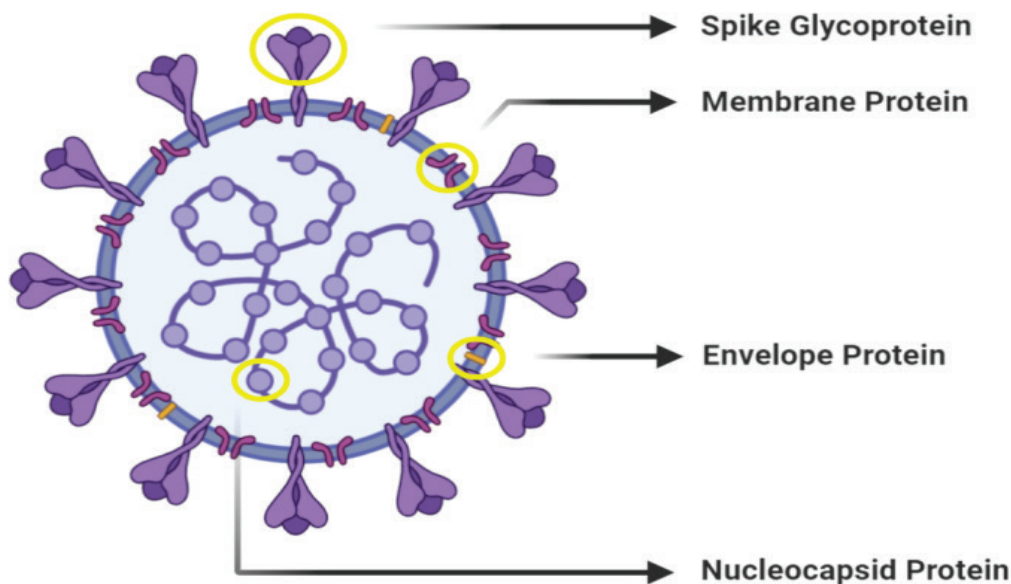
A vaccine is considered as an effective method which had high economic significance to restrict an infectious disease outbreak^{3,9}. The use of vaccines inducing neutralizing antibodies is the best option to increase the number of populations that are immune to SARS-CoV-2¹⁰. Thus, the development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine became an essential need. As per few reports, about 40 pharmaceutical companies and academic institutions in the world have currently assigned the

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program for developing vaccines towards SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, we summarize the ongoing advance research in development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine.



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Figure 1. Structural part of SARS-CoV-2. The virion consists of spike glycoprotein (S), membrane protein (M), envelope protein (E), and nucleocapsid protein (N).

Antigenic Retrieval and Selection from SARS-CoV-2 Structural Protein

Various non-structural protein is common to be utilized for vaccine development. However, spike protein (S protein) is widely being investigated to be used for developing a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2. Studies have revealed that it is a viral surface protein, which is directly recognized by the host immune system^{3,4}. Subsequently, it has been reported that S protein acts as a mediator for interaction between virus and host cell by binding to ACE2 receptor, and cause consequent pathogenicity¹¹. The homologous structure of S protein is being used for vaccine development, which has proven to be effective in overcoming the previous outbreaks including SARS-CoV and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV)¹².

The S protein monomer consists of 1273 amino acids in length and molecular weight about 140 kDa. Furthermore, it has ability to undergo the self-association mechanism and formed a homotrimer structure as a special feature of class I viral fusion protein. Structural studies showed that S protein is composed of two subunits, termed as S1 and S2 part. The S1 subunit can be organized into two domains, such as N-terminal domain (NTD) and C-terminal domain (CTD). In brief, the CTD is reported as receptor-binding domain (RBD). On the other hand, the S2 subunit had an essential part for membrane fusion which consist of internal membrane fusion peptide (FP), two heptad repeats (HR), membrane proximal external region (MPER), and transmembrane domain (TM)^{13,14}. Recently, the S trimer structure of SARS-CoV-2 within the pre-fusion stage, and the RBD structure in convolution with ACE2 had been successfully determined¹⁵.

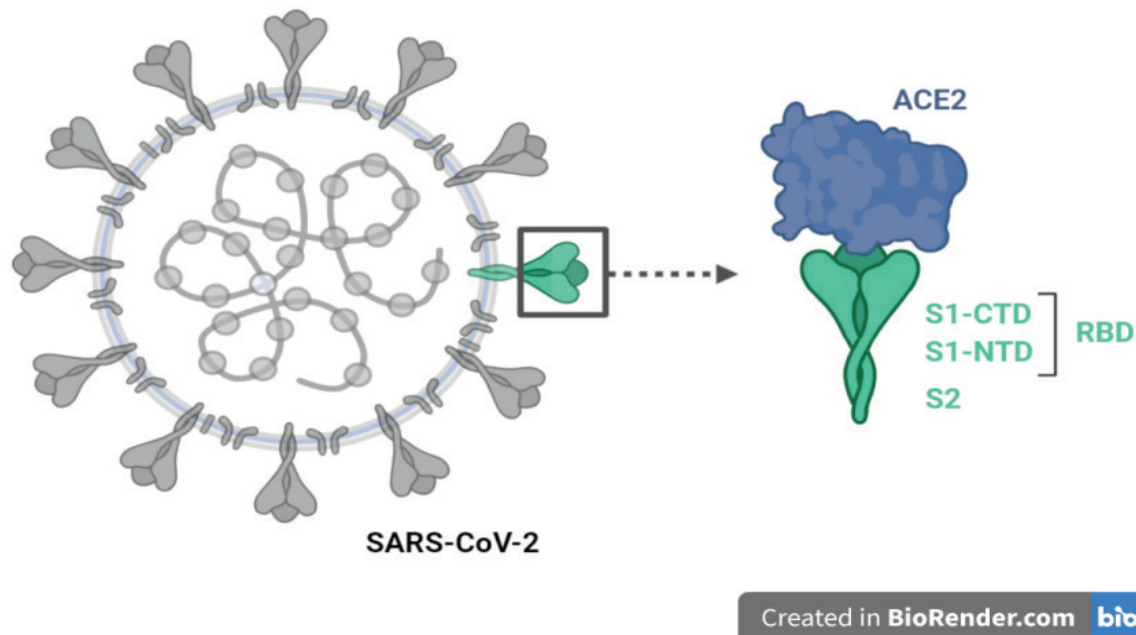


Figure 2. Brief structure of SARS-CoV-2 spike glycoprotein.

The S trimer protein structure had been reported to act as an epitope and had ability to induce a high immunogenicity. Coleman *et al.* showed that the S trimer protein could be produced within baculovirus insect cells, and it could be transformed into nanoparticles¹⁶. Furthermore, it was formulated with an adjuvant (alum) and injected into the mice. Moreover, the immunized mice were observed to obtain the data about titers level of specific antibodies after the nanoparticle administration^{16,17}. Recently, the Clover Biopharmaceutical has announced that they have designed SARS-CoV-2 S-trimer based-vaccine which processed into the preclinical testing stage⁹.

RBD has been known to interact directly with ACE2 receptors of the host cells. Thus, many studies have suggested RBD for immunization to investigate the antibody formation. It estimated for having ability to inhibit the viral recognition of ACE2 receptor, and prevent the subsequent pathogenesis^{18,19}. Accordingly, many RBD-antigens based SARS-CoV-2 subunit vaccines are currently being developed. A study showed that the recombinant RBD, which was isolated from different types of virus serotypes, could trigger the

multi-conformational by neutralizing antibodies towards SARS-CoV-2. This might be due to the presence of multiple epitopes that are recognized by specific immune systems²⁰.

As previously reported, S1 subunit has RBD as well as NTD, which suggests its role in binding S protein to the host receptor²¹. Subsequently, these domains can be widely utilized for vaccine development. As comparison, previous studies showed that MERS-CoV S1 subunit with MF59 adjuvant could protect the human dipeptidyl peptidase 4 transgenic (hDPP4-Tg) mice against infections²². Furthermore, FP in S2 subunit has been reported to be involved in membrane fusion which is essential step for viral pathogenicity^{23,24}. At present, Tianjin University is constructing RDB-FB-based vaccines and producing high titers of neutralizing antibodies in mice⁹.

In other hand, N protein is abundantly expressed by the coronavirus and it has molecular weight about 50 kDa. It has been reported for promoting several functions such as nucleocapsid formation, initiation of viral budding transduction signal, RNA replication, and mRNA transcription^{25,26}. Furthermore, N protein

has been suggested to have high antigenicity as about 80% of patients with COVID-19 have been observed to produce antibodies specific to SARS-CoV N protein²⁷.

Moreover, they have been observed to significantly reduce the viral load of vaccinia virus²⁸. In addition, previous studies reported that bronchitis virus-related N protein could induce the activation of cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTLs) by attenuating infection and thereby, protecting lungs from viral pathogenicity^{29,30}.

Moreover, M protein is a glycoprotein located in the transmembrane of virus and it has molecular weight about 25 kDa. In brief, it has a crucial role for viral assembly. Furthermore, previous report exhibited that it abundantly expressed on the viral surface^{31,32}. Full length M protein has been previously evaluated as a vaccine, which is reported could be neutralizing antibodies in patients with SARS. M proteins also consisted T cell epitope clusters and it was evaluated to be immunogenic^{33,34}. In addition, it also identified for having high conserved domain^{32,35}.

E protein has been reported to have about 76-109 amino acids from studies in different types of coronaviruses. Moreover, it has been demonstrated to have limited immunogenicity compared to S, N, and M proteins. Thus, E protein is not predicted as an immunogen. However, E protein knockout models have been observed to significantly reduce secretion of inflammatory cytokine such as interleukin 1 β (IL-1 β), tumor necrosis factor (TNF), and IL-6³⁶.

Recent Developments in SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine Technology

Studies have shown that whole-cell killed or live-attenuated vaccine exhibit all antigenic components to the host and it could potentially trigger different immunological responses to fight the pathogen^{37,38}. Traditional vaccines could be developed using advanced technology to design the foremost SARS-CoV-2 vaccine that may have prompt applications in healthcare. Wuhan Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Zhejiang University, and other companies

have successfully isolated SARS-CoV-2 and they have started developing vaccines. Recently, Codagenix Inc. collaborated with Serum Institute of India Ltd. developed live-attenuated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine⁹.

Vaccine subunits that comprise of more than one antigen with high immunogenicity could trigger the host immune response. Good quality of vaccines should be safe and easy to produce; however, it commonly requires adjuvants to exhibit the strong immune response³⁹. Several companies have established programs to develop SARS-CoV-2 subunit-based vaccine, and most of them have been reported utilizing protein S as an antigen. The utilization of “molecular clamp” technology by University of Queensland and “Trimer-Tag” technology by Clover Biopharmaceuticals Inc. are several examples of subunit vaccines. Recently, Novavax Inc. announced nanotechnology-based vaccine candidates that have been evaluated in animal models while further testing in humans is needed. Furthermore, Pasteur Institute has collaborated with Chongqing Zhifei Biology Co. Ltd. and started developing SARS-CoV-2 subunit-based vaccine^{9,40}.

Advanced technology in the synthesis, modification, and delivery of mRNA vaccines has been developed for past two decades. The mRNA vaccine is a notable alternative for conventional vaccine since it known for remarkable efficiency, fast production, low cost, and safe consumption^{41,42}. In general, the mRNA vaccine development consists of several steps, including antigen selection, sequence optimization, nucleotide modification, delivery system, evaluation of immune response, and evaluating vaccine safety⁴³. Recently, the mRNA vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 had been developed by Moderna and it is qualified for further analysis. Similarly, the mRNA vaccine based on protein S and RBD is being assessed into in vivo study under the collaboration of Fudan University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, and Bluebird Biopharmaceutical⁹.

Heterologous antigen expression is the principal action for live vector vaccines. It commonly produces stronger immunogenicity and trigger higher cellular

immunity⁴⁴. Houston-based Greffex Inc. has been successful in developing live vector-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccine using adenovirus vectors, and it is evaluated in animals. Moreover, Tonix Pharmaceuticals has recently announced the development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine using Horsepox Virus (TNX-1800)⁹.

Another kind of vaccine, such as synthetic peptide-based vaccines are also developed. It generated from small fragments or peptides which synthesized through chemically process. However, it has been reported that it exhibited a low immunogenicity effect due to the low molecular weight and complex structure. As a result, synthetic peptide vaccines require a few modifications, such as structural modification, presence of a delivery system, and adjuvants formulation⁴⁵. Currently, researchers from Hong Kong University of Science and Technology are developing a peptide vaccine based on B and T cell epitopes from S and N proteins of SARS-CoV⁴⁶.

Conclusion

We hope that several vaccines that have been developed could be used as an effective treatment for COVID-19 outbreak. Different methodology of vaccine development had both advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, current advancements in technology may assist researchers to contribute in development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine.

Conflict of Interest: The author declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Source of Funding: Faculty of Biotechnology, University of Surabaya, Indonesia and Generasi Biologi Indonesia Foundation, Indonesia.

Acknowledgements: We thank Editage for editing the manuscript.

Ethical Approval: None.

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ISSN-0973-9122 (Print) • ISSN-0973-9130 (Electronic)

Volume 15

Number 4

October-December 2021



Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology

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Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

H-INDEX

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PUBLICATION TYPE

Journals

ISSN

09739122, 09739130

COVERAGE

2008-2020

INFORMATION

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reply



Melanie Ortiz 2 years ago

SCImago Team

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request. We suggest you to contact directly with Scopus support:
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/scopus/](https://service.elsevier.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/14883/kw/scimago/supporthub/scopus/)
Best Regards, SCImago Team

D **Dr. Fouad Fadhil Al-Qaim** 2 years ago

Dear Sir/Madam
I have only one question.
How does the same journal gather between science and social science (toxicology and law)?
Please can you explain, why it was considered in SJR data base?
Thank you

reply



Melanie Ortiz 2 years ago

SCImago Team

Dear Fouad,
Thank you for contacting us.
SJR is a portal with scientometric indicators of journals indexed in Scopus. All the data
(Category, Publisher, etc) have been provided By Scopus /Elsevier and SCImago doesn't
have the authority over this data which are property of Scopus/Elsevier. SCImago has a
signed agreement that limits our performance to the generation of scientometric
indicators derived from the metadata sent in the last update.
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Best Regards, SCImago Team

A **aarti** 2 years ago

sir I want to publish my article and I have prepared accordinly but not able to find the copyright
form. please help

reply

B **Bahram** 2 years ago

Hello my dear
Please answer my questions
1 - On what bases does your magazine index? (ISI. Pub med or Scopus)?
2 - How many weeks is the maximum arbitration time? Is it possible to make quick judgments?
3 - How much does it cost to print an article?
Thank you

reply

H **hanaa** 2 years ago

Hello dear: When will the 14th volume of the Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology be published?



Melanie Ortiz 2 years ago

SCImago Team

Dear Hanaa,
thank you for contacting us.
Unfortunately, we cannot help you with your request, we suggest you to visit the journal's homepage or contact the journal's editorial staff, so they could inform you more deeply.
Best Regards, SCImago Team



Melanie Ortiz 2 years ago

SCImago Team

Dear Bahram,
thank you for contacting us.
We are sorry to tell you that SCImago Journal & Country Rank is not a journal. SJR is a portal with scientometric indicators of journals indexed in Elsevier/Scopus. We suggest you to consult Scopus and/or other databases to know where is this journal indexed in. You can also check that information in the journal's website or contact directly with the editorial staff. For further information about this journal, please visit the journal's website. Best Regards, SCImago Team

A **AUTHOR** 2 years ago

is this journal still under scopus.??

reply

T **Tri Astuti Sugiyatmi** 7 months ago

After May 2021, is this journal still indexed by Scopus?

Warm Regard

Tri



Melanie Ortiz 7 months ago

SCImago Team

Dear Tri Astuti,
Thank you very much for your comment.
All the metadata have been provided by Scopus /Elsevier in their last update sent to SCImago, including the Coverage's period data. The SJR for 2020 has been released on 17 May 2021. We suggest you consult the Scopus database directly to see the current index status as SJR is a static image of Scopus, which is changing every day.
Best Regards, SCImago Team

R **Raian Zobi** 7 months ago

Is journal still under scopus??



Melanie Ortiz 7 months ago

SCImago Team

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Best Regards, SCImago Team



Melanie Ortiz 2 years ago

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Dear Sir/Madam, thank you very much for your comment, unfortunately we cannot help you with your request. We suggest you to consult the Scopus database directly. Keep in mind that the SJR is a static image (the update is made one time per year) of a database (Scopus) which is changing every day.
Best Regards, SCImago Team

D **Dr. Shalender Kumar, MD (FM)** 3 years ago

Sir, I want to submit my manuscript for publication in your journal. So sir on which mail id I can do it sir. Kindly guide me sir. Thanks and regards.

reply



Elena Corera 3 years ago

SCImago Team

Dear Dr Shalender,

thank you very much for your comment, unfortunately we cannot help you with your request. We suggest you check author's instructions in journal website. You can find that information in SJR website <https://www.scimagojr.com>

Best Regards,
SCImago Team

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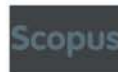
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Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

Scopus coverage years: from 2008 to 2021

(coverage discontinued in Scopus)

Publisher: Institute of Medico-Legal Publications

ISSN: 0973-9122 E-ISSN: 0973-9130

Subject area: Social Sciences: Law Medicine: Pathology and Forensic Medicine

Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutics: Toxicology Environmental Science: Health, Toxicology and Mutagenesis

Source type: Journal

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37506/ijfmr.v15i4>

Published: 2021-09-05

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