DETECTION AND ISOLATION OF CHIKUNGUNYA VIRUS FROM FIELD COLLECTED \textit{AEDES ALBOPICATUS} SKUSE IN SELECTED SITES, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

Rozilawati H.\textsuperscript{1,2}, Mohd Masri S\textsuperscript{1}, Zairi J.\textsuperscript{2}, Yahaya M.A.\textsuperscript{2}, Nazni W.A.\textsuperscript{1}, and Lee H.L.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}Medical Entomology Unit, IDRC, Institute for Medical Research, Jalan Pahang, 50588 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
\textsuperscript{2}School of Biological Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

Corresponding author: rozilawati@imr.gov.my

ABSTRACT.

Chikungunya fever, an \textit{Aedes} borne viral disease, is becoming a serious public health concern today since the first reported outbreak in Port Klang in 1998/99. Recently, more outbreaks were reported in Malaysia. Entomological investigations were conducted in Chikungunya virus cases localities in Peninsular Malaysia which cover Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Perak, Pahang and Selangor state in order to identify the vector responsible for transmitting the Chikungunya virus. The adult mosquitoes were collected using modified aspirator and sweep net methods, whereas water holding containers were inspected for larvae. Reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) were used as the detection of the virus. Positive samples were inoculated on the cell to isolate the virus. The most
common species collected at the localities was *Aedes albopictus* followed by *Culex quinquefasciatus*, *Aedes aegypti* and *Armigeres* sp. Five pools (n=78) of female, adult *Aedes albopictus* collected from Tangkak, Johor were positive for the Chikungunya virus as detected by reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction. Three isolates were obtained and grouped with Central/East African genotype. The presence of Chikungunya virus in wild *Aedes albopictus* indicated that this mosquito is the most likely vector responsible for the transmission of virus to humans in Johor during the outbreak.

**Keywords:** Chikungunya Virus, *Aedes albopictus* Skuse, Peninsular Malaysia

**ABSTRAK**


Kata kunci: Virus Chikungunya, Aedes albopictus Skuse, Semenanjung Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Chikungunya fever is an arthropod-borne viral disease, caused by Chikungunya virus (CHIKV) of the genus Alphavirus in the family Togaviridae (Pialoux, Gaüzère, Jauréguiberry, & Strobel, 2007). CHIKV is transmitted through the bites of infective Aedes sp. mosquitoes (Martin, Moutailler, Madec, & Failloux, 2010). In Malaysia, the first CHIKV outbreak occurred in Klang, between December 1998 and February 1999 (Lam et al., 2001) followed in Bagan Panchor, Perak in March 2006 (AbuBakar et al., 2007; Kumarasamy et al., 2006) and Kinta district, Perak in December 2006 (Noridah et al., 2007). The third outbreak initially started in early April 2008, where an increasing number of CHIKV infections was first detected in Johor State (Apandi et al., 2011). CHIKV has been known to be enzootic in many countries in Asia and Africa, transmitted mainly by various wild Aedes mosquitoes (Diallo, M, Thonnon, Traoré-Lamizana, & Fontenille, 1999; Pfeffer, Lissen, Parker, & Kinney, 2002). In Asia and the Indian Ocean region the main chikungunya virus vectors are Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus (Pialoux et al., 2007): Both Ae. aegypti and Ae. albopictus are abundant in Malaysia and with the abundance of both mosquito species, it is possible that outbreaks of CHIKV can occur anywhere, anytime in the country (Rozilawati et al., 2011, 2014). Information on the ability of the local vectors to transmit CHIKV will be useful in assisting the public health personnel and the general public in implementing a more effective campaign against the vectors in order to reduce the
transmission of the virus. With this information, we have conducted an entomological investigation in CHIKV outbreaks and cases areas in several states in Peninsular Malaysia, in order to identify the most possible vector responsible for the transmission of the virus.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Study sites**
All study areas selected were based on chikungunya outbreaks/cases areas reported. Six states were involved in this study: Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Perak, Pahang and Selangor.

**Mosquito collection**
Larval survey was conducted to collect the immature mosquitoes whereas adult collection was conducted using sweep net and modified aspirator (Rozilawati et al., 2011).

**Mosquitoes processing, Virus detection and isolation**
All mosquitoes sampled were pooled in sterile 2.0 ml tubes labeled accordingly to the study localities and species (both for adult and larvae) and sex (for adults) with a range of 1 to a maximum of 30 individuals per pool before transported to the laboratory in dry ice. The RNA was extracted using the QIAamp® Viral RNA Mini Kit (Qiagen, Germany) according to the manufacturer’s protocol. The RT PCR assay was conducted using the Titan One Tube RT-PCR kit (Roche, Germany). The cDNA was amplified by using primers E1-C and E1-S (Hasebe et al., 2002) which amplified a 354 bp region of the non-structural protein 1 (nsP1) and 294 bp region of the glycoprotein E1 gene of CHIKV respectively. Amplified products were analysed in 2% agarose gels. Samples positive by RT-PCR were inoculated into C6/36 cell line and observed daily for cytopathic effects (CPE) For cell culture samples that showed CPE, RT-PCR was once again conducted on the cell
culture supernatant using E1-C and E1-S primers. The positive DNA samples were then extracted from the gel using the QIAquick® Gel Extraction kit from Qiagen (Germany). The partial E1 genes were sequenced on both strands by using PCR primers (Apandi et al., 2010). Phylogenetic trees were constructed by using the neighbor-joining method from the software MEGA4. The O’nyong-nyong virus was used as the outgroup for phylogenetic analysis together with chikungunya E1 genes obtained for the purpose of generating dendograms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 5,668 mosquitoes comprising 1,525 adult mosquitoes and 4,143 larvae were collected during the study period. Table 1 described the mosquito’s species collected by localities. However, from this collection, only five pools (n=78) which contained only adult female *Ae. albopictus* from Kg Sawah and Kg Teratai, Tangkak, Johor were positive for CHIKV as detected by RT-PCR, whereas all other mosquito species either from the adults (males and females) or from larvae were found to be negative for this virus. From these positive samples, only three isolates were obtained and a phylogenetic tree of these isolates for partial E1 gene and showed that the isolates were related to the Central/East/South African genotype (Figure: I).

A total of 343 containers containing water were inspected during the investigations and 112 containers were found to be positive with *Aedes* larvae. Among all the domestic containers inspected during the study, plastic containers (39.29%) were identified as the key breeding containers infested by *Ae. albopictus* and *Ae. aegypti*, followed by latex collection cups (13.39%), tires and aluminum cans/tins (both 10.71%), plastic covers and rubber boots (both 4.46%), porcelains (3.57%), cement/concrete pools and polystyrenes (both 2.67%), and others (8.07%).
Other researchers also reported the detection of CHIKV from field caught *Ae. albopictus* in Madagascar during the 2006 outbreak (Ratsitorahina et al., 2008), also during the 2007 CHIKV outbreak in Italy (Bonilauri et al., 2008) and both *Ae. aegypti* and *Ae. albopictus* in Thailand (Thavara et al., 2009). All the other species of adult and immature mosquitoes collected during this survey were not positive for CHIKV, even though previous studies have suggested the possibility of vertical transmission of CHIKV in the field (Bonilauri et al., 2008; Thavara et al., 2009). In the recent years, CHIKV has been spreading rapidly therefore with *Ae. albopictus* as the main vector, more outbreaks are likely to occur since this “Asian tiger” mosquito is widely distributed in Malaysia. There is currently no effective antiviral treatment or vaccine for chikungunya fever (Pialoux et al., 2007). The only preventive measures depend on suppressing the vector.

**CONCLUSION**

Findings of this study indicated that *Ae albopictus* is the most potential primary vector of CHIKV in Malaysia during 2008 outbreak and vector control efforts should target this species.
Table 1  Mosquitoes species collected and total no. of pools accordingly to species, stages, and sexes in all study localities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Total adult</th>
<th>Total pool</th>
<th>Total larvae</th>
<th>Total pool</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johor</td>
<td>Ae.albopictus</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1776</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cx. quinquefasciatus</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ae.aegypti</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Armigeres sp.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negeri Sembilan</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Melaka</td>
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<td>Perak</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>141</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Pahang</td>
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<td>156</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>585</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Armigeres sp.</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ae. aegypti</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Armigeres sp.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>583</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>4143</td>
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</table>
Figure 1  Phylogenetic tree of partial glycoprotein E1 sequences (257 bp) of CHIKV inferred using the Neighbour-Joining method from the software MEGA 4. The evolutionary distances were computed using the Maximum Composite Likelihood method. Genotypes Asian, Central/East African and West African are indicated by square brackets with O’nyong-nyong virus as the outgroup. Three representative isolates from this study are indicated as 6e-IMR-2008, 7e-IMR-2008 and 9e-IMR-2008 respectively. Representative strains of each genotype obtained from GenBank are labeled using the following format: ‘Accession number-‘isolate’-‘Country of origin’-Year isolation’.
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