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EUROPEAN UNION REFERENCE LABORATORY FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA AND
NEWCASTLE DISEASE**



**SOP IMM 063
DETECTION OF ANTIBODIES TO TYPE A INFLUENZA VIRUS BY AGAR
GEL IMMUNODIFFUSION ASSAY (AGID)**

This protocol is a copy of the standard operating procedure used by the EURL for AI and ND at the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie. Released on 23/02/23.

The information in this document is subject to change without notice.

Revision history

Revision	Date	Description
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Contents

1. Purpose and field of application	4
2. References.....	4
3. Safety	4
4. Materials	4
4.1 Reagents.....	4
5. Procedure	4
5.1. Preparation of samples and storage.....	4
5.2. Preparation of reference reagents	5
5.3. Agar dishes preparation.....	5
5.4. AGID	5
6. Interpretation of results	6
6.1. Reliability of the test	6
6.2. Diagnostic samples	6
7. Characteristics of the method.....	6

1. Purpose and field of application

This protocol describes the procedure to detect antibodies induced by any influenza A virus in blood sera of birds. The presence of influenza A virus can be confirmed in AGID test by demonstrating the presence of the nucleocapsid or matrix virus proteins, both of which are common to all influenza A viruses.

As not all avian species may produce precipitating antibodies following infection with influenza viruses, this protocol is not recommended to test sera of Anseriformes, which have a low production of precipitating antibodies.

2. References

- Commission Decision 2006/437/EC approving a Diagnostic Manual for avian influenza as provided for in Council Directive 2005/94/EC;
- WOAHA - World Organization for Animal Health, Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals, Chapter 3.3.4. Avian influenza (including infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (Version adopted in May 2021);
- C.W. Beard. Demonstration of type specific antibody in mammalian and avian sera by immunodiffusion. Bull World Health Organ. 42(5): 779–785, 1970;
- IZSVe PDP IMM 063.

3. Safety

Individual laboratories are responsible for ensuring that all the procedures described in this document are conducted under high safety standards, including awareness on chemical and biological risks. According to the risk hazard, either BSL2 or BSL3 facilities must be used. Safety rules at individual laboratories must be agreed with the biosecurity and biosafety officer and acknowledged by all the staff members involved.

4. Materials

4.1 Reagents

- AI positive control serum (^);
- AI reference antigen specific for AGID (^);
- Distilled water;
- Noble Agar;
- Sodium Chloride (NaCl);

(^) To be used according to the manufacturer's instructions.

5. Procedure

5.1. Preparation of samples and storage

If samples are submitted as whole blood, centrifuge the blood at 2,500 rpm for 10 minutes to separate the serum. Carefully pipette or decant serum off red blood cells pellet into another labelled 50 ml centrifuge tube and refrigerate at 4°C.

5.2. Preparation of reference reagents

If AGID antigen and/or serum are freeze-dried, they must be reconstituted with appropriate amount of distilled water according to the manufacturer's instructions. If not completely used, the antigen can be stored between +2°C and +8°C up to seven days or at ≥ -70 °C if occasionally used. To avoid frequent freezing and thawing, control serum can be prepared, labeled and stored at -20°C in multiple aliquots. When more than one aliquot is used, pool before starting the test.

5.3. Agar dishes preparation

Tests are usually carried out using gel of Noble agar and NaCl dissolved in 100 ml of distilled water to a thickness of 2–3 mm in Petri dishes, which are incubated in a humidified chamber. The preparation of the agar dishes is carried out following the steps reported below:

- Dissolve 8 g of NaCl in 100 ml of distilled water in a volumetric flask;
- Add 1.25 g of Noble agar and shake gently;
- Immerse the flask in a boiling water bath until the agar is completely dissolved, or place it in a microwave until the agar is completely dissolved (about 5 minutes at approximately 800 Watt for 100 ml of agar);
- Gently shake the flask and verify that the agar is completely dissolved, otherwise repeat the previous step;
- Place the 90 mm Petri dishes on a perfectly horizontal surface and distribute to each 15 ml of the agar solution with a graduated pipette;
- Leave the dishes uncovered and allow the agar to cool at room temperature;
- Close the dishes and label each plate of the batch with the production date. Then, seal the dishes in an air-tight plastic bag and label with the expiry date;
- Store the agar dishes upside down (to prevent the development of condensation) at +4°C for no longer than 15 days.

5.4. AGID

- Bring the agar dish to room temperature and record the identification number of each test serum on the dishes
- Drill 5 mm-diameter holes on the agar layer using a template cutter. Remove the agar plugs with a steel tip or a Pasteur pipette connected to a vacuum pump;
- Distribute 25 μ l of AI reference AGID antigen (Ag) in the central well, 25 μ l of AI positive control serum (S+) into three peripheral wells and 25 μ l of each test serum (Se) to the remaining wells, following the layout shown in Figure 1. This arrangement ensures that each serum is adjacent to the reference antigen and on two sides also to the positive serum;
- Incubate the dishes in a humid chamber at room temperature for 48 hours.

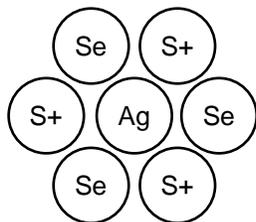


Figure 1. AGID well pattern. Ag = Antigen; Se = Test serum; S+ = Positive control serum.

6. Interpretation of results

Wells should be examined for precipitin lines by reading the plate 48 h post-incubation. The precipitin lines are best observed against a black background that is illuminated from behind.

6.1. Reliability of the test

For a test to be considered valid, a continuous precipitin line must be clearly identifiable at midpoint between the positive serum and the reference antigen well. The meeting between the positive serum and the reference antigen usually takes place halfway. The lower the antibody concentration, the closer the continuous precipitin line is to the test serum well. If the expected result is not observed, the test is considered not valid and must be repeated.

6.2. Diagnostic samples

Interpret reference lines at the sample wells according to the following table:

Output	Result
The precipitin line between the test serum and the reference antigen well is continuous with the line between the reference antigen and the positive serum well	Positive
(i) No precipitin line between the reference antigen and the test serum; (ii) crossed lines between the test serum and the positive serum well	Negative

The AGID is a serological screening test for detection of generic influenza A infections in serum of birds and it must be followed by HI tests for subtyping influenza A positives as to H5 and H7, as recommended by the WOAHP guidelines.

7. Characteristics of the method

This standard operating procedure is a validated and accredited procedure according to the ISO/IEC 17025.