MADA Data Analysis Project Proposal

Effect modification of the relationship between immune response and pre-existing immunity by vaccine dose for the seasonal influenza vaccine

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## 0.1 Background

While influenza has been well-known for over 100 years and has caused 4 pandemics within that time span, the full scope of the human immune response to influenza viruses remains not fully understood. The difficulty in developing antiviral drugs and vaccines for influenza viruses is partially due to the fast rate of antigenic drift which influenza viruses display. Two major proteins for predicting pathogenicity and immunogenicity of influenza virus are the capsule surface proteins hemagglutinin (HA), which facilitates the viral entry process, and neuraminidase (NA), which facilitates the viral exit process. The genetic sequence encoding the unique properties of variants of these proteins are what give rise to the naming system of influenza A subtypes, e.g. H1N1. Hemagglutinin inhibition (HAI) titer, measured as the lowest of a series of two-fold dilutions at which hemagglutination is observed for a serum sample, is generally accepted by the influenza research community as a correlate of protection from influenza (that is, HAI titer is correlated with the strength of immune response to influenza).

Recent mechanistic modeling of the influenza immune response at the host level (Zarnitsyna, Lavine, Ellebedy, Ahmed, & Antia, 2016) predicts that fold change in antibody levels after vaccination with a seasonal influenza vaccine will exhibit a negative linear relationship with preexisting antibody levels on a log-log scale, with an additional “threshold” or so-called “antigen ceiling” effect–if the host has a high-enough level of preexisting immunity, there will be no response to the influenza vaccine. This “threshold” can be overcome by increasing the dose of the vaccine.

## 0.2 Data source

The data we will use for this project is from an ongoing cohort study of immune response to the seasonal influenza vaccine conducted by Ted Ross at the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia. The study design is a prospective, open cohort where a few hundred participants receive either the FluZone, FluZone HD, or FluMist seasonal influenza vaccine each year since 2014. Patients receive a pre-vaccination and a 28-day vaccination blood draw. Hemagglutination inhibition titers are conducted on serum samples for both the homologous strains of influenza included in the vaccine, as well as a wide panel of historical strains. Influenza A strains which are included are from both H1N1 and H3N2 subtypes, and influenza B strains tested against include pre-divergence historical strains, as well as strains from both the Victoria-like and Yamagata-like lineages. Several other host factors including age, sex, BMI, history of vaccine and comorbidities were also collected. The study design and assay collection methods have been described previously, see (Ross et al., 2014).

The data is provided to the Handel research group through UGA’s CIVR-HRP site, a division of the NIH CIVICs program, and will be accessible by both of us. The data has been partially cleaned already, but is continually in a process of wrangling and refinement, and addressing our specific question will likely involve further cleaning and reshaping of the data. All data are available in a private GitHub repository, but we hope to obtain permission from the Ross group to post a subset of the data publicly as part of the project and the paper which we hope will result from the project. We will ensure that the data is completely anonymized before release and will ensure that all project participants have sufficient training (if necessary) to access the data.

## 0.3 Questions/Hypotheses

To that end, we propose the following reach question. Does vaccine dose modify the effect of pre-existing immunity on immune response to the seasonal influenza vaccine? We hypothesize that dose does modify this relationship, but there are likely interactions with other host covariates, such as age or influenza subtype imprinting probability (Arevalo, McLean, Belongia, & Cobey, 2020), so this relationship is likely not as simple as it appears in the mechanistic models.

## 0.4 Proposed analysis

Several techniques could be used to analyze this relationship, such as: CART models if a tree-based approach is desirable; Unsupervised clustering or trajectory clustering across longitudinal data to identify latent groupings of covariates which could potentially interact to determine outcomes; and Advanced machine learning algorithms such as support vector machines or neural networks to predict an individual’s vaccine response. However, we hypothesize that this relationship is causal, so prediction algorithms may not be the best fit here. While advanced causal analyses are potentially outside the scope of this analysis, we propose to use generalized linear mixed-effects models (GLMMs), potentially in a Bayesian framework, in order to gain insight about effects on influenza vaccine response.

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# 1 References

Arevalo, P., McLean, H. Q., Belongia, E. A., & Cobey, S. (2020). Earliest infections predict the age distribution of seasonal influenza A cases. *eLife*, *9*. <https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.50060>

Ross, T. M., Lin, C. J., Nowalk, M. P., Huang, H.-H., Spencer, S. M., Shay, D. K., … Zimmerman, R. K. (2014). Influence of pre-existing hemagglutination inhibition titers against historical influenza strains on antibody response to inactivated trivalent influenza vaccine in adults 50-80 years of age. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, *10*(5), 1195–1203. <https://doi.org/10.4161/hv.28313>

Zarnitsyna, V. I., Lavine, J., Ellebedy, A., Ahmed, R., & Antia, R. (2016). Multi-epitope Models Explain How Pre-existing Antibodies Affect the Generation of Broadly Protective Responses to Influenza. *PLoS Pathogens*, *12*(6), e1005692. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.ppat.1005692>