

MeetEU Project - Team Heidelberg - Team 1 –  
Identification and Enhancement of novel Sars-CoV-2 NSP13 helicase  
inhibitors

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## 1 Abstract

Even though the development of vaccines against Sars-CoV-2 was successful during the recent pandemic, the amount of FDA approved drugs for the therapy of Covid-19 is still limited to Paxlovid and Veklury, Olumiant and Actemra [FDA, 2023]. One possibility to accelerate the development of new therapies for Covid19 is to screen already approved drugs for effects against the viral reproduction. In this years MeetEU project, we investigated the NSP13 helicase of Sars-CoV-2 and tried to find compounds that could be repurposed for this therapy, as well as novel compounds that could lead to an effective treatment of Covid19. Using our *in-silico* pipeline enables us to evaluate possible drug candidates, suggest novel structures based on already approved drugs and investigate their toxicity, while being cheaper and less labor intensive than projects limited to wet-lab work. HIER KOMMT EINE ABBILDUNG HIN

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Identification of consensus binding pocket

In drug discovery, the initial step is to investigate the protein structure in order to analyse potential binding sites. These are cavities on the surface or interior of the protein with suitable properties to bind a ligand. The functionality of a binding pocket is determined by its shape and location, but also by the amino acid residues which define its physicochemical characteristics (Stank, 2016).

### 2.2 Lead Drug Enhancement

In order to enhance the binding affinity of our drug candidates and thus their performance, we used AutoGrow4 (Version 4.0.3) [Spiegel and Durrant, 2020] to generate novel compounds. Starting with the best binding compounds of our initial docking simulation with AutoDock Vina as generation zero, multiple new structures are generated by combining sub-structures of the first generation or by passing them through a set of possible chemical reactions after converting them into their respective SMILES codes. All of the generated compounds are ranked by their binding affinity. After passing several filters the best performing compounds are used as the seed for the next generation. Using this algorithm, compounds are found, which show higher binding affinities than the first generation. As AutoGrow4 labels all new structures by the path by which they were obtained, we can also evaluate the synthesizability.

### 2.3 Molecular Dynamics Simulation

As the last step of our pipeline, a MD simulation is conducted using the best scoring compounds as a ligand in the binding pocket of the NSP13 protein. Using GROMACS (Version 2023.3) [Abraham et al., 2015], this enables us to interpret the stability of the protein-ligand interaction, as well as to identify important residues for the interaction. Using a given force-field, a set of equations describing different forces between the atoms and residues in the protein and ligand, the movement of all atoms in the system can be simulated and analysed. However, this is only possible in a very limited timeframe with a small time step size. As this process is rather resource heavy, it has to be conducted on a cluster with access to a GPU.

**3 Material and Methods**

**4 Results**

**5 Discussion and Outlook**

**6 Supplementary Material**

## References

- [Abraham et al., 2015] Abraham, M. J., Murtola, T., Schulz, R., Páll, S., Smith, J. C., Hess, B., and Lindahl, E. (2015). GROMACS: High performance molecular simulations through multi-level parallelism from laptops to supercomputers. *SoftwareX*, 1:19–25.
- [FDA, 2023] FDA (2023). Know your treatment options for covid-19.
- [Spiegel and Durrant, 2020] Spiegel, J. O. and Durrant, J. D. (2020). AutoGrow4: an open-source genetic algorithm for de novo drug design and lead optimization. *Journal of Cheminformatics*, 12(1):25.