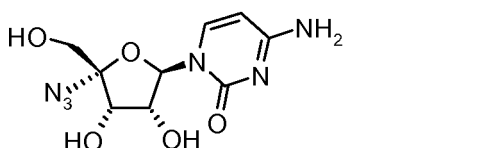


PROCESS FOR PREPARATION OF 4'-AZIDO CYTIDINE DERIVATIVES

The invention relates to a novel process for the preparation of a 4'-azido cytidine of the formula



of a hydrate or of a pharmaceutically accepted salt thereof. The 4'-azido cytidine of
5 formula I is useful for treating virus mediated diseases, particularly for treating HCV mediated diseases.

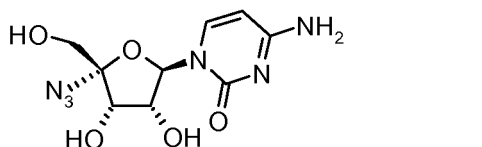
The 4'-azido cytidine of formula I and a couple of synthetic pathways for its preparation have been described in the PCT Publication WO 2004/046159 A1 and WO 2005/000864 A1.

10 For the transformation of the 4'-azido-triacyl uridine into the desired 4'-azido-cytidine it was suggested to run the reaction in the presence of triazole, phosphorous oxychloride and triethylamine. However it was found that the use of triazole is not favourable on a technical scale process due to its low biodegradability.

Object of the present invention therefore was to provide a process which can be
15 performed on a technical scale and which is not suffering from the disadvantages as outlined above.

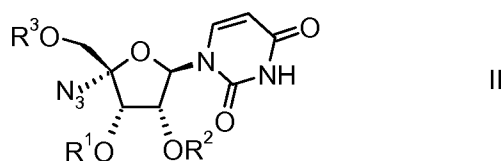
It was found that with the process of the present invention the disadvantages could be overcome.

The process of the present invention comprises the preparation of a 4'-azido-
20 cytidine of the formula



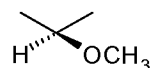
of a hydrate or of a pharmaceutically accepted salt thereof, which is characterized in that

a) a protected 4'-azido-triacyl nucleoside of the formula



wherein

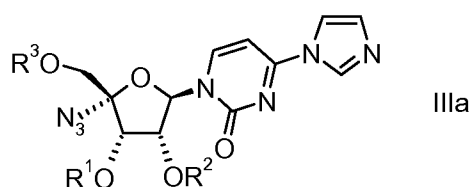
- 5 R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ or R^1 and R^2 together form a CH_2 -, $C(CH_3)_2$ -, CH -phenyl-, or a



bridge;

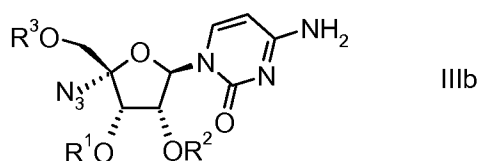
R^3 is selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ and

- 10 R^4 is independently C_{1-12} -alkyl, phenyl optionally substituted with 1 to 3 substituents selected from the group consisting of C_{1-6} -alkyl, C_{1-6} -alkoxy, halogen, nitro or cyano is reacted with imidazole, phosphorous oxychloride and triethylamine to form the imidazole compound of formula



- 15 wherein R^1 , R^2 and R^3 are as above;

b) the imidazole compound of formula IIIa is subjected to ammonolysis with aqueous ammonia to form the amine of formula



wherein R^1 , R^2 and R^3 are as above, and

- 20 c) the amine of formula IIIb is finally transformed into the 4'-azido-cytidine of formula I.

The term "C₁₋₁₂- alkyl" as used herein denotes an unbranched or branched chain hydrocarbon residue containing 1 to 12 carbon atoms. Representative C₁₋₁₂- alkyl groups include methyl, ethyl, propyl, *i*-propyl, *n*-butyl, *i*-butyl, *t*-butyl, pentyl or hexyl, heptyl, 5 octyl, nonyl, decyl, undecyl or dodecyl.

The term "C₁₋₆- alkoxy" as used herein denotes an unbranched or branched chain C₁₋₆- alkyl oxy residue containing 1 to 6 carbon atoms. Representative C₁₋₆- alkoxy groups include methoxy, ethoxy, propyloxy, *i*-propyloxy, *n*-butyloxy, *i*-butyloxy, *t*-butyloxy, pentyloxy or hexyloxy.

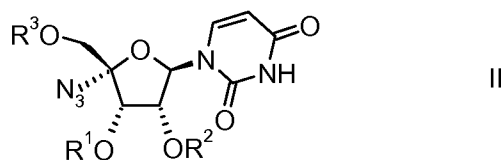
10 The term "halogen" refers to fluoro, chloro, bromo and iodo, preferably to chloro.

The term "hydrate" as used herein means that the 4'-azido-cytidine of formula I includes a stoichiometric or non-stoichiometric amount of water bound by non-covalent intermolecular forces.

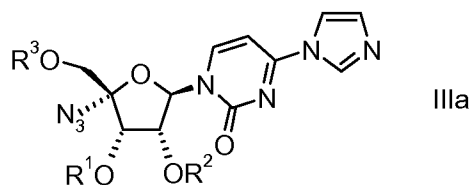
The term pharmaceutically acceptable salts refers to salts of the 4'-azido-cytidine of 15 formula I with inorganic acids such as hydrohalic acids (e.g. hydrochloric acid and hydrobromic acid), sulphuric acid, nitric acid and phosphoric acid, and the like, and with organic acids (e.g. with acetic acid, tartaric acid, succinic acid, fumaric acid, maleic acid, malic acid, salicylic acid, citric acid, methanesulphonic acid and *p*-toluene sulphonic acid, and the like). The formation and isolation of such salts can be carried out according to 20 methods known in the art.

Step a)

Step a comprises the transformation of a protected 4'-azido-uridine derivative of the formula



25 wherein R¹, R² and R³ are as above with imidazole, phosphorous oxychloride and triethylamine into the imidazole compound of formula



wherein R^1 , R^2 and R^3 are as above.

Usually the process is performed in the presence of an organic solvent, preferably in methylene chloride, THF or 2-methyltetrahydrofuran at a reaction temperature of 0°C to 80°C, preferably of 20°C to 65°C.

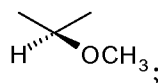
The imidazole as a rule is used in an excess which is from 4.0 equivalents to 10.0 equivalents, preferably from 5.0 equivalents to 8.0 equivalents related to one equivalent of the 4'-azido-triacyl nucleoside of formula II.

The phosphorous oxychloride as a rule is used in an excess which is from 1.0 equivalent to 2.0 equivalents, preferably from 1.4 equivalents to 1.7 equivalents related to one equivalent of the 4'-azido-triacyl nucleoside of formula II.

The 4'-azido-triacyl nucleosides of formula II can be synthesized e.g. following the procedure disclosed in examples 1 to 5 of the PCT Publication WO 2005/000864 A1.

The imidazole compound of formula IIIa is a novel compound and therefore is a further embodiment of the present invention.

Particularly preferred is the imidazole compound of formula IIIa wherein R^1 and R^2 are benzoyl or R^1 and R^2 together form



and R^3 is 3-chlorobenzoyl.

The imidazole compound of formula IIIa can be isolated from the reaction mixture following procedures known to the skilled in the art for instance by recovering it from the organic phase e.g. by evaporation.

As a rule the imidazole compound of formula IIIa is directly, without isolating it from the organic phase, subjected to the ammonolysis in step b).

Step b)

Step b) comprises ammonolysis of the imidazole compound of formula IIIa with aqueous ammonia to form the amine of formula IIIb.

The ammonolysis is commonly performed in an organic solvent such as methylene chloride, tetrahydrofuran or 2-methyltetrahydrofuran, preferably tetrahydrofuran or 2-methyltetrahydrofuran at a temperature of 20°C to 60 °C, preferably of 25°C to 45°C.

Suitable aqueous ammonia solutions have an ammonia content of 20% to 30%, as a rule of about 25%.

The duration of the ammonolysis largely depends on the amount of ammonia and the reaction temperature.

The amine of formula IIIb can be isolated following methods known to the skilled in the art, but is as a rule directly used in step c).

Step c)

Step c) comprises the transformation of the amine of formula IIIb into the 4'-azido-cytidine of formula I.

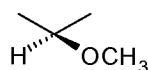
In case R^1 , R^2 and R^3 are independently selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ the transformation in step c) is a methanolysis performed in aqueous ammonia and methanol at a temperature of 20°C to 60°C.

The change to methanol can happen by distilling off the solvent used in step b) from the reaction mixture and by replacing it by methanol.

Methanolysis then can be effected by the addition of a solution of aqueous ammonia and by performing the reaction at a temperature of 20°C to 60 °C, preferably of 25°C to 45°C.

As to suitable aqueous ammonia solutions reference is made to the description of step b) above.

In case R^1 and R^2 taken together form a CH_2 -, $C(CH_3)_2$ -, CH -phenyl- or a



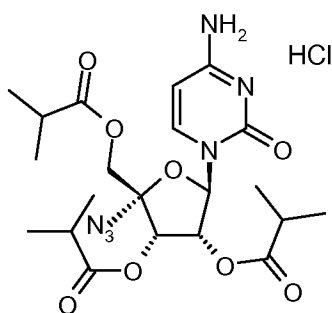
acetal bridge and R^3 is independently selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ wherein R^4 is as defined above, the transformation in step c) comprises a methanolysis performed in aqueous ammonia and methanol at a temperature of 20°C to 60°C for the cleaving off of the acyl group R^3 and an acidic treatment for cleaving the acetal formed by R^1 and R^2 .

The methanolysis can be performed as described above.

For the acidic treatment a mineral acid like hydrochloric acid or sulfuric acid or a short chain carboxylic acid such as formic acid or acetic acid may be used. The cyclic acetal formed by R¹ and R² is preferably cleaved with formic acid at room temperature.

- 5 The isolation of the desired 4'-azido cytidine of formula I can take place applying methods known to the skilled in the art for instance by exchanging the solvent from methanol to e.g. acetone / ethylacetate and by filtering off the precipitated product.

In a further embodiment of the invention the process of the present invention as described above can be used for the preparation of the tri-isobutyryloxy compound of
10 formula



IV

- This can be achieved by transforming the 4'-azido-cytidine of formula I with isobutyryl chloride in the presence of 4-(dimethylamino)-pyridine and triethylamine in a mixture of water and an organic solvent. Suitable organic solvent is tetrahydrofuran. The reaction
15 temperature is usually selected in the range of -5°C to 30°C. Isolation of the tri-isobutyryloxy compound of formula IV can happen by an aqueous work-up, followed by a solvent exchange to isopropanol/heptane and acidifying with hydrochloric acid.

The following examples shall illustrate the process of the present invention without limiting it.

Examples

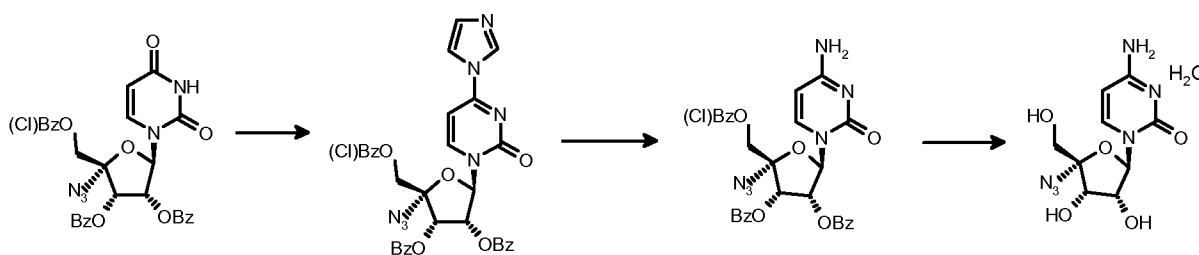
Abbreviations:

Bz=Benzoyl; (Cl)Bz=m-chlorobenzoyl; MeTHF=2-Methyltetrahydrofuran; DMAP= 4-(dimethylamino)-pyridine; THF=Tetrahydrofuran

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Example 1

Preparation of 4-amino-1-((2R, 3R, 4S, 5R)-5-azido-3,4-dihydroxy-5-hydroxymethyl-tetrahydro-furan-2-yl)-1H-pyrimidin-2-one.



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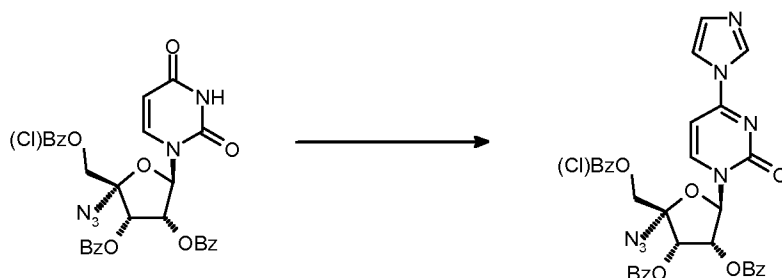
A suspension of 100 g (0.158 mol) 3-chlorobenzoic acid (2R,3S,4R,5R)-2-azido-3,4-bis-benzoyloxy-5-(2,4-dioxo-3,4-dihydro-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester and 86.6 g (1.266 mol) imidazole in 500 ml MeTHF was treated at room temperature with 64 g (0.632 mol) triethylamine. The resulting mixture was treated at 20 to 45°C within 30 to 120 minutes with 36.8 g (0.238 mol) phosphorous oxychloride. After the addition the mixture was heated to 55 to 65°C and stirred at this temperature for 5 to 6 hours. The mixture was then cooled to 15 to 25°C and treated at this temperature with 300 ml water. The layers were separated and the aqueous layer was extracted with MeTHF (1×50 ml). The combined organic layer was treated at 20 to 30°C within 10 to 20 minutes with 54 g ammonia (25% solution in water). The mixture was heated to 40°C and stirred at this temperature for 7 to 9 hours. After complete conversion the lower aqueous layer was separated and from the organic layer MeTHF was distilled off and replaced by methanol. The methanolic solution (approximately 400 ml) was then treated at 30 to 40°C with 108 g ammonia (25% solution in water) and the resulting mixture was stirred for 5 hours at 35 to 40°C. Methanol was then distilled off and continuously replaced by 400 ml acetone, whereby the product precipitated. To complete precipitation 500 ml ethyl acetate was added at room temperature. The resulting suspension was cooled to 0 to 5°C within 2 to 4 hours and stirred at this temperature for additional 2 hours. The crystals were filtered, washed in two portions with a pre-cooled mixture of 124 ml ethyl acetate and 62 ml acetone and dried at 45°C / <30 mbar for 5 hours to afford 43.3 g (90.5%) of 4-

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amino-1((2R, 3S, 4S, 5R)-5-azido-3,4,-hydroxy-5-hydroxymethyl-tetrahydro-furan-2-yl)-1H-pyrimidin-2-one as the monohydrate with an assay of 99.4 %(m/m).

Example 2

5 Preparation of 3-chlorobenzoic acid (2R, 3S, 4R, 5R)-2-azido-3,4-bis-benzoyloxy-5-(4-imidazol-1-yl-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester



A suspension of 30.0 g (47.5 mmol) 3-chlorobenzoic acid (2R,3S,4R,5R) -2-azido-3,4-bis-benzoyloxy-5-(2,4-dioxo-3,4-dihydro-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester and 26.0 g (380 mmol) imidazole in 110 ml MeTHF was treated at room temperature with 19.2 g (189 mmol) triethylamine. The resulting mixture was treated at 10 to 20°C within 30 minutes with 11.03 g (71.2 mmol) phosphorous oxychloride. The mixture was heated to 60°C and stirred at this temperature for 5 hours. The mixture was then cooled to 15°C and treated at this temperature with 125 ml water. The layers were separated and the aqueous layer was extracted with MeTHF (1×30 ml). From the organic layer MeTHF was completely removed by distillation and replaced by 250 ml acetonitrile. Water (50 ml) and methylene chloride (100 ml) were added and the layers were separated. The aqueous layer was extracted with methylene chloride (1×100 ml). The organic layer was filtered, the solvent was evaporated and the residue (34.2 g) dried at 40°C / <30 mbar for 16 hours to afford 29.7 g (90.8%) of 3-chlorobenzoic acid (2R,3S,4R,5R)-2-azido-3,4-bis-benzoyloxy-5-(4-imidazol-1-yl-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester with an assay of 99.3 %(area).

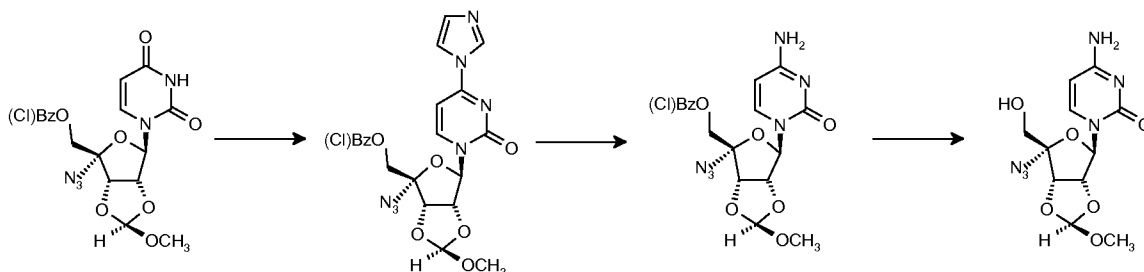
¹H NMR (CDCl₃) δ 4.87 (s, 2 H); 6.04-6.07 (m, 2H); 6.33 (dd, 1H); 6.51 (d, 1H); 7.20-7.41 (m, 6H); 7.49-7.60 (m, 3H); 7.69 (s, 1H); 7.89-8.06 (m, 7H); 8.37 (s, 1H).

IR: 2923, 2854, 2120 (-N₃), 1730, 1678, 1633, 1545, 1469, 1247, 1127, 929, 709, 476 cm⁻¹.

MS: 682 (M⁺+1).

Example 3

Preparation of 4-amino-1-((3aR 4R, 6aS, 6R)-6-azido-6-hydroxymethyl-2-methoxy-tetrahydrofuro [3,4-d]1,3-dioxol-4-yl)-1H-pyrimidin-2-one.



5

To a suspension of 0.69 g (10.11 mmol) imidazole and 1.07 g (10.5 mmol) triethylamine in 9 ml methylene chloride was added dropwise at -5 to 0°C within 15 minutes 0.49 g (3.22 mmol) phosphorous oxychloride. After 15 minutes at -5°C, the resulting suspension was treated with 1.00 g (2.15 mmol) 3-chloro-benzoic acid 4-azido-6-(2,4-dioxo-3,4-dihydro-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-2-methyl-tetrahydro-furo[3,4-d]-1,3-dioxol-4-ylmethyl ester followed by 1 ml methylene chloride. The suspension was allowed to warm to room temperature within 15 minutes and then stirred at room temperature for 69 hours. The suspension was cooled to 0°C and treated at this temperature with 10 ml water. The suspension was allowed to warm to room temperature and the layers were separated. The aqueous layer was extracted with methylene chloride (2×5 ml). The combined organic layer was dried over MgSO₄, filtered, concentrated in vacuo, and dried at 25°C / <10 mbar for 22 hours to afford 1.07 g (96%) of 3-chlorobenzoic acid 4-azido-6-(4-imidazol-1-yl-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-2-methyl-tetrahydro-furo[3,4-d]-1,3-dioxol-4-ylmethyl ester as a beige foam.

¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 3.36 (s, 3H); 4.71 (d, J=12.5 Hz, 1H); 4.77 (d, J=11.5 Hz, 1H); 5.04 (d, J=5.5 Hz, 1H); 5.44 (dd, J=5.5 Hz, J=1.5 Hz, 1H); 6.03 (m, 2H); 6.55 (d, J=7.0 Hz, 1H); 7.21 (dd, J=1.5 Hz, J=0.5 Hz, 1H); 7.42 (dd, J=7.5 Hz, J=7.5 Hz, 1H); 7.58 (m, 1H), 7.70 (dd, J=2.0 Hz, J=2.0 Hz, 1H), 7.96 (m, 1H), 8.02 (d, J=8.0 Hz, 1H); 8.04 (dd, J=2.0 Hz, J=2.0 Hz, 1H); 8.40 (dd, J=1.0 Hz, J=1.0 Hz, 1H).

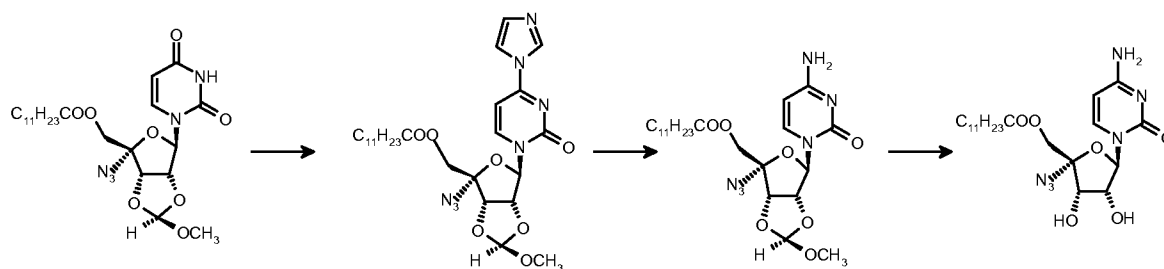
1.055 g (2.05 mmol) of this foam was dissolved in 10 ml THF and treated with 0.90 g ammonia (28% solution in water). The resulting solution was stirred at 25°C for 24 hours. The solution was then concentrated on a rotary evaporator at 25°C and 70 to 30 mmHg. Methanol (10 ml) was added followed by 0.90 g ammonia (28% solution in water) and the resulting solution was stirred at 25°C for 22 hours. The solution was concentrated on a rotary evaporator and the residue purified by radial chromatography on silica gel using first ethyl acetate followed by ethyl acetate/methanol 5:1 as eluent to

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afford 0.68 g (102%) of 4-amino-1-((2S, 4R, 3aS, 6aS, 6R)-6-azido-6-hydroxymethyl-2-methyl-tetrahydrofuro[3,4-d]-1,3-dioxol-4-yl)-1H-pyrimidin-2-one as a beige solid.

Example 4

Preparation of Dodecanoic acid (2R, 3S, 4R, 5R)-5-(4-amino-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-2-azido-3,4-dihydroxy-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester



- A solution of 1.35 g (8.83 mmol) phosphorus oxychloride in 5 ml methylene chloride was added dropwise at 0 to -5°C within 15 minutes to a suspension of 1.89 g (27.7 mmol) imidazole and 2.92 g (28.9 mmol) triethylamine in 20 ml methylene chloride and the resulting suspension was stirred at -5°C for 15 minutes. A solution of the azidoester (3.00 g, 5.89 mmol) in 12 ml methylene chloride was added and the resulting suspension was allowed to warm from 0 to 25°C within 10 minutes and then stirred at 25°C for 69 hours. The suspension was cooled to 0°C and 30 ml of water was added dropwise at 0 to 5°C . The suspension was allowed to warm to 20°C and the layers were separated. The aqueous layer was extracted with methylene chloride (2x5 ml). The combined organic layers were dried (MgSO_4), filtered, concentrated *in vacuo*, and dried at 25°C / <10 mbar for 5 hours to afford 3.13 g (95.0%) of the imidazol derivative as a beige foam. This foam was dissolved in 30 ml dry THF and the resulting solution was treated with 2.49 g (19.9 mmol) ammonia (28% solution in water). After 23 hours at 25°C the solution was concentrated *in vacuo*, and dried at 25°C / <10 mbar for 10 hours to afford 3.30 g of a pale yellow solid. This solid was recrystallized from hot methanol (50°C) to afford 1.27 g of the methoxymethylene protected cytidine derivative as a colorless solid.
- 1.20 g (2.36 mmol) of this solid was treated with 4.8 ml formic acid (96%) and the resulting suspension was stirred at 25°C for 4 hours. Water (4.8 ml) was then added followed by 10.5 ml ammonia (28% solution in water) to adjust the pH to pH 9. After one hour at 25°C the precipitate was filtered, washed with 10 ml water, and dried at 25°C / <10 mbar for 16 hours to afford 1.10 g (40%) of dodecanoic acid (2R, 3R, 4S, 5R)-5-(4-amino-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-2-azido-3,4-dihydroxy-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester as a colorless solid.

An analytical sample was obtained by recrystallization from hot methanol.

¹H NMR (500 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 0.85 (t, J=7.0 Hz, 3H); 1.18-1.30 (m, 16H); 1.53 (m, 2H); 2.33 (t, J=7.5 Hz, 2H); 3.78 (t, J=5.0 Hz, 1H); 4.29 (d, J=12.0 Hz, 1H); 4.41 (d, J=12.0 Hz, 1H); 4.53-4.57 (m, 1H); 5.60 (br, 1H); 5.83 (d, J=8.0 Hz, 1H); 5.98 (br, 1H);
 5 6.17 (d, J=8.0 Hz, 1H), 7.33 (br, 2H), 7.65 (d, J=7.0 Hz, 1H)

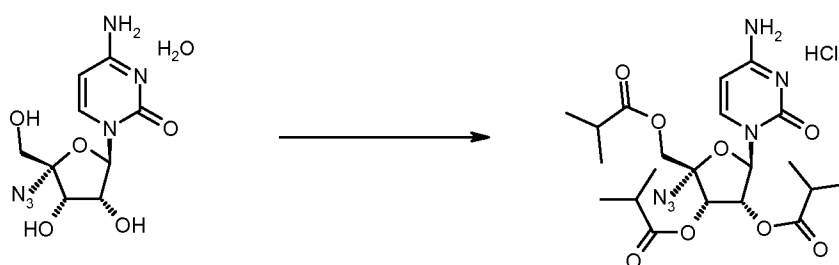
¹³C NMR (125 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 173.0, 166.2, 156.2, 142.0, 97.9, 96.3, 89.6, 74.7, 72.1, 65.1, 34.0, 32.0, 29.7, 29.5, 29.4, 29.3, 29.0, 25.0, 22.8, 14.7.

IR (KBr): 3538, 3400, 3288, 2924, 2850, 2116, 1759, 1672, 1641, 1593, 1523 cm⁻¹.

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Example 5

Preparation of Isobutyric acid (2R, 3S, 4R, 5R)-5-(4-amino-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-2-azido-3,4-bis-isobutyryloxy-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester Hydrochloride



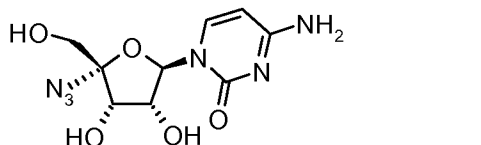
15 A suspension of 21.6 g (0.070 mol) 4-amino-1-((2R, 3S, 4S, 5R)-5-azido-3,4-dihydroxy-5-hydroxymethyl-tetrahydro-furan-2-yl)-1H-pyrimidin-2-one and 88 mg (0.72 mmol) DMAP in 102 ml THF and 40 ml water was treated at -5 to 0°C with 35.8 g (0.354 mol) triethylamine. The mixture was then treated at -5 to 20°C within 1 to 2 hours with 29.5 g (0.271 mol) isobutyryl chloride and the resulting mixture was allowed to warm to
 20 room temperature and stirred at room temperature for one hour. After complete conversion 110 ml ethyl acetate followed by 30 ml water were added and the pH was adjusted to pH 6.5 to 7.0 by the addition of approximately 6.8 g hydrochloric acid (37% in water). The layers were allowed to separate, the lower aqueous layer was removed and the organic layer was washed with water (1×50 ml). From the organic layer ethyl acetate and THF were distilled off and completely replaced by isopropanol. The isopropanolic
 25 solution (approximately 90 ml) was then treated at 20 to 30°C within 5 to 10 minutes with 13.2 g (0.079 mol) of a solution of hydrochloric acid in isopropanol (21.7 %). Upon slow addition of 120 ml heptane crystallization of the product occurred. The resulting suspension was stirred at 40°C for 2 hours and then cooled to 0 to 5°C within 2 hours.

After one hour at 0 to 5°C the crystals were filtered, washed in two portions with a pre-cooled mixture of 62 ml heptane and 31 ml isopropanol and dried at 70°C / <30 mbar for 10 hours to afford 35.5 g (93.5%) of isobutyric acid (2R, 3S, 4R, 5R)-5-(4-amino-2-oxo-2H-pyrimidin-1-yl)-2-azido-3,4-bis-isobutyryloxy-tetrahydro-furan-2-ylmethyl ester

5 Hydrochloride with an assay of 99.5 %(m/m).

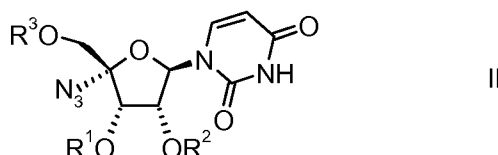
Claims

1. Process for the preparation of a 4'-azido-cytidine of formula



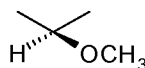
of a hydrate or of a pharmaceutically accepted salt thereof, characterized in that

5 a) a protected 4'-azido-triacyl nucleoside of the formula



wherein

R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ or R^1 and R^2 together form a CH_2 -, $C(CH_3)_2$ -, CH -phenyl- or a

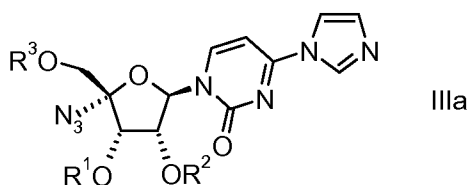


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bridge;

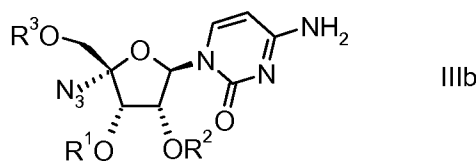
R^3 is selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ and

R^4 is independently C_{1-12} -alkyl, phenyl optionally substituted with 1 to 3 substituents selected from the group consisting of C_{1-6} -alkyl, C_{1-6} -alkoxy, halogen, nitro or cyano is
 15 reacted with imidazole, phosphorous oxychloride and triethylamine to form the imidazole compound of formula



wherein R^1 , R^2 and R^3 are as above and

b) the imidazole compound of formula IIIa is subjected to ammonolysis with aqueous
 20 ammonia to form the amine of formula



wherein R¹, R² and R³ are as above and

c) the amine of formula IIIb is finally transformed into the 4'-azido-cytidine of formula I.

2. Process of claim 1, characterized in that the formation of the imidazole compound of formula IIIa in step a) is performed in the presence of an organic solvent at 0°C to 80°C.

3. Process of claim 2, characterized in that methylene chloride, tetrahydrofuran or 2-methyltetrahydrofuran is used as organic solvent.

4. Process of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that the imidazole compound of formula IIIa is without isolation directly used for the ammonolysis in step b).

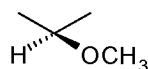
5. Process of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the ammonolysis in step b) is performed in an organic solvent at a temperature of 20°C to 60°C.

6. Process of claim 5, characterized in that tetrahydrofuran, 2-methyltetrahydrofuran or methylene chloride is used as organic solvent.

7. Process of claims 1 to 6 characterized in that the amine of formula IIIb is without isolation directly used for the transformation in step c).

8. Process of claims 1 to 7, characterized in that in case R¹, R² and R³ are independently selected from COR⁴ and C(=O)OR⁴ the transformation in step c) is a methanolysis performed in aqueous ammonia and methanol at a temperature of 20°C to 60°C.

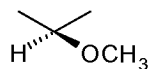
9. Process of claims 1 to 7, characterized in that in case R¹ and R² taken together form a CH₂-, C(CH₃)₂-, CH-phenyl- or



acetal bridge and R³ is independently selected from COR⁴ and C(=O)OR⁴ wherein R⁴ is as defined above, the transformation in step c) comprises a methanolysis performed in aqueous ammonia and methanol at a temperature of 20°C to 60°C for the cleaving off of the acyl group R³ and an acidic treatment for cleaving the acetal formed by R¹ and R².

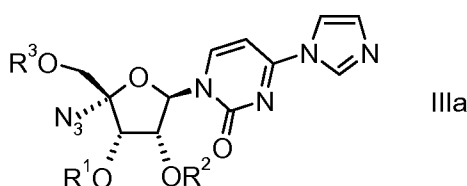
10. Process of claim 9, characterized in that the acidic treatment is performed with formic acid.

11. Process of claims 1 to 10, characterized in that R^1 and R^2 are benzoyl or R^1 and R^2 together is

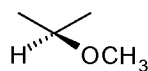


and R^3 is 3-chlorobenzoyl.

12. Imidazole compound of formula



wherein R^1 and R^2 are independently selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ or R^1 and R^2 taken together form a CH_2 -, $C(CH_3)_2$ -, CH -phenyl- or a

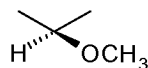


bridge;

R^3 is selected from COR^4 and $C(=O)OR^4$ and

R^4 is independently C_{1-12} -alkyl, phenyl optionally substituted with 1 to 3 substituents selected from the group consisting of C_{1-6} -alkyl, C_{1-6} -alkoxy, halogen, nitro or cyano.

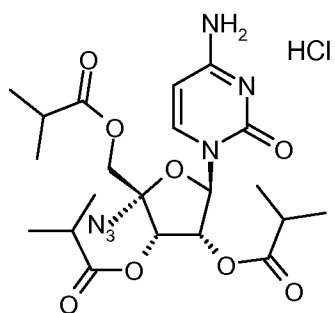
13. Imidazole compound of claim 12, wherein R^1 and R^2 are benzoyl or R^1 and R^2 together is



and R^3 is 3-chlorobenzoyl.

14. Use of the process of claims 1 to 11 for the preparation of

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IV

15. The process as hereinbefore described.