Tuberculosis is far from being controlled for different reasons: poor patient compliance with the prescribed standard-of-care in areas with limited resources, exacerbation of TB epidemics due to HIV coinfection, poor performance of BCG vaccination which is ineffective in protecting adults. In view of the increasing worldwide threat of TB and the inherent complexity of the *Mtb* infection and anti-mycobacterial immune response, there remains a need for improved vaccine strategies for diagnosing, preventing and treating tuberculosis, especially in endemic regions.

The present invention fulfils this and other needs by providing an immunogenic combination of *Mtb* antigens that is tailored for all phases of the natural course of infection.

This technical problem is solved by the provision of the embodiments as defined in the claims.

Other and further aspects, features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following description of the presently preferred embodiments of the invention. These embodiments are given for the purpose of disclosure.

BRIEF SUMMARY

The present disclosure relates generally to an immunogenic combination comprising at least 5 different antigens or nucleic acid molecules encoding the at least 5 antigens, wherein said antigens are independently obtained from a Mycobacterium species, wherein the at least 5 mycobacterial antigens are selected from the group consisting of from the group consisting of ESAT-6 (Rv3875), TB10.4 (Rv0288), Ag85B (Rv1886), RpfB, RpfD, Rv0111, Rv0569, Rv1733c, Rv1807, Rv1813, Rv2029c, Rv2626, Rv3407 and Rv3478, and particularly from a Mycobacterium species of the tuberculosis complex such as Mycobacterium tuberculosis (*Mtb*). A data mining scoring system was developed and used to classify a panel of *Mtb* antigens based on their immunogenicity and protection properties. Upon sequence alignment, biochemical and bioinformatics prediction studies, 14 *Mtb* antigens were selected and combined into antigen/vector combination and fusion polypeptides.

In one aspect, there is provided an immunogenic combination comprising at least 5 different antigens or nucleic acid molecules encoding the at least 5 antigens, wherein said antigens are independently obtained from a Mycobacterium species, wherein the at least 5 mycobacterial antigens are selected from the group consisting of from the group consisting of ESAT-6 (Rv3875), TB10.4 (Rv0288), Ag85B (Rv1886), RpfB, RpfD, Rv0111, Rv0569, Rv1733c, Rv1807, Rv1813, Rv2029c, Rv2626, Rv3407 and Rv3478, said immunogenic combination is multiphasic comprising or encoding at least one antigen from

the active infection phase, at least one antigen from the resuscitation infection phase and at least one antigen from the latent infection phase, and said immunogenic combination comprises or expresses at least RpfB and RpfD.

In one embodiment, the antigen combination of the disclosure is multiphasic where the at least 5 mycobacterial antigens are from two or the three phases of the natural course of a Mycobacterium infection, namely the active, latent and resuscitation phases. The mycobacterial antigens can be employed/expressed in the form of mixture or in one or more fusion polypeptide(s) as described herein.

The present disclosure also concerns fusion polypeptides of specific mycobacterial antigens, nucleic acid molecules and vectors encoding/expressing such fusion polypeptides and compositions comprising or encoding said fusion polypeptides as well as methods of

Claims

1. An immunogenic combination comprising at least 5 different antigens or nucleic acid molecules encoding the at least 5 antigens, wherein said antigens are independently obtained from a Mycobacterium species, wherein:

- the at least 5 mycobacterial antigens are selected from the group consisting of from the group consisting of ESAT-6 (Rv3875), TB10.4 (Rv0288), Ag85B (Rv1886), RpfB, RpfD, Rv0111, Rv0569, Rv1733c, Rv1807, Rv1813, Rv2029c, Rv2626, Rv3407 and Rv3478,

- said immunogenic combination is multiphasic comprising or encoding at least one antigen from the active infection phase, at least one antigen from the resuscitation infection phase and at least one antigen from the latent infection phase, and

said immunogenic combination comprises or expresses at least RpfB and RpfD.

2. The immunogenic combination according to claim 1, wherein the mycobacterial antigens are obtained from a Mycobacterium species of the tuberculosis complex selected from the group consisting of *M. tuberculosis* (*Mtb*), *M. bovis*, *M. bovis* BCG, *M. africanum*, *M. canetti*, *M. caprae*, and *M. microti*.

3. The immunogenic combination according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said antigen(s) of the active phase is/are selected from the group consisting of ESAT-6 (Rv3875), TB10.4 (Rv0288), Ag85B (Rv1886), and PPE family proteins Rv3478.

4. The immunogenic combination according to claim 3, wherein said immunogenic combination comprises or expresses at least ESAT-6 (Rv3875), Ag85B (Rv1886) and TB10.4 (Rv0288).

5. The immunogenic combination according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said antigen(s) of the latent phase is/are selected from the group consisting of Rv0111, Rv0569, Rv1733c, Rv1807, Rv1813, Rv2029c, Rv2626, and Rv3407.

6. The immunogenic combination according to claim 1, wherein the at least 5 mycobacterial antigens are selected from the group of polypeptides comprising an amino acid sequence at least 80% homologous or identical to any of SEQ ID NO: 1-10 and 12-24.

7. The immunogenic combination according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the immunogenic combination comprises additional mycobacterial antigen(s).

8. The immunogenic combination according to anyone of claims 1 to 7, wherein said immunogenic combination comprises or encodes the mycobacterial antigens in the form of separate polypeptides or in the form of one or more fusion polypeptides or both in the form of separate antigen(s) and fusion(s).

9. A nucleic acid molecule encoding said at least 5 mycobacterial antigens comprised in the immunogenic combination according to anyone of claims 1 to 8.

10. The nucleic acid molecule according to claim 9, which exhibits at least 80% identity, with the nucleotide sequence shown in any of SEQ ID NO: 40-51 or a fragment thereof.

11. A vector comprising one or more nucleic acid molecule(s) according to claim 9 or 10.

12. The vector of claim 11, wherein said vector is a plasmid or a viral vector selected from the group consisting of retrovirus, adenovirus, adenovirus-associated virus (AAV), poxvirus, herpes virus, measles virus, foamy virus, alphavirus, vesicular stomatis virus.

13. The vector of claim 12, wherein said vector is a E1-defective adenoviral vector.

14. The vector of claim 12, wherein said vector is a poxvirus vector selected from the group consisting of fowlpox, canarypox and vaccinia virus vector.

15. The vector of claim 14, wherein said vaccinia virus vector is Copenhagen, Wyeth, NYVAC and modified Ankara (MVA) strains.

16. The vector of claim 11, wherein said vector is a bacterium cell selected from the group consisting of *M. bovis* BCG, Lactobacillus, Listeria, Salmonella and Pseudomonas.

17. The vector according to anyone of claims 11 to 15 which is selected from the group consisting of:

i. A vector encoding a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv2029c, Rv2626, Rv1733c and Rv0111 and a fusion polypeptide comprising RpfB, RpfD, Ag85B, TB10.4 and ESAT-6;

ii. A vector encoding a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv2029c, Rv2626, Rv1733c and Rv0111, a fusion polypeptide comprising RpfB, RpfD, Ag85B, TB10.4 and ESAT-6 and a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv0569, Rv1813, Rv3407, Rv3478 and Rv1807;

iii. A vector encoding a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv2029c, Rv2626, Rv1733c and Rv0111, a fusion polypeptide comprising RpfB, RpfD, Ag85B, TB10.4 and ESAT-6 and a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv0569, Rv1813, Rv3407, Rv3478 and Rv1807;

iv. A vector encoding a fusion polypeptide comprising Ag85B, Rv2626 RpfB, RpfD and Rv1733 and a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv2029c, TB10.4, ESAT-6 and Rv0111;

v. A vector encoding a fusion polypeptide comprising Ag85B, Rv2626 RpfB, RpfD and Rv1733, a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv2029c, TB10.4, ESAT-6 and Rv0111 and a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv0569, Rv1813, Rv3407, Rv3478 and Rv1807; and

vi. A vector encoding a fusion polypeptide comprising RpfB, RpfD, Ag85B, TB10.4 and ESAT-6 and a fusion polypeptide comprising Rv0569, Rv1813, Rv3407, Rv3478 and Rv1807.

18. The vector according to anyone of claims 12 to 15 and 17 which is in the form of infectious virus particles.

19. A process of producing an infectious virus particle comprising the steps of (i) introducing the viral vector of anyone of claims 12 to 15 and 17 to 18 into a suitable cell line, (ii) culturing said cell line under suitable conditions so as to allow the production of said infectious viral particle, (iii) recovering the produced viral particle from the culture of said cell line, and (iv) optionally purifying said recovered viral particle.

20. A host cell comprising the immunogenic combination of anyone of claims 1 to 8, the nucleic acid molecule of anyone of claims 9 to 10 or the vector of anyone of claims 11 to 18.

21. A method for recombinant production of the mycobacterial antigens comprised or encoded by the immunogenic combination of anyone of claims 1 to 8, which comprises the steps of (i) introducing a vector according to any one of claims 11 to 18 into a suitable host cell to produce a transfected or infected host cell, (ii) culturing *in-vitro* said transfected or infected host cell under conditions suitable for growth of the host cell, (iii) recovering the cell culture, and (iv) optionally, purifying the mycobacterial antigen(s) or the fusion polypeptide from the recovered cell and/or culture supernatant.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein said suitable host cell is an *E coli* host cell and in particular a *E. coli* strain carrying the D13 prophage in its genome.

23. A composition comprising at least one of the immunogenic combination of anyone of claims 1 to 8, the nucleic acid molecule of anyone of claims 9 to 10, the vector of anyone of claims 11 to 18 or the host cell of claim 20 or any combination thereof.

24. The composition of claim 23 which further comprises a pharmaceutically acceptable vehicle.

25. Use of the immunogenic combination of anyone of claims 1 to 8, the nucleic acid molecule of anyone of claims 9 to 10, the vector of anyone of claims 11 to 18, the host cell of claim 20 or the composition of anyone of claims 23 or 24 in the manufacture of a medicament for preventing or treating a Mycobacterium infection or any disease and pathologic condition caused by or associated with such a Mycobacterium infection.

26. The use according to claim 25, for preventing infection or delaying the

risk of infection with a Mycobacterium in a subject in need thereof, especially a subject who has been in close contact with an infected individual having developed an active disease.

27. The use according to claim 25, for treating an active disease in a subject infected with a Mycobacterium species and especially *M. tuberculosis*.

28. The use according to claim 25, for preventing or treating reactivation in a subject latently infected with a Mycobacterium species and especially *M. tuberculosis*.

29. The use according to claim 25, as a BCG booster.

30. The use according to anyone of claims 25 to 29 wherein the medicament is to be used in association with one or more chemotherapeutic drug(s) effective against a Mycobacterium infection, and especially one or more antibiotic chemotherapy.

31. The use according to anyone of claims 25 to 30, for inducing or enhancing an immune response in the administered subject.

32. The use according to claim 31, wherein said induced or stimulated immune response is a CD4+ and/or CD8+-mediated T cell response directed to a mycobacterial antigen/epitope.