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A MUTANT HUMAN HEPATITIS B
VIRAL STRAIN AND USES THEREOF

Throughout this application, various references are referred
5 to within parentheses. Disclosures of these publications in
their entireties are hereby incorporated by reference into
this application to more fully describe the state of the art
to which this invention pertains.

10 **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention concerns the human hepatitis B virus
genome, isolated from hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), and with
a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine)
15 within the major surface antigen, its nucleotide sequence, the
deduced amino acid sequence of the four major proteins,
antigen, antibody, detection systems, development of effective
vaccines, and antiviral agents.

20 HCC is one of the most common human liver cancers,
particularly in Asia where 70% of the worldwide new cases are
found every year. It usually arises in cirrhotic livers as a
complication of chronic liver disease. The clinical
manifestations of HCC patients are unspecific with signs and
25 symptoms only appearing in the later stages of the cancer.

One of the major causes of chronic liver diseases is hepatitis
B viral infection. First discovered in 1963 as a human virus
that is transmitted parenterally, chronic hepatitis B viral
30 infection has been most commonly implicated in serological
undefined pathogenesis of HCC. Despite the fact that
hepatitis B virus does not display features of a complete
viral oncogene, its involvement in the development of HCC can
be attributed to various aspects of its interaction with host
35 hepatocyte cells. These include the promiscuous
transcriptional activity of the smallest viral protein, X,
which enhances the expression level of many cellular target
genes including proto-oncogenes. On the other hand,
integrated viral DNA in the host chromosomes is regularly
40 found in HCC patients. There is also evidence for an active

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role in the development of HCC by the major surface antigen. This protein has served as the main detection marker for carriers of hepatitis B virus. The most antigenic epitope is a highly conserved region spanning 23 amino acid residues and located from amino acid position 124 to 147 of the major surface antigen. This small region designated as the group specific determinant "a" is found in all subtypes and isolates of hepatitis B viral genomes. Its antigenic properties seem due to its proposed double loop structure, to which the vaccine-induced neutralizing antibody binds.

Our epidemiological data indicate that the wild type major surface antigen has been found in most HCC patients. Furthermore, observation indicates that several variants of the major surface antigen from HCC patients may be involved in the pathogenesis of HCC. Direct sequencing analysis indicated that 24 out of 63 HCC patients (around 38%) carry various mutations in the "a" epitope of the major surface antigen. When both the wild type and variant cases are combined, the proportion of the variant virus carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133, located in the first loop of the "a" epitope of the major surface antigen (Methionine to Threonine), is as high as 12.7% in 63 HCC patients from the Southeast Asia region, and present in 5 local HCC cases. However, the same mutation is found in only 2% of hepatitis B virus carriers in a random population (more than 100 cases). The significance of this variant at amino acid residue 133 is further strengthened by the fact that the proportion of variant virus at amino acid residue 145 (Glycine to Arginine), better known as a vaccine-induced mutant and located in the second loop of the "a" epitope, remains constant at 8% in hepatitis B virus carriers in the random population sample.

Although this variant hepatitis B viral strain, carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen in HCC patients, may arise differently from those induced following vaccination (i.e. with a mutation at amino acid residue 145 of the major surface

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention provides an isolated strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-
5 133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) which constituent viral genome is deposited under Accession Nos. P97121501, P97121502 and P97121503 with the European Collection of Cell Culture on 15th December 1997.

10 This invention further provides an isolated nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in
15 that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine.

This invention further provides a method of producing the polypeptide and a method of obtaining the polypeptide in
20 purified form so as to recover a purified polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino
25 acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine.

This invention further provides an oligonucleotide of at least 15 nucleotides capable of specifically hybridizing with
30 sequences of only the mutant viral strain of hepatitis B virus.

This invention further provides a method of obtaining antibodies to the polypeptide and to the antibodies produced.
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This invention also provides use of the above-identified nucleic acid, polypeptide, peptide or antibody for determining whether a subject is infected with the above-identified viral

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strain.

This invention also provides use of the above-identified nucleic acid, polypeptide, peptide or antibody for determining
5 whether a subject has a predisposition for hepatocellular carcinoma.

This invention also provides a vaccine for preventing and treating hepatocellular carcinoma, as well as, a vaccine for
10 treating or preventing infection by the above-identified mutant strain of hepatitis B virus.

This invention also provides a method for identifying a chemical compound which is capable of treating or preventing
15 hepatocellular carcinoma and compositions containing such compounds.

This invention also provides a method for identifying a chemical compound which is capable of treating or preventing
20 infection by the above-identified mutant strain and compositions containing such compounds.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

- Figure 1. Structure of the four open reading frames of human hepatitis B viral genome isolated from HCC (with a Methionine to Threonine mutation at amino acid residue 133 of the major surface antigen, as labeled by an asterisk). The major viral proteins: DNA polymerase, large/middle/major surface antigen, precore, core and transactivating X are denoted as P, PreS 1/PreS2/S, PreC, C and X respectively.
- Figure 2. Strategy of cloning and sequence determination of the same hepatitis B viral genome.
- ~~Figure 3. Whole nucleotide sequence of human hepatitis B virus, isolated from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen (SEQ I.D. No. 1). The mutation is shown at nucleic acids numbered 551-553.~~
- Figure 4. Deduced amino acid sequence of the DNA polymerase from the nucleotide sequence of Figure 3 (SEQ. I.D. No. 2).
- Figure 5. Deduced amino acid sequence of the large surface antigen from the nucleotide sequence of Figure 3 (SEQ. I.D. No. 3). The mutated amino acid residue (M to T) is numbered 307.
- Figure 6. Deduced amino acid sequence of the core protein from the nucleotide sequence of Figure 3 (SEQ. I.D. No. 4).
- Figure 7. Deduced amino acid sequence of the trans-activating X protein from the nucleotide ~~sequence of Figure 3 (SEQ. I.D. No. 5).~~

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- ~~Figure 8. Oligonucleotide sequence corresponding to the~~
initiation site of the coding region of DNA
polymerase, at position 2307 of the viral
genome and matches the coding strand (sense
oligonucleotide) (SEQ.I.D.No.6).
- Figure 9. Oligonucleotide sequence corresponding to
position 250 of the viral nucleotide sequence
and matches the complementary strand (anti-
sense oligonucleotide) (SEQ.I.D.No.7).
- Figure 10. Oligonucleotide sequence corresponding to
position 250 of the viral nucleotide sequence
and matches the coding strand (sense
oligonucleotide) (SEQ.I.D.No.8).
- Figure 11. Oligonucleotide sequence corresponding to the
stop codon of the coding region of DNA
polymerase, at position 1623 of the viral
genome and matches the complementary strand
(anti-sense oligonucleotide) (SEQ.I.D.No.9).
- Figure 12. Oligonucleotide sequence corresponding to
position 1420 of the viral genome and matches
the coding strand (sense oligonucleotide)
(SEQ.I.D.No.10).
- Figure 13. Oligonucleotide sequence corresponding to
position 2340 of the viral genome and matches
the complementary strand (anti-sense
~~oligonucleotide) (SEQ.I.D.No.11).~~

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Throughout this application, references to specific nucleotides are to nucleotides present on the coding strand of the nucleic acid. The following standard abbreviations are used throughout the specification to indicate specific nucleotides:

C=cytosine	A=adenosine
T=thymidine	G=guanosine

The present invention provides the nucleotide sequence of human hepatitis B virus genome isolated from hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), which carries a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, consisting of 3215 nucleotides (Figure 3) coding for 4 overlapping viral proteins shown in Figures 4-7.

The invention provides the amino acid sequences of the four major viral proteins, including the DNA polymerase, large/middle/major surface antigen, core and trans-activating X. These proteins can be produced using recombinant technology, and used in developing polyclonal or monoclonal antibodies.

The present invention also provides a human hepatitis B virus diagnostic system, specific for the mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, using the nucleotide or protein sequences, or antibodies described above.

This invention provides an isolated strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) which constituent viral genome is deposited under Accession Nos. P97121501, P97121502 and P97121503.

This invention also provides an isolated nucleic acid encoding

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a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine. In a specific embodiment, the polypeptide is being encoded by nucleotides 155 through 835 of the nucleic acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 1, comprising nucleotides "ATG" in position 551-553, instead of "ACG."

The isolated nucleic acid can be DNA or RNA, specifically cDNA or genomic DNA.

In another embodiment, the polypeptide has an amino acid sequence substantially identical to amino acid residues 174 through 400 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.

This invention also provides an isolated nucleic acid which encodes a peptide, wherein the peptide is encoded by a nucleic acid molecule comprising nucleotides 527 through 595 of SEQ I.D. No. 1.

This invention also provides an isolated nucleic acid which encodes a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.

This invention further provides a vector comprising an isolated nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine and operatively linked to a promoter of RNA transcription.

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This invention further provides a vector comprising an isolated nucleic acid encoding a peptide, wherein the peptide is encoded by a nucleic acid molecule comprising nucleotides 527 through 595 of SEQ. I.D. No. 1.

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Specifically the vectors above comprise viral DNA.

This invention also provides a host vector system for the production of a polypeptide or peptide and comprises the above-identified vectors in a suitable host.

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Also in this invention, is a method of producing a polypeptide which comprises growing in the host vector systems described above, under suitable conditions permitting production of the polypeptide or the peptide and recovering the polypeptide or peptide.

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This invention also provides a method of obtaining a polypeptide or peptide in purified form which comprises:

(a) introducing any of the above-describes vectors into a suitable host cell; (b) culturing the resulting host cell so as to produce the polypeptide; (c) recovering the polypeptide produced into step (b); and (d) purifying the polypeptide or peptide so recovered.

20

This invention also provides a purified polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine. Specifically, one can obtain the purified polypeptide or peptide using the above methods.

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This invention provides a purified peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.

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This invention also provides an oligonucleotide of at least 15 nucleotides capable of specifically hybridizing with a unique sequence of nucleotides within a nucleic acid which encodes a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine, without hybridizing to any sequence of nucleotides within a nucleic acid which encodes the major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus. In an embodiment, the oligonucleotide comprises nucleotides 527 through 595 of SEQ. I.D. No. 1.

This invention also provides a composition capable of stimulating or enhancing antibody production for the polypeptide.

This invention also provides a method of obtaining antibodies to a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and not to the major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus, comprising: (a) obtaining the polypeptide in a purified form; (b) immunizing an organism capable of producing antibodies against the purified polypeptide; (c) collecting the produced antibodies; (d) combining the produced antibodies and the purified polypeptide under conditions to form a complex; and (e) determining which produced antibodies form a complex with the purified polypeptide so as to obtain antibodies to the polypeptide. In a specific embodiment, the polypeptide is being encoded by nucleotides 155 through 835 of the nucleic acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 1. In another embodiment, the polypeptide has an amino acid sequence substantially identical to amino acid residues 174 through 400

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of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.

One can obtain these antibodies from organism such as a rabbit or a mouse.

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This invention also provides a method of obtaining antibodies to a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3, comprising: (a) obtaining the peptide in a purified form; (b) immunizing an organism capable of producing antibodies against the purified peptide; (c) collecting the produced antibodies; (d) combining the produced antibodies and the purified peptide under conditions to form a complex; and (e) determining which produced antibodies form a complex with the purified peptide so as to obtain antibodies to the peptide.

This invention also provides for the antibodies obtained using the methods described above, specifically when the antibodies are monoclonal antibodies.

This invention also provides for antibodies capable of detecting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and incapable of detecting the major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus.

This invention further provides for antibodies capable of detecting a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.

This invention provides use of a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a

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strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether a subject is infected with a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine), wherein such determination comprises: (a) obtaining an appropriate nucleic acid sample from the subject; and (b) determining whether the nucleic acid sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine.

In one embodiment, the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b), which comprises: (i) contacting the mRNA with the oligonucleotide under conditions permitting binding of the mRNA to the oligonucleotide so as to form a complex; (ii) isolating the complex so formed; and (iii) identifying the mRNA in the isolated complex so as to thereby determine whether the mRNA is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.

In another embodiment, the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a

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strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b) comprises: (i) translating the mRNA under suitable conditions to obtain an amino acid sequence; and (ii) comparing the amino acid sequence of step (i) with the amino acid sequence encoded by the above-described isolated nucleic acid so as to thereby determine whether the nucleic acid sample is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.

Further, one can determine step (b) by: (i) amplifying the nucleic acid present in the sample of step (a); and (ii) detecting the presence of polypeptide in the resulting amplified nucleic acid.

This invention also provides use of antibodies that recognize a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether a subject is infected with a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine), wherein such determination comprises: (a) obtaining an appropriate sample from the subject; and (b) determining whether the sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine by contacting the sample under appropriate conditions to bind to the antibodies

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recognizing the polypeptide so as to determine whether a subject is infected.

In the above-identified uses, the isolated nucleic acid, oligonucleotide or antibody may be labeled with a detectable marker. Examples of detectable markers include radioactive isotopes, fluorophors, and enzymes.

In embodiments, the sample may comprise blood, tissue or sera.

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This invention provides use of a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether a subject has a predisposition for hepatocellular carcinoma, wherein such determination comprises: (a) obtaining an appropriate nucleic acid sample from the subject; and (b) determining whether the nucleic acid sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine.

In one embodiment, the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b), which comprises: (i) contacting the

mRNA with the oligonucleotide under conditions permitting binding of the mRNA to the oligonucleotide so as to form a complex; (ii) isolating the complex so formed; and (iii) identifying the mRNA in the isolated complex so as to thereby
5 determine whether the mRNA is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.

In another embodiment, the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding
10 a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is
15 a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b) comprises: (i) translating the mRNA under suitable conditions to obtain an amino acid sequence; and (ii) comparing the amino acid sequence of step (i) with the amino acid sequence of the isolated nucleic acid which
20 encodes a polypeptide, wherein the polypeptide has an amino acid sequence substantially identical to amino acids 174 through 400 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3, so as to thereby determine whether the nucleic acid sample is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes
25 the polypeptide.

In another embodiment, the determining of step (b) comprises: (i) amplifying the nucleic acid present in the sample of step (a); and (ii) detecting the presence of polypeptide in the
30 resulting amplified nucleic acid.

This invention further provides use of antibodies that recognize a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide
35 having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a

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methionine for determining whether a subject has a predisposition for hepatocellular carcinoma, wherein such determination comprises: (a) obtaining an appropriate sample from the subject; and (b) determining whether the sample from
5 step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that
10 the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine by contacting the sample under appropriate conditions to bind to the antibodies that recognize the polypeptide so as to determine whether a subject is infected.

15

In the above-described uses, the isolated nucleic acid, oligonucleotide or antibody may be labeled with a detectable marker. Examples of detectable markers include radioactive isotopes, fluorophors, and enzymes.

20

In embodiments, the sample may comprise blood, tissue or sera.

This invention provides a method for identifying a chemical compound for the manufacture of a medicament which is capable
25 of treating infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) which comprises: (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide
30 having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions
35 permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound; (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify

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a chemical compound which is capable of treating infection by the viral strain.

This invention also provides a method for identifying a chemical compound for the manufacture of a medicament which is capable of preventing infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine), which comprises: (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound; (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of preventing infection by the viral strain.

This invention also provides a method for identifying a chemical compound for the manufacture of a medicament which is capable of treating hepatocellular carcinoma which comprises: (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound; (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of treating infection by the viral strain.

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This invention also provides a method for identifying a chemical compound for the manufacture of a medicament which is capable of preventing hepatocellular carcinoma, which comprises: (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound; (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of preventing infection by the viral strain.

This invention also provides a composition comprising the chemical compound identified by the above-described methods in an amount effective to treat or prevent infection by the strain and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.

This invention provides a composition comprising a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, or derivative thereof, the amounts of such polypeptide being effective to stimulate or enhance antibody production in a subject, and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

The actual effective amount will be based upon the size of the polypeptide, the biodegradability of the polypeptide, the bioactivity of the polypeptide and the bioavailability of the polypeptide. If the polypeptide does not degrade quickly, is bioavailable and highly active, a smaller amount will be

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required to be effective. The effective amount will be known to one of skill in the art; it will also be dependent upon the form of the polypeptide, the size of the polypeptide and the bioactivity of the polypeptide. Use of an adjuvant for example, would lower the required amount of the polypeptide. One of skill in the art could routinely perform empirical activity tests to determine the bioactivity in bioassays and thus determine the effective amount.

Pharmaceutically acceptable carriers are well known to those skilled in the art and include, but are not limited to, 0.01-0.1M and preferably 0.05M phosphate buffer or 0.8% saline. Additionally, such pharmaceutically acceptable carriers may be aqueous or non-aqueous solutions, suspensions, and emulsions. Examples of non-aqueous solvents are propylene glycol, polyethylene glycol, vegetable oils such as olive oil, and injectable organic esters such as ethyl oleate. Aqueous carriers include water, alcoholic/aqueous solutions, emulsions or suspensions, including saline and buffered media. Parenteral vehicles include sodium chloride solution, Ringer's dextrose, dextrose and sodium chloride, lactated Ringer's or fixed oils. Intravenous vehicles include fluid and nutrient replenishers, electrolyte replenishers such as those based on Ringer's dextrose, and the like. Preservatives and other additives may also be present, such as, for example, antimicrobials, antioxidants, chelating agents, inert gases and the like.

This invention also provides a composition comprising a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3. or derivative thereof, the amounts of such peptide being effective to stimulate or enhance antibody production in a subject, and a pharmaceutically acceptable.

This invention also provides compositions comprising the chemical compound identified by the above-described methods in

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an amount effective to treat or prevent hepatocellular carcinoma and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.

5 This invention also provides a composition comprising the chemical compound identified by the above-described methods in an amount effective to treat or prevent infection by a strain of hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.

10

This invention further provides use of the above-identified compositions for treating a subject infected with a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine).

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This invention also provides use of the above-identified compositions for preventing infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) in a subject.

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This invention also provides use of the above-described compositions for treating or preventing hepatocellular carcinoma.

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This invention also provides a method of screening bodily fluids from a subject for a strain of hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) which comprises: (a) obtaining an appropriate sample of bodily fluid from the subject; (b) determining the presence of a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wild type hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine in the sample of step (a) so as to screen the sample for the strain. Specifically, wherein the bodily fluid comprises blood, sera, or a nucleic

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acid sample of blood or sera.

This invention further provides a method of treating a subject infected with this viral strain.

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This invention also provides a method of screening tissues and bodily fluids for this viral strain.

10 This invention provides a hepatitis vaccine, comprising a mutant form of the surface antigen of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the wild type amino acid sequence of the major surface antigen of hepatitis B in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine.

15

This invention also provides the above-described vaccine, further comprising an adjuvant.

20 This invention is illustrated in the Experimental Details section which follows. These sections are set forth to aid in an understanding of the invention but are not intended to, and should not be construed to, limit in any way the invention as set forth in the claims which follow thereafter.

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Experimental Details

In the method described below, the human hepatitis B virus carrying the mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to
5 Threonine) of the major surface antigen was isolated, and its nucleotide sequence was determined.

Serum sample (5194) was obtained from a 63-year old Chinese female patient of surface antigen carrier. She was confirmed
10 as a HCC patient by subsequent biopsy. The hepatitis B virus from her serum carried a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) in the major surface antigen, as shown by previous sequencing analysis of the "a" epitope. Viral DNA was extracted prior to the determination of its
15 sequence in the present invention.

As described in the examples below, the genome of this hepatitis B mutant virus from HCC and carrying a mutation at the amino acid residue 133 of the major surface antigen,
20 consists of 3215 nucleotides which is identical to that of the wild type virus of the same subtype (adr). Open reading frames (ORF) coding for the major viral proteins are found at corresponding positions when compared to the wild type virus. Position 1 in the mutant hepatitis B virus genome is defined
25 according to that in the wild type virus.

The structure of the different ORFs in the mutant human virus genome are reported here and summarized in Fig. 1. The locations are indicated as follows:

30 - DNA polymerase gene starts at position 2307 and ends at position 1623, therefore consisting of 2532 nucleotides and coding for 843 amino acid residues;
- Large surface antigen gene starts at position 2848 and ends at position 835, therefore consisting of 1203 nucleotides and
35 coding for 400 amino acid residues. This large surface antigen overlaps the middle surface antigen which starts at position 3205 and the major surface antigen which starts at position 155. Both the middle (consisting of 281 amino acids

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residues) and the major (consisting of 226 amino acid residues) surface antigens end at the same position as the large surface antigen;

- Core gene starts at position 1814 and ends at position 2452, therefore consisting of 639 nucleotides and coding for 212 amino acid residues; and

- Trans-activating X gene starts at position 1374 and ends at position 1838, therefore consisting of 465 nucleotides and coding for 154 amino acid residues.

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Furthermore, sequence analysis has established this mutant hepatitis B virus belongs to the adr subtype as indicated by a lysine residue and an arginine residue at positions 122 and 160 respectively in the major surface antigen. Consistent with previous analysis of the "a" epitope by direct sequencing, the mutation (from Methionine to Threonine) is found at amino acid residue 133 of the major surface antigen.

Compared with the wild type hepatitis B virus deposited in the Genbank database (accession number D16665), the identity of this hepatitis B viral strain is at 90.3% for the nucleotide sequence. The identity of different viral proteins of the present mutant hepatitis B virus as compared with its counterpart, the wild type virus, is 95.8%, 97.5%, 95.1% and 94.8% for DNA polymerase (PIR - Protein Identification Resources accession number S43491), large surface antigen (PIR accession number JQ2107), core (PIR accession number S43490) and trans-activating X (PIR accession number S35529) proteins respectively. Conversely, numerous amino acid substitutions are present in each of the viral proteins as compared to their wild type counterparts, these include: 5 mutations in DNA polymerase, 5 in large surface antigen (including the Methionine to Threonine change for the initiation codon of the major surface antigen), 5 in core and 4 in trans-activating X protein.

The human hepatitis B virus genome in the present invention, isolated from HCC and carrying mutation at amino acid residue

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133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, can be used as material to design oligonucleotides specific to the mutant virus genome. These oligonucleotides can be used as material for highly specific diagnostic agents that detect
5 virus derived from HCC carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 of the major surface antigen.

The human hepatitis B virus genome in the present invention, with a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to
10 Threonine) of the major surface antigen, can be used as material to produce proteins of the invention by expressing a vector that carries the relevant coding region, and which can replicate in a host cell such as Escherichia coli by standard DNA recombinant technology.

15 Proteins of the present invention are useful as material for highly specific diagnostic agents capable of detecting hepatitis B virus from HCC, carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface
20 antigen. Using known methods, these same proteins can be used to produce polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies.

25 Polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies can be used as material for diagnostic agents to detect with high specificity antigens of hepatitis B virus, from HCC, with a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen.

30 A detection system using each protein of the present invention or proteins with partial replacement of amino acids, and a detection system using monoclonal or polyclonal antibodies to such proteins are useful as highly specific diagnostic agents capable of detecting of human hepatitis B virus from HCC to detect this virus from patients who are carriers of hepatitis
35 B surface antigen who may then be at risk of developing HCC. The proteins, or antibodies of such proteins can be used as a material for development of prophylactic and therapeutic vaccines against this viral strain.

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It is well known that one or more nucleotides in a DNA sequence can be substituted by other nucleotides to produce the same protein. The present invention also concerns such nucleotide changes which code for proteins reported in this invention. It is equally well known that one or more amino acids in a protein sequence can be replaced by other analogous amino acids, as defined by their hydrophilic properties or charges, to produce an analog of the amino acid sequence. Any analogs of the proteins of the present invention involving amino acid replacement, deletions, isosteres (modified amino acids that bear close structural and spatial similarity to protein amino acids), or additions, can be utilized, provided that the resulting sequences elicit antibodies recognizing hepatitis B virus from HCC with a mutation at amino acid mutation 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen.

EXAMPLES

The nucleotide sequence and the deduced amino acid sequence of human hepatitis B virus, isolated from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, were determined in the following manner:

25

1. Isolation of Viral DNA

The viral DNA was isolated from a serum sample (5194) obtained from a 63-year old Chinese female patient of surface antigen carrier. She was confirmed as an HCC patient by biopsy. The hepatitis B virus from her serum carried a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) in the major surface antigen, as shown by our previous sequencing analysis of the "a" epitope.

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The isolation method used was:

200 μ l of the serum sample was added with 400 μ l of the lysis buffer (Tris chloride 10 mM, pH7.4, EDTA 1 mM, and sodium

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dodecyl sulfate 2%) and 25 μ l of proteinase K (20 mg/ml), incubated at 65⁰ C for 3 hours. Viral DNA was then extracted by phenol/chloroform and precipitated by ethanol.

5 2. Amplification of Viral DNA by Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)

The virus genome in the present invention was amplified by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using 3 sets of overlapping
10 oligonucleotides, which were designed according to the wild type hepatitis B virus. Various restriction enzyme sites were included to facilitate the cloning of the PCR products. The position of these oligonucleotides is shown in Fig. 2 and indicated as follows:

- 15 - Flag 1 (ATAAGCTTATGCCCCTATCTTATCAACACTTCCGGA) (SEQ. I.D. No. 6) starts at the initiation site of the coding region of DNA polymerase, at position 2307 of the viral nucleotide sequence and matches the coding strand (sense oligonucleotide). An additional HindIII restriction enzyme site is underlined;
- 20 - Xba3 (GAGTCTAGACTCTGCGGTATTGTGA) (SEQ. I.D. No. 7) starts at the internal restriction enzyme site XbaI, at position 250 of the viral nucleotide sequence and matches the complementary strand (anti-sense oligonucleotide). An additional XbaI restriction enzyme site is underlined;
- 25 - Xba5 (GAGTCTAGACTCGTGGTGGACTTCT) (SEQ. I.D. No. 8) starts at the internal XbaI site, at the same location as that of Xba3 oligonucleotide but matches the coding strand (sense oligonucleotide). An additional XbaI restriction enzyme site is underlined;
- 30 - Common 3 (TGAGAAATTCTCACGGTGGTCTCCATGCGACGT) (SEQ. I.D. No. 9) starts at the stop codon of the DNA polymerase, at position 1623 of the viral nucleotide sequence and matches the complementary strand (anti-sense oligonucleotide). An additional EcoRI restriction enzyme site is underlined;
- 35 - V11 (TTTGTTTACGTCCCGT) (SEQ. I.D. No. 10) starts near the initiation site of the X gene, at position 1420 of the viral nucleotide sequence and matches the coding strand (sense oligonucleotide);

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- HindIIIADW3 (CTAAGCTTAGTTTCCGGAAGTGTGAT) (SEQ. I.D. No. 11) starts close to the initiation site of the DNA polymerase, at position 2340 and matches the complementary strand (anti-sense oligonucleotide). An additional Hind III restriction enzyme site is underlined.

Using viral DNA as template, PCR was then carried out on a DNA Thermal Cycler (Perkin-Elmer. Cetus) for 35 cycles using *Pfu* polymerase (Stratagene, U.S.A.), each cycle consisting of 1.5 minutes at a denaturing temperature of 94° C, 2 minutes at an annealing temperature of 53° C and 4 minutes at an extension temperature of 72° C. The following combinations of oligonucleotides were used: Flag1/Xba3, Xba5/Common3 and V11/HindIIIADW3, and generated amplification products of 1.2 kb, 1.4 kb and 1.1 kb respectively.

3. Cloning of the Amplified Viral DNA Fragments

The amplified viral DNA fragment from Flag1/Xba3 (1.2 kb) was subjected to restriction enzyme digestion by HindIII and XbaI, prior to cloning in a BlueScript plasmid pre-treated by the same restriction enzymes. Similar digestion with XbaI and EcoRI was applied to PCR product from Xba5/Common3 (1.4 kb), prior to cloning in a BlueScript plasmid pre-treated by XbaI and EcoRI. On the other hand, the DNA fragment amplified with V11 and HindIIIADW3 (1.1 kb) was directly cloned into a ZeroBlunt plasmid, developed by InvitroGen (U.S.A.) for cloning blunt-end DNA fragments.

4. Determination of Nucleotide Sequence

Nucleotide sequence of the human hepatitis B virus isolated from HCC and reported in the present invention was determined on plasmid DNA template by chain-terminating inhibitors, using the Sequenase DNA Sequencing Kit (United States Biochemical Corp.). To facilitate the sequencing procedure, various internal oligonucleotides were designed (from V1 to V16) according to the wild type hepatitis B virus, and their

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positions are indicated in Figure 2.

From the analysis described above, the full-length nucleotide sequence of the hepatitis B virus, isolated from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, was determined as shown in Figure 3. The deduced amino acid sequences coding for the major viral proteins are shown in Figures 4-7: hepatitis B viral DNA polymerase (Figure 4), the large surface antigen, including the middle and major surface antigen (Figure 5), the core protein (Figure 6) and the trans-activating X protein (Figure 7).

Alignment of the virus sequence in the present invention with other hepatitis B viral sequences, available in the Genbank database, will point to specific sequence differences which in turn can be used to design DNA probes. A detection system using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) can then be developed. Such PCR reactions will involve combinations of oligonucleotides specific to human hepatitis B virus in the present invention, with a mutation at the amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, thereby allowing highly specific detection of these mutant viral DNA. Briefly, viral DNA can be extracted as described in this invention. PCR reaction can be performed using specific oligonucleotides using the similar cycling conditions described above. Results can then be analyzed after resolving PCR products on a 1% agarose gel.

According to known immunological procedures, it is possible to determine epitopes from protein sequences as those in Figures 4-7. Determination of these epitopes specific to human hepatitis B virus, from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, will allow synthesis of peptides using known genetic engineering methods, synthesis of proteins, production of antibodies specific to these epitopes, development of specific diagnostic reagents, development of prophylactic and

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therapeutic vaccines, and antiviral agents.

A detection system for antibody against hepatitis B virus isolated from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen can be developed using polyvinyl microtiter plates and the sandwich method. Briefly, 50 μ l of 5 μ g/ml concentration of a peptide from the hepatitis B virus in the present invention, isolated from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen, can be dispensed in each well of the microtiter plates and incubated overnight at room temperature for consolidation. A similar procedure can be applied to a protein purified from host cells such as Escherichia coli. The microplate wells can be washed five times with physiological saline solution containing 0.05% Tween 20. For overcoating, 100 μ l of NaCl buffer containing 30% (v/v) of calf serum and 0.05% Tween 20 (CS buffer) can be dispensed in each well and discarded after incubation for 30 minutes at room temperature.

To determine antibodies specific for the mutant (Methionine to Threonine at amino acid residue 133 of the major surface antigen) hepatitis B virus in serum, the primary reaction can be carried out such that 50 μ l of the CS buffer and 10 μ l of a serum sample can be dispensed in each microplate well and incubated on a microplate vibrator for one hour at room temperature. After completion of the primary reaction, microplate wells are washed five times as described above.

In the secondary reaction, 1 ng of horseradish peroxidase labeled anti-human IgG mouse monoclonal antibodies dissolved in 50 μ l of calf serum can be dispensed in each microplate well and incubated on a microplate vibrator for one hour at room temperature. Upon completion, wells can be washed five times in the same way. After addition of hydrogen peroxide (as substrate) and 50 μ l of O-phenylenediamine solution (as color developer) in each well, and after incubation for 30

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minutes at room temperature, 50 μ l of 4M sulphuric acid solution can be dispensed in each well to stop further color development and for reading absorbance at 490nm.

5 The present invention makes possible detection of the mutant human hepatitis B virus, in particular those carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major surface antigen. The present invention also provides detection systems capable of a highly specific and
10 sensitive detection at an early stage of infection or development of HCC when the HCC may be treated and cured.

In addition, these features allow accurate diagnosis of patients at an early stage in the HCC and also help to inhibit
15 with higher efficiency mutant hepatitis B virus.

Proteins and their antibodies under the present invention can be utilized for development of prophylactic and therapeutic vaccines, as well as, immunological pharmaceuticals. Sequence
20 information on structural genes of these mutant viruses will be helpful for developing detection systems of the relevant protein antigens and antibodies.

Antigen-antibody complexes can be detected by known methods.
25 Specific monoclonal and polyclonal antibodies can be raised by immunizing animals such as mice and rabbits with peptides or proteins specific to mutant hepatitis B viruses from HCC. Inhibitory antiviral agents can be designed and targeted against these proteins and molecules in cell culture or in
30 vivo.

The present invention is based on studies on human hepatitis virus genome isolated from HCC and carrying a mutation at amino acid residue 133 (Methionine to Threonine) of the major
35 surface antigen. The invention makes possible highly specific detection of these mutant hepatitis B virus from HCC, and provides material such as protein, polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies for development of such detection system.

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35
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SEQUENCE LISTING

(1) GENERAL INFORMATION:

(i) TITLE OF INVENTION: A MUTANT HUMAN HEPATITIS B VIRAL STRAIN
AND USES THEREOF

(ii) NUMBER OF SEQUENCES: 11

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:1: (Figure 3)

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

(A) LENGTH: 3215 base pairs
(B) TYPE: nucleic acid
(C) STRANDEDNESS: double
(D) TOPOLOGY: circular

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:1:

CTCCACAACA TTCCACCAAG CTCTGCTAGA TCCCAGGGTG AGGGGCCTAT ATTTTCCTGC	60
TGGTGGCTCC AGTTCGGGAA CAGTAAACCC TGTTCGACT ACTGCCTCTC CCATATCGTC	120
AATCTTCTCG AGGACTGGGG ACCCTGCACC GAACATGGAG AACACAACAT CAGGATTCCCT	180
AGGACCCCTG CTCGTGTTAC AGGCGGGGTT TTTCTCGTTG ACAAGAATCC TCACAATACC	240
GCAGAGTCTA GACTCTGGTG GACTTCTCTC AATTTTCTAG GGGGAGCACC CACGTGTTCC	300
TGGCCAAAAT TCGCAGTCCC CAACCTCCAA TCACTCACCA ACCTCTTGTC CTCCAATTTG	360
TCCTGGCTAT CGCTGGATGT GTCTGCGGCG TTTTATCATA TTCCTCTTCA TCCTGCTGCT	420
ATGCCTCATC TTCTTGTTGG TTCTTCTGGA CTACCAAGGT ATGTTGCCCC TTTGTCTCT	480
ACTTCCAGGA ACATCAACCA CCAGCACGGG GCCATGCAAG ACCTGCACGA CTCCTGCTCA	540
AGGAAACTCT ACGTTTCCCT CTTGTTGCTG TACAAAACCT TCGGACGGAA ACTGCACTTG	600
TATTTCCATC CCATCATCCT GGGCTTTCGC AAGATTCCTA TGGGAGTGGG CCTCAGTCCG	660
TTTCTCCTGG CTCAGTTTAC TAGTGCCATT TGTTCACTGG TTCGTAGGGC TTTCCCCCAC	720
TGTTTGCTTT TCAGTTATAT GGATGATGTG GTATTGGGGG CGAAGTCTGT ACAACATCTT	780
GAGTCCCTTT TTACCTCTAT TACCAATTTT CTTTTGTCTT TGGGTATACA TTTAAACCTT	840
AATAAAACCA AACGTTGGGG CTACTCCCTT AACTTCATGG GATATGTAAT TGGGAAGTTGG	900
GGTACTTTTAC CGCAGGAACA TATTGTACTA AAACTCAAGC AATGTTTTCG AAAACTGCCT	960
GTAAATAGAC CTATTGATTG GAAAGTATGT CAAAGAATTG TGGGTCTTTT GGGCTTTGCT	1020

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GCCCCCTTTTA	CACAATGTGG	CTATCCTGCC	TTGATGCCTT	TATATGCATG	TATACAATCT	1080
AAGCAGGCTT	TCACTTTCTC	GCCAACTTAC	AAGGCCTTTC	TGTGTAAACA	ATATCTGAAC	1140
CTTTACCCCG	TTGCCCGGCA	ACGGTCCGGT	CTCTGCCAAG	TGTTTGCTGA	CGCAACCCCC	1200
ACTGGATGGG	GCTTGGCCAT	AGGCCATCAG	CGCATGGCTG	GAACCTTTCT	GGCTCCTCTG	1260
CCGATCCATA	CTGCGGAACT	CCTAGCAGCT	TGTTTTGCTC	GCAGCCGGTC	TGGAGCAAAA	1320
CTTATCGGAA	CCGACAACCTC	TGTTGTCTCT	TCTCGGAAAT	ACACCTCCTT	TCCATGGCTG	1380
CTAGGGTGTG	CTGCCAACTG	GATCCTGCGC	GGGACGTCTT	TTGTCTACGT	CCCGTCGGCG	1440
CTGAATCCCG	CGGACGACCC	GTCTCGGGGC	CGTTTGGGGC	TCTACCGTCC	CCTTCTTCAT	1500
CTGCCGTTCC	GGCCGACCAC	GGGGCGCACC	TCTCTTTACG	CGGTCTCCCC	GTATGTGCCT	1560
TCTCATCTGC	CGGACCGTGT	GCACTTCGCT	TCACCTCTGC	ACGTGCGATG	GAGACCACCG	1620
TGAACGCACG	CCAGGTCTTG	CCCAAGGTCT	TATATAAGAG	GACTCTTGGA	CTCTCAGCAA	1680
TGTCAACGAC	CGACCTTGAG	GCATACTTCA	AAGACTGTGT	GTTTAAAGAC	TGGGAGGAGT	1740
TGGGGGAGGA	GATTAGGTTA	AAGATTTATG	TACTAGGAGG	CTGTAGGCAT	AAATTGGTCT	1800
GTTCAACCAGC	ACCATGCAAC	TTTTTCTCCT	CTGCCTAATC	ATCTCATGTT	CATGTCCTAC	1860
TGTTCAAGCC	TCCAAGCTGT	GCCTTGGGTG	GCTTTGGGAC	ATGGACATTG	ACCCGTATAA	1920
AGAATTTGGA	GCATCTGCTG	AGTTACTCTC	TTTTTTGCCT	TCTGACTTCT	TTCCGTCTAT	1980
TCGAGATCTC	CTCGACACCG	CCTCTGCTCT	GTATCGGGAG	GCCTTAGAGT	CTCCGGAACA	2040
TTGTTGCGCT	CACCATAACG	CACTCAGGCA	AGCTATTTTG	TGTTGGGGTG	AGTTGATGAA	2100
TCTGGCCACC	TGGGTGGGAA	GTAATTTGGA	AGATCCAGCA	TCCAGGGAAT	TAGTAGTCAG	2160
CTATGTCAAC	GTTAATATGG	GCCTAAACT	CAGACAAATA	TTGTGGTTTC	ACATTTCTCTG	2220
TCTTACTTTT	GGAAGAGAAA	CTGTTCTTGA	GTACTTGGTA	TCTTTTGGAG	TGTGGATTCTG	2280
CACTCCTACC	GCTTACAGAC	CACCAAATGC	CCCTATCTTA	TCAACACTTC	CGGAAACTAC	2340
TGTTGTTAGA	CGACGAGGCA	GGTCCCCTAG	AAGAAGAACT	CCCTCGCCTC	GCAGACGAAG	2400
GTCTCAATCG	CCGCGTCGCA	GAAGATCTCA	ATCTCGGGAA	TCTCAACGTT	AGTATTCCTT	2460
GGACTCATAA	GGTGGGAAAC	TTTACTGGGC	TTTATTCTTC	TACTGTACCT	GTCTTTAATC	2520
CCGAGTGGCA	AATTCCTTCC	TTTCCTCACA	TTCATTTACA	AGAGGACATT	ATTAATAGAT	2580
GTCAACAATA	TGTGGGCCCT	CTTACAGTTA	ATGAAAAAAG	AAGATTAAAA	TTAATTATGC	2640
CTGCTAGGTT	TTATCCTAAC	CTTACTAAAT	ATTTGCCCTT	AGACAAAGGC	ATTAAACCGT	2700
ATTATCCTGA	ACATGCAGTT	AATCATTACT	TCAAACTAG	GCATTATTTA	CATACTCTGT	2760

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GGAAGGCTGG CATTCTATAT AAGAGAGAAA CTACACGCAG CGCCTCATTT TGTGGGTCAC      2820
CATATTCTTG GGAACAAGAG CTACAGCATG GGAGGTTGGT CTTCCAAACC TCGACAAGGC      2880
ATGGGGAGCA ATCTTGCTGT TCCCAATCCT CTGGGATTCT TTCCCAGATCA CCAGTTGGAC      2940
CCTGCGTTCG GAGCCAACTC AAACAATCCA GATTGGGACT TCAACCCCAA CAAGGATCAC      3000
TGGCCAGAGG CAAATCAGGT AGGAGTGGGA GCATTCGGGC CAGGGTTCAC CCCACCACAC      3060
GGCGGTCTTT TGGGGGGGAG CCCTCAGGCT CAGGGCATAT TGACAACAGT GCCAGCAGCA      3120
CCTCCTCCTG CCTCCACCAA TCGGCAGTCA GGAAGACAGC CTACTCCCAT CTCTCCACCT      3180
CTAAGAGACA GTCATCCTCA GGCCACGCAG TGGAA                                3215

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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:2: (Figure 4)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
- (A) LENGTH: 843 amino acids
 - (B) TYPE: amino acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:2:

```

Met Pro Leu Ser Tyr Gln His Phe Arg Lys Leu Leu Leu Leu Asp Asp
1           5           10           15
Glu Ala Gly Pro Leu Glu Glu Glu Leu Pro Arg Leu Ala Asp Glu Gly
20          25          30
Leu Asn Arg Arg Val Ala Glu Asp Leu Asn Leu Gly Asn Leu Asn Val
35          40          45
Ser Ile Pro Trp Thr His Lys Val Gly Asn Phe Thr Gly Leu Tyr Ser
50          55          60
Ser Thr Val Pro Val Phe Asn Pro Glu Trp Gln Ile Pro Ser Phe Pro
65          70          75          80
His Ile His Leu Gln Glu Asp Ile Ile Asn Arg Cys Gln Gln Tyr Val
85          90          95
Gly Pro Leu Thr Val Asn Glu Lys Arg Arg Leu Lys Leu Ile Met Pro
100         105         110
Ala Arg Phe Tyr Pro Asn Leu Thr Lys Tyr Leu Pro Leu Asp Lys Gly
115         120         125
Ile Lys Pro Tyr Tyr Pro Glu His Ala Val Asn His Tyr Phe Lys Thr
130         135         140

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Arg His Tyr Leu His Thr Leu Trp Lys Ala Gly Ile Leu Tyr Lys Arg
 145 150 155 160
 Glu Thr Thr Arg Ser Ala Ser Phe Cys Gly Ser Pro Tyr Ser Trp Glu
 165 170 175
 Gln Glu Leu Gln His Gly Arg Leu Val Phe Gln Thr Ser Thr Arg His
 180 185 190
 Gly Asp Glu Ser Cys Cys Ser Gln Ser Ser Gly Ile Leu Ser Arg Ser
 195 200 205
 Pro Val Gly Pro Cys Val Arg Ser Gln Leu Lys Gln Ser Arg Leu Gly
 210 215 220
 Leu Gln Pro Gln Gln Gly Ser Leu Ala Arg Gly Lys Ser Gly Arg Ser
 225 230 235 240
 Gly Ser Ile Arg Ala Arg Val His Pro Thr Thr Arg Arg Ser Phe Gly
 245 250 255
 Gly Glu Pro Ser Gly Ser Gly His Ile Asp Asn Ser Ala Ser Ser Thr
 260 265 270
 Ser Ser Cys Leu His Gln Ser Ala Val Arg Lys Thr Ala Tyr Ser His
 275 280 285
 Leu Ser Thr Ser Lys Arg Gln Ser Ser Ser Gly His Ala Val Glu Leu
 290 295 300
 His Asn Ile Pro Pro Ser Ser Ala Arg Ser Gln Gly Glu Gly Pro Ile
 305 310 315 320
 Phe Ser Cys Trp Trp Leu Gln Phe Arg Asn Ser Lys Pro Cys Ser Asp
 325 330 335
 Tyr Cys Leu Ser His Ile Val Asn Leu Leu Glu Asp Trp Gly Pro Cys
 340 345 350
 Thr Glu His Gly Glu His Asn Ile Arg Ile Pro Arg Thr Pro Ala Arg
 355 360 365
 Val Thr Gly Gly Val Phe Leu Val Asp Lys Asn Pro His Asn Thr Ala
 370 375 380
 Glu Ser Arg Leu Trp Trp Thr Ser Leu Asn Phe Leu Gly Gly Ala Pro
 385 390 395 400
 Thr Cys Ser Trp Pro Lys Phe Ala Val Pro Asn Leu Gln Ser Leu Thr
 405 410 415
 Asn Leu Leu Ser Ser Asn Leu Ser Trp Leu Ser Leu Asp Val Ser Ala
 420 425 430
 Ala Phe Tyr His Ile Pro Leu His Pro Ala Ala Met Pro His Leu Leu
 435 440 445

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Val Gly Ser Ser Gly Leu Pro Arg Tyr Val Ala Arg Leu Ser Ser Thr
 450 455 460
 Ser Arg Asn Ile Asn His Gln His Gly Ala Met Gln Asp Leu His Asp
 465 470 475 480
 Ser Cys Ser Arg Lys Leu Tyr Val Ser Leu Leu Leu Leu Tyr Lys Thr
 485 490 495
 Phe Gly Arg Lys Leu His Leu Tyr Ser His Pro Ile Ile Leu Gly Phe
 500 505 510
 Arg Lys Ile Pro Met Gly Val Gly Leu Ser Pro Phe Leu Leu Ala Gln
 515 520 525
 Phe Thr Ser Ala Ile Cys Ser Val Val Arg Arg Ala Phe Pro His Cys
 530 535 540
 Leu Ala Phe Ser Tyr Met Asp Asp Val Val Leu Gly Ala Lys Ser Val
 545 550 555 560
 Gln His Leu Glu Ser Leu Phe Thr Ser Ile Thr Asn Phe Leu Leu Ser
 565 570 575
 Leu Gly Ile His Leu Asn Pro Asn Lys Thr Lys Arg Trp Gly Tyr Ser
 580 585 590
 Leu Asn Phe Met Gly Tyr Val Ile Gly Ser Trp Gly Thr Leu Pro Gln
 595 600 605
 Glu His Ile Val Leu Lys Leu Lys Gln Cys Phe Arg Lys Leu Pro Val
 610 615 620
 Asn Arg Pro Ile Asp Trp Lys Val Cys Gln Arg Ile Val Gly Leu Leu
 625 630 635 640
 Gly Phe Ala Ala Pro Phe Thr Gln Cys Gly Tyr Pro Ala Leu Met Pro
 645 650 655
 Leu Tyr Ala Cys Ile Gln Ser Lys Gln Ala Phe Thr Phe Ser Pro Thr
 660 665 670
 Tyr Lys Ala Phe Leu Cys Lys Gln Tyr Leu Asn Leu Tyr Pro Val Ala
 675 680 685
 Arg Gln Arg Ser Gly Leu Cys Gln Val Phe Ala Asp Ala Thr Pro Thr
 690 695 700
 Gly Trp Gly Leu Ala Ile Gly His Gln Arg Met Ala Gly Thr Phe Leu
 705 710 715 720
 Ala Pro Leu Pro Ile His Thr Ala Glu Leu Leu Ala Ala Cys Phe Ala
 725 730 735
 Arg Ser Arg Ser Gly Ala Lys Leu Ile Gly Thr Asp Asn Ser Val Val
 740 745 750

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Leu Ser Arg Lys Tyr Thr Ser Phe Pro Trp Leu Leu Gly Cys Ala Ala
 755 760 765
 Asn Trp Ile Leu Arg Gly Thr Ser Phe Val Tyr Val Pro Ser Ala Leu
 770 775 780
 Asn Pro Ala Asp Asp Pro Ser Arg Gly Arg Leu Gly Leu Tyr Arg Pro
 785 790 795 800
 Leu Leu His Leu Pro Phe Arg Pro Thr Thr Gly Arg Thr Ser Leu Tyr
 805 810 815
 Ala Val Ser Pro Tyr Val Pro Ser His Leu Pro Asp Arg Val His Phe
 820 825 830
 Ala Ser Pro Leu His Val Ala Trp Arg Pro Pro
 835 840

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:3: (Figure 5)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
- (A) LENGTH: 400 amino acids
 - (B) TYPE: amino acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:3:

Met Gly Gly Trp Ser Ser Lys Pro Arg Gln Gly Met Gly Thr Asn Leu
 1 5 10 15
 Ala Val Pro Asn Pro Leu Gly Phe Phe Pro Asp His Gln Leu Asp Pro
 20 25 30
 Ala Phe Gly Ala Asn Ser Asn Asn Pro Asp Trp Asp Phe Asn Pro Asn
 35 40 45
 Lys Asp His Trp Pro Glu Ala Asn Gln Val Gly Val Gly Ala Phe Gly
 50 55 60
 Pro Gly Phe Thr Pro Pro His Gly Gly Leu Leu Gly Gly Ser Pro Gln
 65 70 75 80
 Ala Gln Gly Ile Leu Thr Thr Val Pro Ala Ala Pro Pro Pro Ala Ser
 85 90 95
 Thr Asn Arg Gln Ser Gly Arg Gln Pro Thr Pro Ile Ser Pro Pro Leu
 100 105 110
 Arg Asp Ser His Pro Gln Ala Thr Gln Trp Asn Ser Thr Thr Phe His
 115 120 125
 Gln Ala Leu Leu Asp Pro Arg Val Arg Gly Leu Tyr Phe Pro Ala Gly
 130 135 140

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Gly Ser Ser Ser Gly Thr Val Asn Pro Val Pro Thr Thr Ala Ser Pro
145          150          155          160
Ile Ser Ser Ile Phe Ser Arg Thr Gly Asp Pro Ala Pro Asn Met Glu
          165          170          175
Asn Thr Thr Ser Gly Phe Leu Gly Pro Leu Leu Val Leu Gln Ala Gly
          180          185          190
Phe Phe Ser Leu Thr Arg Ile Leu Thr Ile Pro Gln Ser Leu Asp Ser
          195          200          205
Trp Trp Thr Ser Leu Asn Phe Leu Gly Gly Ala Pro Thr Cys Pro Gly
          210          215          220
Gln Asn Ser Gln Ser Pro Thr Ser Asn His Ser Pro Thr Ser Cys Pro
          225          230          235          240
Pro Ile Cys Pro Gly Tyr Arg Trp Asn Cys Leu Arg Arg Phe Ile Ile
          245          250          255
Phe Leu Phe Ile Leu Leu Leu Cys Leu Ile Phe Leu Leu Val Leu Leu
          260          265          270
Asp Tyr Gln Gly Met Leu Pro Val Cys Pro Leu Leu Pro Gly Thr Ser
          275          280          285
Thr Thr Ser Thr Gly Pro Cys Lys Thr Cys Thr Thr Pro Ala Gln Gly
          290          295          300
Asn Ser Thr Phe Pro Ser Cys Cys Cys Thr Lys Pro Ser Asp Gly Asn
          305          310          315          320
Cys Thr Cys Ile Pro Ile Pro Ser Ser Trp Ala Phe Ala Arg Phe Leu
          325          330          335
Trp Glu Trp Ala Ser Val Arg Phe Ser Trp Leu Ser Leu Val Pro
          340          345          350
Phe Val Gln Trp Phe Val Gly Leu Ser Pro Thr Val Trp Leu Ser Val
          355          360          365
Ile Trp Met Met Trp Tyr Trp Gly Arg Ser Leu Tyr Asn Ile Leu Ser
          370          375          380
Pro Phe Leu Pro Leu Leu Pro Ile Phe Phe Cys Leu Trp Val Tyr Ile
          385          390          395          400

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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:4: (Figure 6)

- (1) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
- (A) LENGTH: 212 amino acids
 - (B) TYPE: amino acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

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(x1) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:4:

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Met Gln Leu Phe Leu Leu Cys Leu Ile Ile Ser Cys Ser Cys Pro Thr
1           5           10           15
Val Gln Ala Ser Lys Leu Cys Leu Gly Trp Leu Trp Asp Met Asp Ile
20           25           30
Asp Pro Tyr Lys Glu Phe Gly Ala Ser Ala Glu Leu Leu Ser Phe Leu
35           40           45
Pro Ser Asp Phe Phe Pro Ser Ile Arg Asp Leu Leu Asp Thr Ala Ser
50           55           60
Ala Leu Tyr Arg Glu Ala Leu Glu Ser Pro Glu His Cys Ser Pro His
65           70           75           80
His Thr Ala Leu Arg Gln Ala Ile Leu Cys Trp Gly Glu Leu Met Asn
85           90           95
Leu Ala Thr Trp Val Gly Ser Asn Leu Glu Asp Pro Ala Ser Arg Glu
100          105          110
Leu Val Val Ser Tyr Val Asn Val Asn Met Gly Leu Lys Leu Arg Gln
115          120          125
Ile Leu Trp Phe His Ile Ser Cys Leu Thr Phe Gly Arg Glu Thr Val
130          135          140
Leu Glu Tyr Leu Val Ser Phe Gly Val Trp Ile Arg Thr Pro Thr Ala
145          150          155          160
Tyr Arg Pro Pro Asn Ala Pro Ile Leu Ser Thr Leu Pro Glu Thr Thr
165          170          175
Val Val Arg Arg Arg Gly Arg Ser Pro Arg Arg Arg Thr Pro Ser Pro
180          185          190
Arg Arg Arg Arg Ser Gln Ser Pro Arg Arg Arg Arg Ser Gln Ser Arg
195          200          205
Glu Ser Gln Arg
210

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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:5: (Figure 7)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
- (A) LENGTH: 154 amino acids
 - (B) TYPE: amino acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

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(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:5:

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Met Ala Ala Arg Val Cys Cys Gln Leu Asp Pro Ala Arg Asp Val Leu
1      5      10      15
Cys Leu Arg Pro Val Gly Ala Glu Ser Arg Gly Arg Pro Val Ser Gly
20      25      30
Pro Phe Gly Ala Leu Pro Ser Pro Ser Ser Ser Ala Val Pro Ala Asp
35      40      45
His Gly Ala His Leu Ser Leu Arg Gly Leu Pro Val Cys Ala Phe Ser
50      55      60
Ser Ala Gly Pro Cys Ala Leu Arg Phe Thr Ser Ala Arg Arg Met Glu
65      70      75      80
Thr Thr Val Asn Ala Arg Gln Val Leu Pro Lys Val Leu Tyr Lys Arg
85      90      95
Thr Leu Gly Leu Ser Ala Met Ser Thr Thr Asp Leu Glu Ala Tyr Phe
100     105     110
Lys Asp Cys Val Phe Lys Asp Trp Glu Glu Leu Gly Glu Glu Ile Arg
115     120     125
Leu Lys Ile Tyr Val Leu Gly Gly Cys Arg His Lys Leu Val Cys Ser
130     135     140
Pro Ala Pro Cys Asn Phe Phe Ser Ser Ala
145     150

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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:6: (Figure 8)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
- (A) LENGTH: 36 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:6:

ATAAGCTTAT GCCCCTATCT TATCAACACT TCCGGA

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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:7: (Figure 9)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
- (A) LENGTH: 25 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

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(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:7:

GAGTCTAGAC TCTGCGGTAT TGTGA

25

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:8: (Figure 10)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
 - (A) LENGTH: 25 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:8:

GAGTCTAGAC TCGTGGTGGA CTTCT

25

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:9: (Figure 11)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
 - (A) LENGTH: 32 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:9:

TGAGAATTCT CACGGTGGTC TCCATGCGAC GT

32

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:10: (Figure 12)

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
 - (A) LENGTH: 16 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:10:

TTTGTTTACG TCCCGT

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- (2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO:11: (Figure 13)
- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
 - (A) LENGTH: 36 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: single
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(x1) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO:11:

ATAAGCTTAT GCCCCTATCT TATCAACACT TCCGGA

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What is claimed is:

1. An isolated strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) and deposited under Accession Nos. P97121501, P97121502 and P97121503 with the European Collection of Cell Culture on 15th December 1997.
2. An isolated nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine.
3. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 2, wherein the polypeptide is being encoded by nucleotides 155 through 835 of the nucleic acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 1.
4. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 3, comprising nucleotides "ACG" in position 551-553.
5. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 2, wherein the nucleic acid is DNA.
6. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 2, wherein the nucleic acid is RNA.
7. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 5, wherein the nucleic acid is cDNA.
8. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 5, wherein the nucleic acid is genomic DNA.

9. The isolated nucleic acid of claim 2, wherein the polypeptide has an amino acid sequence substantially identical to amino acid residues 174 through 400 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.
10. An isolated nucleic acid which encodes a peptide, wherein the peptide is encoded by a nucleic acid molecule comprising nucleotides 527 through 595 of SEQ. I.D. No. 1.
11. An isolated nucleic acid which encodes a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.
12. A vector comprising an isolated nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine and operatively linked to a promoter of RNA transcription.
13. A vector comprising an isolated nucleic acid encoding a peptide, wherein the peptide is encoded by a nucleic acid molecule comprising nucleotides 527 through 595 of SEQ. I.D. No. 1.
14. The vector of claim 12 or 13, wherein the vector comprises viral DNA.
15. A host vector system for the production of a polypeptide which comprises the vector of claim 12 in a suitable host.
16. A host vector system for the production of a peptide which

comprises the vector of claim 13 in a suitable host.

17. A method of producing a polypeptide, which comprises growing the host vector system of claim 15 under suitable conditions permitting production of the polypeptide and recovering the polypeptide so produced.
18. A method of producing a peptide, which comprises growing the host vector system of claim 16 under suitable conditions permitting production of the polypeptide and recovering the polypeptide so produced.
19. A method of obtaining a polypeptide in purified form which comprises:
 - (a) introducing the vector of claim 12 into a suitable host cell;
 - (b) culturing the resulting host cell so as to produce the polypeptide;
 - (c) recovering the polypeptide produced into step (b); and
 - (d) purifying the polypeptide so recovered.
20. A method of obtaining a peptide in purified form which comprises:
 - (a) introducing the vector of claim 13 into a suitable host cell;
 - (b) culturing the resulting host cell so as to produce the polypeptide;
 - (c) recovering the polypeptide produced into step (b); and
 - (d) purifying the polypeptide so recovered.
21. A purified polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide

is a threonine rather than a methionine.

22. A purified polypeptide obtained from the method of claim 19.
23. A purified peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No.: 3.
24. A purified polypeptide obtained from the method of claim 20
25. An oligonucleotide of at least 15 nucleotides capable of specifically hybridizing with a unique sequence of nucleotides within a nucleic acid which encodes a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine, without hybridizing to any sequence of nucleotides within a nucleic acid which encodes the major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus.
26. The oligonucleotide of claim 25 comprising nucleotides 527 through 595 of SEQ. I.D. No. 1.
27. A method of obtaining antibodies to a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and not to the major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus, comprising:
 - (a) obtaining the polypeptide in a purified form;
 - (b) immunizing an organism capable of producing antibodies

- against the purified polypeptide;
- (c) collecting the produced antibodies;
 - (d) combining the produced antibodies and the purified polypeptide under conditions to form a complex; and
 - (e) determining which produced antibodies form a complex with the purified polypeptide so as to obtain antibodies to the polypeptide.
28. The method of claim 27, wherein the polypeptide is being encoded by nucleotides 155 through 835 of the nucleic acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 1.
29. The method of claim 27, wherein the polypeptide has an amino acid sequence substantially identical to amino acid residues 174 through 400 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.
30. The method of claim 27, wherein the organism comprises a rabbit or a mouse.
31. A method of obtaining antibodies to a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3, comprising:
- (a) obtaining the peptide in a purified form;
 - (b) immunizing an organism capable of producing antibodies against the purified peptide;
 - (c) collecting the produced antibodies;
 - (d) combining the produced antibodies and the purified peptide under conditions to form a complex; and
 - (e) determining which produced antibodies form a complex with the purified peptide so as to obtain antibodies to the peptide.
32. The method of claim 31, wherein the organism comprises a

rabbit or a mouse.

33. The antibodies obtained in claim 27 or 31.
34. Monoclonal antibodies of the antibodies of claim 33.
35. Antibodies capable of detecting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and incapable of detecting the major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus.
36. Antibodies capable of detecting a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3.
37. Use of a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether a subject is infected with a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine), wherein such determination comprises:
 - (a) obtaining an appropriate nucleic acid sample from the subject; and
 - (b) determining whether the nucleic acid sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a

strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine.

38. The use of claim 37, wherein the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b) comprises:
- (i) contacting the mRNA with the oligonucleotide of claim 25 under conditions permitting binding of the mRNA to the oligonucleotide so as to form a complex;
 - (ii) isolating the complex so formed; and
 - (iii) identifying the mRNA in the isolated complex so as to thereby determine whether the mRNA is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.
39. The use of claim 37, wherein the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b) comprises:

- (i) translating the mRNA under suitable conditions to obtain an amino acid sequence; and
 - (ii) comparing the amino acid sequence of step (i) with the amino acid sequence of the isolated nucleic acid of claim 9 so as to thereby determine whether the nucleic acid sample is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.
40. The use of claim 37, wherein the determining of step (b) comprises:
- (i) amplifying the nucleic acid present in the sample of step (a); and
 - (ii) detecting the presence of polypeptide in the resulting amplified nucleic acid.
41. Use of an antibody that recognizes a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether a subject is infected with a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine), wherein such determination comprises:
- (a) obtaining an appropriate sample from the subject; and
 - (b) determining whether the sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine by contacting the sample under appropriate conditions to

bind to the antibodies of claim 35 or 36 so as to determine whether a subject is infected.

42. The use of claim 37, 38 or 41, wherein the isolated nucleic acid, oligonucleotide or antibody is labeled with a detectable marker.
43. The use the claim 42, wherein the detectable marker is a radioactive isotope, a fluorophor or an enzyme.
44. The use of claim 37, wherein the sample comprises blood, tissue or sera.
45. Use of a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether a subject has a predisposition for hepatocellular carcinoma, which comprises:
 - (a) obtaining an appropriate nucleic acid sample from the subject; and
 - (b) determining whether the nucleic acid sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine.
46. The use of claim 45, wherein the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA

encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b), which comprises:

- (i) contacting the mRNA with the oligonucleotide of claim 25 under conditions permitting binding of the mRNA to the oligonucleotide so as to form a complex;
- (ii) isolating the complex so formed; and
- (iii) identifying the mRNA in the isolated complex so as to thereby determine whether the mRNA is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.

47. The use of claim 45, wherein the nucleic acid sample in step (a) comprises mRNA corresponding to the transcript of DNA encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, and wherein the determining of step (b) comprises:

- (i) translating the mRNA under suitable conditions to obtain an amino acid sequence; and
- (ii) comparing the amino acid sequence of step (i) with the amino acid sequence of the isolated nucleic acid of claim 9 so as to thereby determine whether the nucleic acid sample is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid which encodes the polypeptide.

48. The use of claim 45, wherein the determining of step (b)

comprises:

- (i) amplifying the nucleic acid present in the sample of step (a); and
- (ii) detecting the presence of polypeptide in the resulting amplified nucleic acid.

49. Use of an antibody that recognizes a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine for determining whether the subject has a predisposition for hepatocellular carcinoma, wherein such determination comprises:

- (a) obtaining an appropriate sample from the subject; and
- (b) determining whether the sample from step (a) is, or is derived from, a nucleic acid encoding a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine by contacting the sample under appropriate conditions to bind to the antibodies of claim 35 or 36 so as to determine whether the subject has a predisposition for hepatocellular carcinoma.

50. The use of claim 46, 47 or 49, wherein the isolated nucleic acid, oligonucleotide or antibody is labeled with a detectable marker.

51. The use of claim 50, wherein the detectable marker is a radioactive isotope, a fluorophor or an enzyme.
52. The use of claim 45, wherein the sample comprises blood, tissue or sera.
53. A method for identifying a chemical compound for use in the manufacture of a medicament capable of treating infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) wherein the method for identifying the chemical compound comprises:
 - (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound;
 - (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and
 - (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of treating infection by the viral strain.
54. A method for identifying a chemical compound for use in the manufacture of a medicament capable of preventing infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine), wherein the method for identifying the chemical compound comprises:
 - (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such

polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound;

- (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and
- (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of preventing infection by the viral strain.

55. A method for identifying a chemical compound for use in the manufacture of a medicament capable of treating hepatocellular carcinoma wherein the method for identifying the chemical compound comprises:

- (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound;
- (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and.
- (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of treating hepatocellular carcinoma.

56. A method for identifying a chemical compound for use in the manufacture of a medicament capable of preventing hepatocellular carcinoma, wherein the method for identifying

the chemical compound comprises:

- (a) contacting a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, with the chemical compound under conditions permitting binding between the polypeptide and the chemical compound;
 - (b) detecting specific binding of the chemical compound to the polypeptide; and
 - (c) determining whether the chemical compound inhibits the polypeptide so as to identify a chemical compound which is capable of preventing infection by the viral strain.
57. A composition comprising a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine, the amounts of such polypeptide being effective to stimulate or enhance antibody production in a subject, and a pharmaceutically acceptable.
58. A composition comprising a peptide, wherein the peptide has an amino acid sequence comprising amino acid residues 298 through 320 of the amino acid sequence designated SEQ. I.D. No. 3., the amounts of such peptide being effective to stimulate or enhance antibody production in a subject, and a pharmaceutically acceptable.
59. A composition comprising the chemical compound identified by the method of claim 55 in an amount effective to treat

hepatocellular carcinoma and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.

60. A composition comprising the chemical compound identified by the method of claim 56 in an amount effective to prevent hepatocellular carcinoma and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.
61. A composition comprising the chemical compound identified by the method of claim 53 in an amount effective to treat a strain of hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.
62. A composition comprising the chemical compound identified by the method of claim 54 in an amount effective to prevent infection by a strain of hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) and a pharmaceutically effective carrier.
63. Use of the composition of claim 57 or 58 for treating a subject infected with a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine).
64. Use of the composition of claim 61 treating a subject infected with a strain of hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine).
65. Use of the composition of claim 57 or 58 for preventing infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) in a subject.

66. Use of the composition of claim 62 for preventing infection by a strain of Hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) in a subject.
67. Use of the composition of claim 57 or 58 for treating a subject with hepatocellular carcinoma.
68. Use of the composition of claim 59 for treating a subject with hepatocellular carcinoma.
69. Use of the composition of claim 57 or 59 for preventing hepatocellular carcinoma in a subject.
70. Use of the composition of claim 60 for preventing hepatocellular carcinoma in a subject.
71. A method of screening bodily fluids from a subject for a strain of hepatitis B virus designated Human Hepatitis B Virus Surface Antigen-'S'-133 Oon Strain (Methionine to Threonine) which comprises:
 - (a) obtaining an appropriate sample of bodily fluid from the subject;
 - (b) determining the presence of a polypeptide which is a mutant major surface antigen of a strain of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the amino acid sequence of a major surface antigen of a wildtype hepatitis B virus in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine, rather than a methionine in the sample of step (a) so as to screen the sample for the strain.
72. The method of claim 71, wherein the bodily fluid comprises blood, sera, or a nucleic acid sample of blood or sera.

73. A hepatitis vaccine, comprising a mutant form of the surface antigen of hepatitis B virus, such polypeptide having an amino acid sequence which differs from the wildtype amino acid sequence of the major surface antigen of hepatitis B in that the amino acid at position number 133 of such polypeptide is a threonine rather than a methionine.
74. The vaccine of claim 73, further comprising an adjuvant.