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(57) Abstract

The present invention relates generally to an isolated Hepatitis B virus (HBV) with a surface component exhibiting an altered immunological profile relative to a reference HBV. A reference HBV is considered herein to comprise a composite or consensus nucleotide or amino acid sequence from HBV genotypes A through F. The isolated HBV of the present invention is considered herein to be an HBV variant relative to the reference HBV. The altered immunological profile renders the HBV variants of the present invention less susceptible to vaccines directed to the surface component. The HBV variants of the present invention generally arise from selective pressure following one or both of anti–HBV chemical therapy and in particular chemical therapy aimed at disrupting HBV polymerase activity or function and/or following immune pressure directed to the surface component. Immune pressure may result from natural exposure to HBV or following vaccination with an avirulent or attenuated HBV or with a component of an HBV. The present invention further provides a recombinant polypeptide and derivatives and chemical equivalents thereof corresponding to the surface component of the HBV variants. The HBV variants and recombinant polypeptides and their derivatives and chemical equivalents of the present invention are useful in biological compositions capable of inducing a neutralizing immune response to the HBV variant.