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Perspective

Antivirals for the Prevention and Treatment of Emerging Viral Zoonoses

Anna Schmidt*

Department of Microbiology, University of Freiburg, Baden Wurttemberg, Germany

DESCRIPTION

Emerging viral zoonoses diseases that spill over from animals to humans pose significant public health threats globally. Notable examples include Ebola, Zika, and the recent SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The rapid emergence of these viruses underscores the necessity for effective antiviral strategies to prevent and treat infections in humans. As we face the growing challenge of zoonotic diseases, developing antivirals specifically targeting these emerging pathogens is important for safeguarding public health. Zoonotic diseases arise when viruses adapted to animal hosts cross species barriers, often facilitated by ecological changes, human behaviours, and increased interactions between wildlife and human populations. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 60% of all infectious diseases in humans are zoonotic, highlighting their importance in public health.

Zoonotic viruses can cause severe illness, often with high mortality rates, as seen in outbreaks of Ebola virus disease. The unpredictability of emerging viruses necessitates a proactive approach to antiviral development, emphasizing the need for broad-spectrum antiviral agents that can be rapidly deployed in response to new threats. Zoonotic viruses belong to various families, including flaviviruses, coronaviruses, and paramyxoviruses. The genetic diversity among these viruses complicates the identification of universal antiviral targets. Many emerging viruses are not well understood, with limited pre-existing data on their biology, pathogenesis, and potential vulnerabilities. This knowledge gap can hinder the development of effective therapeutics. The development and approval of new antivirals is a lengthy process, often taking years to complete. In the face of rapid outbreaks, this delay can result in missed opportunities to mitigate viral spread. The financial incentives for developing antivirals for zoonotic diseases may be limited compared to those for more established diseases. The uncertainty associated with potential outbreaks can deter investment in antiviral research.

Despite these challenges, significant progress is being made in the development of antivirals for emerging viral zoonoses. The development of broad-spectrum antiviral agents capable of targeting multiple viral families can provide a robust response to emerging zoonotic threats. Drugs such as favipiravir and remdesivir, which target viral polymerases, have shown efficacy against various RNA viruses, including ebola and coronaviruses. Monoclonal Antibodies (mAbs) represent a targeted therapeutic approach against specific viral pathogens. For example, mAbs developed against Ebola virus have been successfully used in outbreak settings, providing both prophylactic and therapeutic benefits. Their rapid development and ability to neutralize specific viral proteins make mAbs a valuable tool in managing emerging zoonoses. Targeting host factors that viruses exploit for replication presents a novel strategy in antiviral development. By inhibiting these host pathways, researchers aim to create broad-spectrum therapies that can effectively impede various viral infections. This approach minimizes the likelihood of resistance developing, as it targets conserved cellular mechanisms rather than viral proteins. While not strictly antivirals, vaccines play a vital role in preventing zoonotic diseases. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines illustrates the potential for accelerated vaccine responses to emerging viral threats. Investing in vaccine research for high-risk zoonotic pathogens can significantly reduce the incidence of zoonotic infections in human populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of rapid response mechanisms in public health. The ability to quickly develop and deploy antivirals and vaccines in response to emerging threats is essential for mitigating the impact of zoonotic diseases. Collaborative efforts among governments, public health organizations, and the pharmaceutical industry are necessary to streamline research and development processes. Establishing platforms for rapid antiviral screening and testing can facilitate quicker responses to newly identified viruses. Integrating genomic surveillance systems to monitor emerging zoonotic pathogens allows for timely detection and identification of potential threats, enabling preemptive antiviral development.

To effectively combat emerging viral zoonoses, a coordinated global response is essential. This includes investing in research and development for antiviral therapies, improving surveillance systems, and fostering collaboration among scientists, public health officials, and policymakers. Moreover, addressing the socio-economic factors contributing to zoonotic spillover such as habitat destruction and wildlife trade can reduce the incidence

Correspondence to: Anna Schmidt, Department of Microbiology, University of Freiburg, Baden Wurttemberg, Germany, E-mail: anna.schmidt@gmail.com

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of these diseases. A one health approach, which recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, is necessary for preventing future outbreaks.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of viral zoonoses presents a significant challenge to global health, necessitating the development of effective antivirals for prevention and treatment. While challenges abound, ongoing research and innovative approaches are paving the way for new antiviral strategies. By focusing on broad spectrum agents, monoclonal antibodies, host targeted therapies, and rapid response mechanisms, we can enhance our ability to respond to emerging viral threats. Investing in antiviral development, strengthening surveillance systems, and fostering global collaboration will be key to preventing and managing zoonotic diseases. As we confront the complexities of emerging viral pathogens, a proactive and integrated approach is essential to safeguarding public health and mitigating the risks associated with zoonotic infections. The future of antiviral therapy holds promise, and with continued innovation, we can better prepare for the next wave of viral challenges.