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A sulfonamide sialoside analog for targeting Siglec-8 and -F on immune cells

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Abstract

The Siglec family of cell surface receptors have emerged as attractive targets for cell directed therapies due to their restricted expression on immune cells, endocytic properties and ability to modulate receptor signaling. Human Siglec-8, for instance has been identified as a therapeutic target for the treatment of eosinophil and mast cell disorders. A promising strategy to target Siglecs involves the use of liposomal nanoparticles with multivalent display of Siglec ligands. A key challenge for this approach is the identification of a high affinity ligand for the target Siglec. Here we report the development of a ligand of Siglec-8 and its closest murine functional ortholog Siglec-F that is capable of targeting liposomes to cells expressing Siglec-8 or -F. A glycan microarray library of synthetic 9-*N*-sulfonyl sialoside analogs was screened to identify potential lead compounds. The best ligand, 9-*N*-(2-naphthyl-sulfonyl)-Neu5Ac α 2-3-[6-*O*-sulfo]-Gal β 1-4GlcNAc (6'-*O*-sulfo^{NSA}Neu5Ac) combined the lead 2-naphthyl sulfonyl C-9 substituent with the preferred sulfated scaffold. The ligand 6'-*O*-sulfo^{NSA}Neu5Ac was conjugated to lipids for display on liposomes to evaluate targeted delivery to cells. Targeted liposomes showed strong *in*

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Supporting Information.

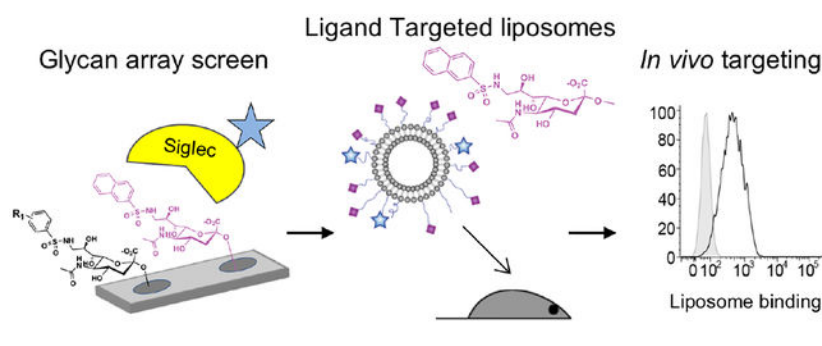
The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website. Experimental procedures, characterization data, and NMR spectra for representative compounds, including Schemes S1-S3, and Figures S1-S8 (PDF)

Dr. Bochner receives remuneration for serving on the scientific advisory board of Allakos, Inc.; and owns stock in Allakos. He receives publication-related royalty payments from Elsevier and Up-ToDate®. He is a co-inventor on existing Siglec-8-related patents and thus may be entitled to a share of royalties received by Johns Hopkins University during development and potential sales of such products. Dr. Bochner is also a co-founder of Allakos, which makes him subject to certain restrictions under University policy. The terms of this arrangement are being managed by the Johns Hopkins University and Northwestern University in accordance with their conflict of interest policies.

All other authors declare no competing financial interests.

in vitro binding/uptake and selectivity to cells expressing Siglec-8 or -F, and when administered to mice, exhibit *in vivo* targeting to Siglec-F⁺ eosinophils.

Graphical Abstract



The Sialic acid-binding immunoglobulin-type lectins (Siglecs) are a family of cell surface receptors with restricted expression on one or a few immune cell types.^{1–2} Due to their expression patterns, endocytic properties, and ability to modulate receptor signaling, Siglecs have emerged as attractive targets for cell directed therapies.^{3–16} Examples include targeting Siglec-1 on macrophages,^{6–7} Siglec-2 on B cells,^{8–10} Siglec-3 on mast cells,^{11–13} Siglec-9 on T cells,¹⁴ and Siglec-15 on osteoclasts.^{15, 17} Furthermore, Siglec-8 has been identified as a therapeutic target for the treatment of eosinophil and mast cell disorders, with antibodies targeting Siglec-8 in clinical trials.^{18–22} A promising alternative to antibodies to target Siglecs involves use of a multivalent display of Siglec ligands presented on nanoparticles or polymers.³ Indeed, ligand mediated targeting of Siglecs has been used to deliver diagnostic or therapeutic agents to a variety of immune cells.^{6, 23–28} A key challenge for this strategy is the identification of selective, high affinity ligands for the target Siglec.

Natural sialylated glycan ligands of Siglecs have variable selectivity and generally low monovalent affinity (0.1–3 mM). Glycan ligands gain avidity through multivalent interactions.^{29–31} These glycan scaffolds, however, can serve as starting points to develop more optimal synthetic ligands. It has been well established that modifying positions on sialic acid can modulate the selectivity and affinity of Siglec ligands.³² A productive strategy to identify ligands has involved synthesizing and screening libraries of glycan analogs.^{33–39} While high affinity ligands have been developed for many Siglecs,^{3, 40–41} suitable ligands are currently unavailable for Siglec-8 or its closest murine functional ortholog Siglec-F, the latter also being prominently expressed on eosinophils. In view of the therapeutic potential of targeting eosinophils and mast cells we set out to develop selective ligands for Siglec-8 and -F. We describe here a ligand of Siglec-8 and -F capable of targeting Siglec-8 and -F positive cells, and *in vivo* targeting of murine eosinophils.

While initial attempts to identify ligands for Siglec-8 and -F by screening established sialoside analog libraries with amide-linked substituents at C-5/-9 yielded no ‘hits’, we obtained promising evidence of binding of Siglec-8 and -F to a focused panel of C-9 sulfonamide analogs (**1-17** α 2–3, Scheme 1, Figure 1 and S2). Based on these results we chemoenzymatically synthesized an expanded library of sulfonamide-based C-9 modified

sialoside analogs (**1-78** α 2-3; **79-156** α 2-6) (Scheme 1). Although, Siglec-8 and -F are known to bind 6'-*O*-sulfo Neu5Ac α 2-3Gal β 1-4GlcNAc⁴² and 6'-*O*-sulfo Sialyl-Lewis-X⁴³ we constructed the library based off C-9 modification of the synthetically more accessible non-sulfated Neu5Ac α 2-3- and Neu5Ac α 2-6-Gal β 1-4GlcNAc scaffolds. Briefly, the 9-NH₂ trisaccharides (**C**) and (**D**) were synthesized and purified on ~50 mg scales by reacting CMP-9-NH₂-Neu5Ac⁴⁴ (**A**) with Gal β 1-4GlcNAc-ethyl azide⁴⁵ (**B**) using either *P. multocida* α 2,3-sialyltransferase⁴⁶ or *P. damsela* α 2,6-sialyltransferase⁴⁷, respectively. The sulfonamide analogs were synthesized from **C** and **D** in parallel two-step one pot reactions (0.5 mg scale) by reacting the 9-NH₂ groups with a panel of substituted sulfonyl chlorides (~2 eq. RSO₂Cl, see Table S1). Completed reactions (TLC) were placed in a vacuum desiccator to remove the methanol. After quenching excess RSO₂Cl with H₂O (pH 9-10), the ethyl azide aglycones were reduced using trimethyl phosphine (PMe₃, 2 eq.) to generate an ethyl amine linker. The reactions were concentrated under reduced pressure then the products were diluted to 0.1 mM (H₂O) without further purification for printing on the glycan microarray. In total, the library consists of 156 sulfonamide sialoside analogs. The glycans were printed directly on amine-reactive *N*-hydroxy succinimide (NHS)-activated glass slides (Schott Nexterion® Slide-H).³³ Neu5Ac α 2-3Gal β 1-4GlcNAc (**C1**) which is the parent scaffold used to construct the analog library, and 6'-*O*-sulfo Neu5Ac α 2-3Gal β 1-4GlcNAc (**C2**) which is the known Siglec-8 and -F ligand were included as controls. The printed slides were washed to remove excess synthetic reagents.

The sulfonamide analog array (**1-156**) was screened against fluorescently labeled recombinant Siglec-8 COMP (Cartilage Oligomeric Matrix Protein)⁴⁸ or Fc and Siglec-F Fc chimeras to identify substituents that show increased binding compared to **C1** (Figures 1, S1, and S2). As expected, Siglec-8 and -F bound the 6'-*O* sulfated **C2** (down to 4 μ M) however neither bound **C1**. Binding of the Siglecs to the analogs was markedly different. Siglec-8 bound to only a few of the α 2-3 analogs while Siglec-F bound strongly to many (**1-78**, Figure 1 and S2). Each Siglec bound to only a few of the α 2,6 analogs (**79-156**, Figure S1 and S2). Siglec-8 showed robust binding to several ligands (**12**, **23**, **61**, **74**). We selected **12** as a lead hit since it showed strong binding down to 0.8 μ M. It comprises Neu5Ac modified at C-9 with a 2-naphthyl sulfonyl group (^{NSA}Neu5Ac, NSA = 2-naphthyl sulfonamide). To further optimize this hit we also synthesized **158** (^{NSA}Neu5Ac α 2-3[6SO₄]Gal β 1-4GlcNAc, 6'-*O*-sulfo NSA^{NSA}Neu5Ac), which combines the ^{NSA}Neu5Ac with the preferred scaffold **C2** (Scheme S1).

We next used a cell binding assay to evaluate if liposomes displaying ligands **C2**, **12**, or **158** could bind Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells expressing Siglec-8 or -F (Figure 2 and S3).⁴⁹ Accordingly, ligands **C2**, **12**, and **158** were synthesized, purified then coupled to NHS activated PEGylated lipid to generate the conjugates **159-161** (Scheme S1-S3). 'Targeted' liposomes containing these glyco-PEG-lipid conjugates (2 mol%) and fluorescent (Alexa Fluor® 647) lipids were formulated as described in the supporting information. Fluorescent 'non-targeted' liposomes without Siglec ligand were used as a control. Siglec-8 and -F expressing CHO cells were incubated with targeted (**159-161**) or non-targeted liposomes for one hour, washed then analyzed for binding of fluorescent liposomes by flow cytometry (Figure 2 and S3). Liposomes formulated with either **160** or **161** strongly bound Siglec-F

expressing cells with slight preference for **161**. In contrast Siglec-8 expressing CHO cells only bound liposomes containing **161**. In contrast, liposomes displaying the natural ligand **C2** did not bind to either Siglec-8 or -F expressing CHO cell (Figure S3). This result demonstrates that both the C-9 2-naphthyl sulfonamide and 6'-O-sulfation of **161** are required to support binding of liposomes to Siglec-8 expressing cells. Accordingly, we proceeded to further evaluate liposomes decorated with **161**.

To assess the degree of specificity for Siglec-F/8, the targeted (**161**) liposomes were then assessed against a panel of cell lines expressing several human and murine Siglecs. Cells were incubated with fluorescent targeted (**161**, 2 mol%) or non-targeted liposomes and analyzed by flow cytometry as described above. For murine Siglecs, targeted liposomes (**161**) bound strongly to and were highly selective for Siglec-F (Figure 3). For the human Siglecs, the targeted liposomes showed strong binding to Siglec-8 and to a lesser extent to Siglec-3, -5, and -9. We further tested if targeted liposomes (**161**) bound bone marrow derived eosinophils (bmEos) generated from wild-type (Siglec F⁺/8⁻) and various transgenic (Siglec F⁺/8⁺, Siglec F⁻/8⁺, and Siglec F⁻/8⁻)⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ mice (Figure S5). In all cases the targeted liposomes bound to cells expressing Siglec-F and/or -8. However, no appreciable binding was observed with bmEos from Siglec F⁻/8⁻ mice. These results demonstrate that liposomes decorated with **161** selectively bind to Siglec-8 and -F expressing cells.

To evaluate targeting cells *in vivo*, we investigated whether Siglec-F expressing eosinophils in the spleen of normal mice could be labeled with fluorescent liposomes containing **161** (Figure 4A, S6, and S7). To this end, wild type (WT) mice were intravenously given fluorescent targeted (**161**) or non-targeted liposomes. After 1 and 24 hours, the spleens were harvested and the binding/uptake of liposomes by splenocytes was analyzed by flow cytometry. Populations of eosinophils (CD11b⁺CCR3⁺), B (CD19⁺) and T (CD4⁺/CD8⁺) cells were identified using antibodies to surface markers of each cell type (Figure 4A). Analysis of the gated cell populations revealed that the targeted liposomes strongly labeled Siglec-F⁺ eosinophils *in vivo*. There was no appreciable binding of targeted liposomes to any other cell type, however, a small amount of labeling of B cells was observed (Figure 4A and S6 and S7). Since Siglec-G is a B cell Siglec, and we had observed a slight but significant labeling of Siglec-G expressing CHO cells not evident in Figure 3, we compared *in vitro* labeling of splenocytes from WT and Siglec-G knockout (KO) mice (Figure S8), and found that the weak binding to B cells is Siglec-G mediated.

Lastly, previous work demonstrated that anti-Siglec-F and -8 antibodies deplete eosinophils *in vivo*.⁵²⁻⁵⁵ Moreover, glycan ligand mediated ligation of Siglec-8 was also observed to increase death of human eosinophils *in vitro*.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶ To determine if the targeted liposomes (**161**) impacted eosinophil survival *in vivo*, WT mice were intravenously injected with either anti-Siglec-F antibody⁵⁷ or liposomes containing 5 mol% **161** (Figure 4B). Blood eosinophil frequency was then determined 1- and 3-days post injection by flow cytometry. Eosinophils were identified as CD11b⁺CCR3⁺ and their frequency was determined by comparison to total live peripheral blood leukocytes (CD45⁺PI⁻). As seen by others,⁵² anti-Siglec-F potently decreased eosinophil frequencies at both time points. In contrast, there was no significant change observed in eosinophil frequencies in mice injected with ligand targeted liposomes relative to control mice. The results suggest that anti-Siglec-F may deplete

eosinophils *in vivo* by an immune dependent mechanism rather than ligation dependent signaling of Siglec-F. Furthermore, they suggest that targeted (**161**) liposomes could serve as a vehicle for delivery of agents to eosinophils without causing their depletion.

In summary, we have described the successful development of a sulfonamide-based glycan analog ligand, 6'-*O*-sulfo^{NSA}Neu5Ac that binds both Siglec-8 and -F. The sulfonamide substituent was identified by screening a glycan analog microarray against recombinant Siglec-8 and -F. The best ligand combined the C-9 sulfonamide with the preferred sulfated glycan scaffold (^{NSA}Neu5Ac₂₋₃[6-SO₄]Galβ1-4GlcNAc). Targeted liposomes showed strong binding to Siglec-F and -8 expressing cells. Evaluation of the targeted liposomes in mice showed effective *in vivo* targeting of eosinophils without significantly affecting eosinophil frequency. We envisage that incorporating this novel ligand of Siglec-8 and -F into nanoparticle delivery systems will allow targeting of eosinophils and modulation of immune cell responses.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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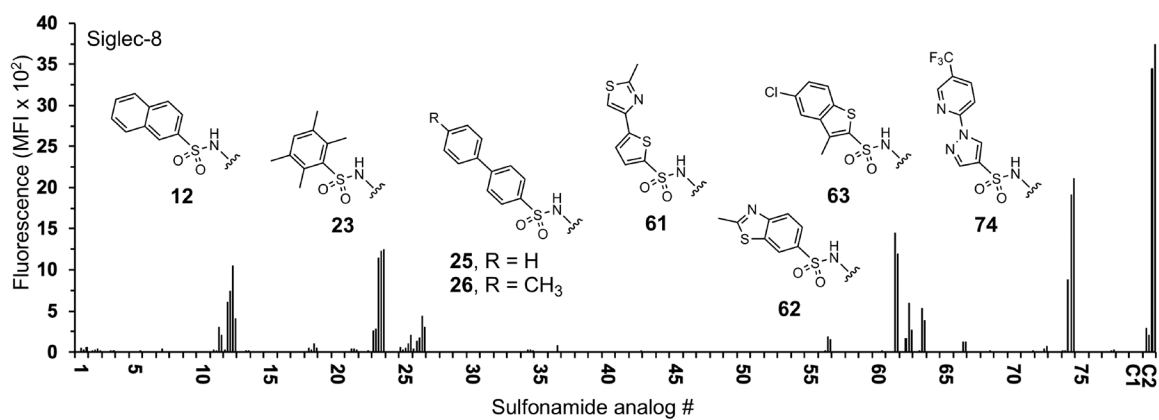


Figure 1.

Binding of recombinant Siglec-8 to the α 2,3-sialyl sulfonamide analog array. Arrays were screened to identify C-9 substituents of sialic acid that show increased binding compared to control glycan **C1**. Human Siglec-8 COMP (10 μ g/ml) was pre-complexed with anti-pentahistidine IgG-Alexa Fluor 488 (5 μ g/ml). The complexed proteins were overlaid onto the array. After incubation the slides were washed then scanned for fluorescence. Analogs **1-78** correspond to the groups listed in Table S1. Shown is mean fluorescence intensity of Siglec-8 binding. Each glycan was printed at 100, 20, 4, 0.8, and 0.16 μ M in 4 replicates each (increasing concentration from left to right). The controls are Neu5Ac α 2-3Gal β 1-4GlcNAc (**C1**) and 6'-*O*-sulfo Neu5Ac α 2-3Gal β 1-4GlcNAc (**C2**).

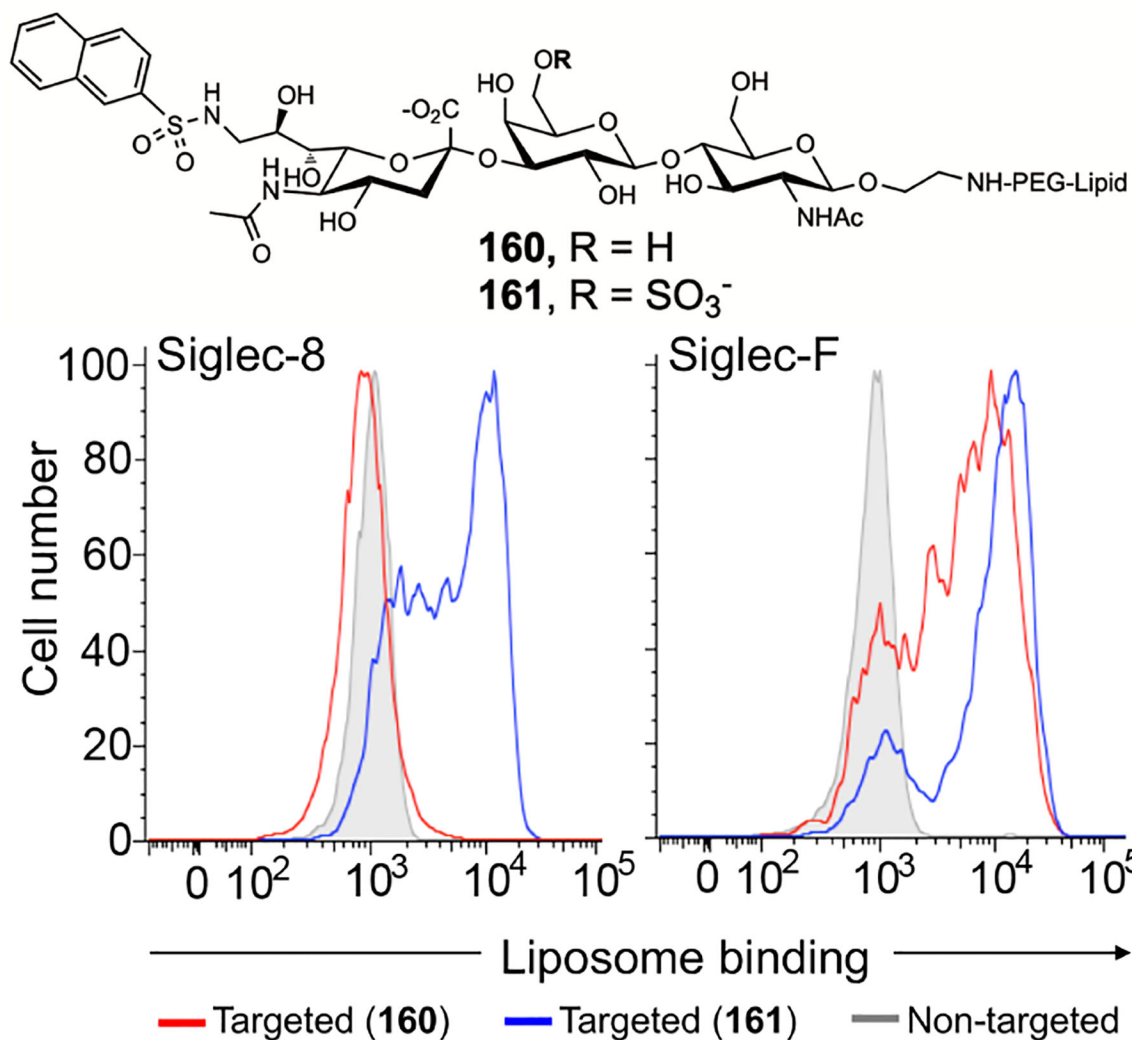


Figure 2.
In vitro binding/uptake of fluorescent targeted liposomes displaying **160** or **161** to CHO cells expressing Siglec-8 and -F. Cells were treated with 20 μ M fluorescent targeted liposomes (2 mol% of **160** or **161**) at 37 °C for 1 hour. Liposome binding was assessed by flow cytometry. Low binding to some cells reflects loss of Siglec expression (see Figure S4).

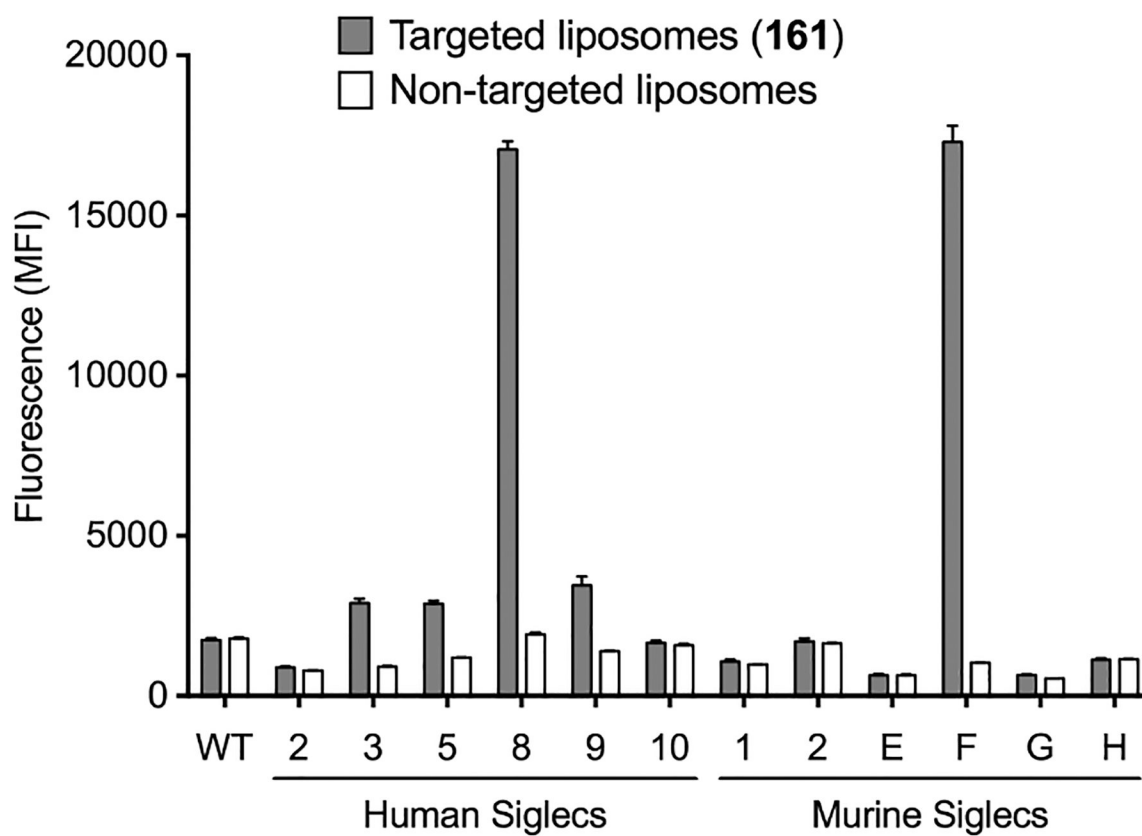


Figure 3. Flow cytometry analysis of *in vitro* binding/uptake of targeted (**161**, 2 mol%) or non-targeted (no ligand) fluorescent liposomes to cells expressing human and murine Siglecs. Binding is shown as mean fluorescence intensity (MFI) \pm SEM (n = 3).

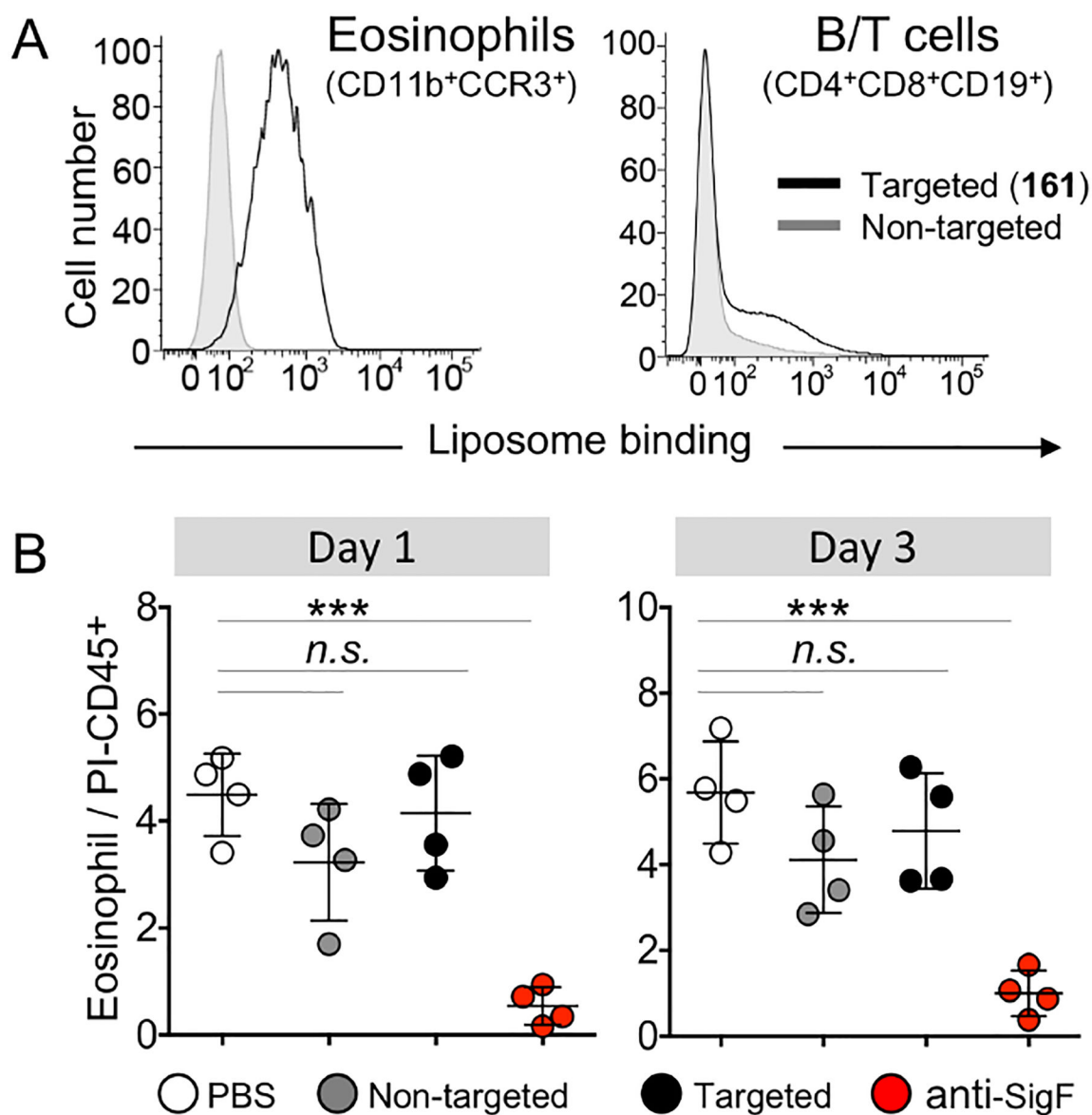
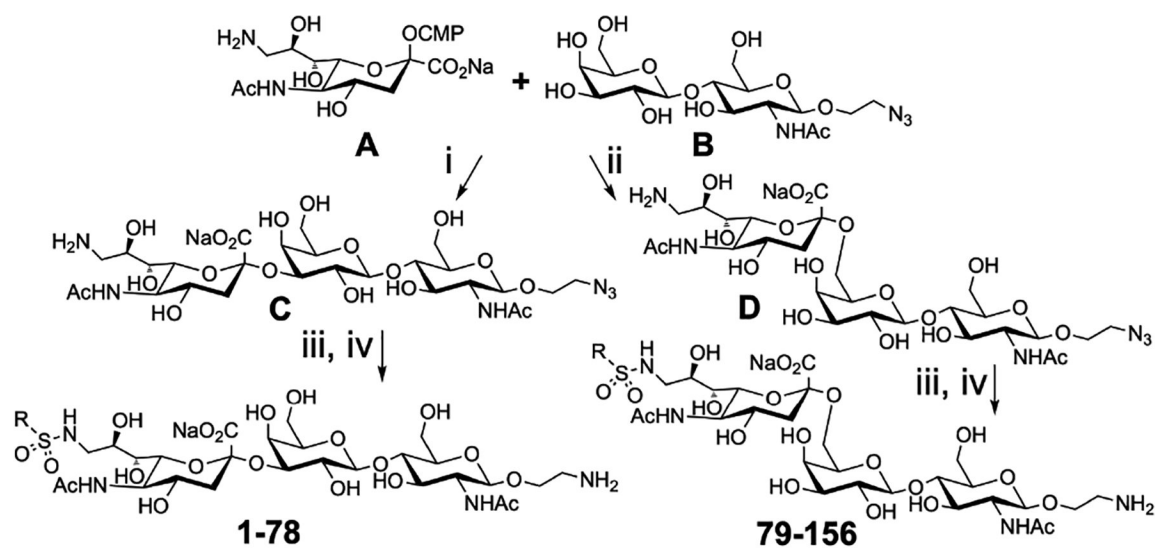


Figure 4.

(A) Targeted liposomes (**161**) bind eosinophils *in vivo*. WT mice were intravenously given either targeted (**161**, 2 mol%, n=3) or non-targeted (no ligand, n=3) fluorescent liposomes. After one hour, splenocytes were harvested, stained with antibodies and analyzed by flow cytometry. *In vivo* binding of targeted (black line) or non-targeted liposomes (grey) to eosinophils (CD11b⁺CCR3⁺, *left*) or B/T cells (CD4⁺CD8⁺CD19⁺, *right*) were overlaid. Representative overlays are shown. See also Figure S6. (B) Targeted liposomes (**161**) do not alter eosinophil frequency *in vivo*. WT mice (n=4) were intravenously given PBS (white), non-targeted liposomes (grey), targeted liposomes (**161**, 5 mol%) (black), or anti-Siglec-F (red). Eosinophil frequencies in the blood were analyzed 1- and 3-days post injection and determined by dividing cells that were CD11b⁺CCR3⁺ by live immune cells (PI⁻CD45⁺). *** $P < 0.001$; N.S., not significant ($P > 0.05$) determined by 1-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's test.



Scheme 1. Chemo-enzymatic synthesis of sulfonamide analogs.^a

^aReagents and conditions: (i) *Pasteurella multocida* α2,3-sialyltransferase; (ii) *Photobacterium damsela* α2,6-sialyltransferase; (iii) RSO₂Cl (**1-156**, see Table S1), DIEA (5 eq.), CH₃OH; (iv) PMe₃ (2 eq.), THF, H₂O (pH 9).