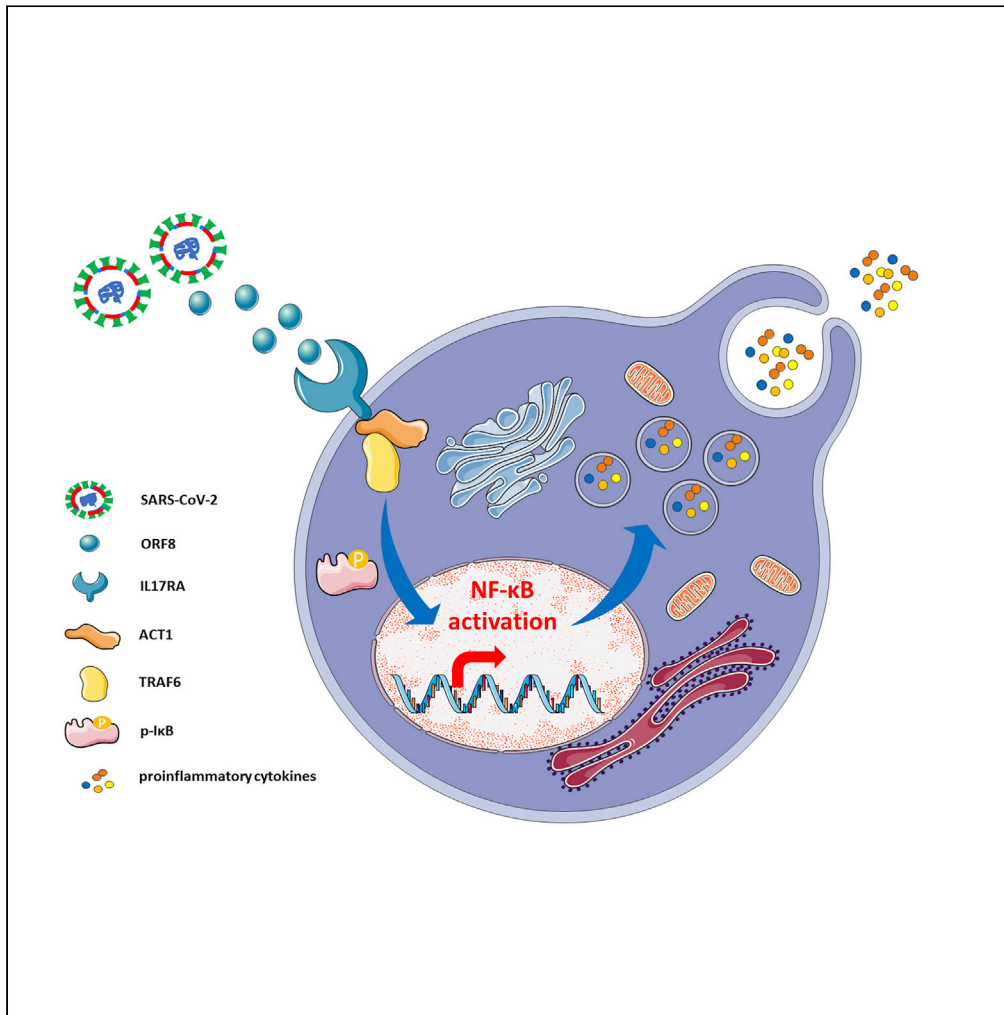


Article

# ORF8 contributes to cytokine storm during SARS-CoV-2 infection by activating IL-17 pathway



Xiaoyuan Lin,  
Beibei Fu, Songna  
Yin, ..., Weiqi Nian,  
Xingsheng Wang,  
Haibo Wu

nwqone@126.com (W.N.)  
shengxw73@163.com (X.W.)  
hbwu023@cqu.edu.cn (H.W.)

**Highlights**

SARS-CoV-2 ORF8  
activates IL-17 signaling  
pathway by interacting  
with host IL17RA

Treatment of IL17RA  
antibody protects mice  
from ORF8-induced  
inflammation



## Article

## ORF8 contributes to cytokine storm during SARS-CoV-2 infection by activating IL-17 pathway

Xiaoyuan Lin,<sup>1,11</sup> Beibei Fu,<sup>1,11</sup> Songna Yin,<sup>2,11</sup> Zhifeng Li,<sup>3</sup> Huawen Liu,<sup>4</sup> Haiwei Zhang,<sup>5</sup> Na Xing,<sup>6</sup> Yu Wang,<sup>7</sup> Weiwei Xue,<sup>8</sup> Yan Xiong,<sup>1</sup> Shanfu Zhang,<sup>1</sup> Qingting Zhao,<sup>1</sup> Shiyao Xu,<sup>1</sup> Jing Zhang,<sup>9</sup> Peihui Wang,<sup>9</sup> Weiqi Nian,<sup>5,\*</sup> Xingsheng Wang,<sup>10,\*</sup> and Haibo Wu<sup>1,12,\*</sup>

## SUMMARY

Recently, COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has brought great challenges to the world. More and more studies have shown that patients with severe COVID-19 may suffer from cytokine storm syndrome; however, there are few studies on its pathogenesis. Here we demonstrated that SARS-CoV-2 coding protein open reading frame 8 (ORF8) acted as a contributing factor to cytokine storm during COVID-19 infection. ORF8 could activate IL-17 signaling pathway and promote the expression of pro-inflammatory factors. Moreover, we demonstrated that treatment of IL17RA antibody protected mice from ORF8-induced inflammation. Our findings are helpful to understand the pathogenesis of cytokine storm caused by SARS-CoV-2 and provide a potential target for the development of COVID-19 therapeutic drugs.

## INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). At present, it is still a worldwide epidemic with nearly 24 million people infected, which has brought severe challenges to global public health. The clinical course of patients remains to be fully characterized, and no pharmacological therapies of proven efficacy yet exist (Russell et al., 2020). To open up a new breakthrough for clinical therapy, it is necessary to uncover the pathogenesis from a perspective of host-microbe interaction. However, except for a certain understanding of Spike protein (Walls et al., 2020), other proteins' functions have not been extensively studied. In this study, we demonstrated that open reading frame 8 (ORF8) could activate IL-17 signaling pathway and promote the expression of pro-inflammatory factors by interacting with host IL17RA. We also found that inhibition of this interaction by IL17RA antibody was helpful to control the cytokine storm in SARS-CoV-2 infection. Our findings not only made an important contribution to the understanding of how various effectors of the immune system initiate the cytokine storm but also provided a potential target for the development of COVID-19 therapeutic drugs.

## RESULTS

## ORF8 promotes the secretion of inflammatory factors by activating IL-17 signaling pathway

According to clinical data analysis, patients with severe COVID-19 showed cytokine storm, resulting in acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) and multiple organ failure (Mangalmurti and Hunter, 2020; Vaninov, 2020). Cytokine storm refers to the rapid production of many cytokines, such as TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1, IL-6, IL-12, and IFN- $\alpha$ . ARDS caused by cytokine storm in the late stage of infection is an important node in the transition from mild to severe illness, and it is also an important cause of death (Wu et al., 2020). In the current treatment of COVID-19, antibodies targeting IL-6 are commonly used to inhibit cytokine storm. However, suppression of IL-6 has not achieved a desired effect in clinical treatment (Hermine et al., 2021; Salama et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2020). As a proinflammatory cytokine, IL-17 has been reported to be related to cytokine storm (Crowe et al., 2009; Kolls and Lindén, 2004). Targeting IL-17 is immunologically plausible as a strategy to prevent ARDS in COVID-19 (Orlov et al., 2020; Pacha et al., 2020). In this study, yeast two-hybrid system was used to screen the SARS-CoV-2 proteins that interacted with IL-17 receptors. Three candidates (NSP2, ORF7a, and ORF8) were obtained through yeast two-hybrid experiment (Figure S1), and

<sup>1</sup>School of Life Sciences, Chongqing University, Chongqing 401331, China

<sup>2</sup>Medical school, Yan'an University, Yan'an, 716000 Shaanxi, China

<sup>3</sup>Chongqing Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Chongqing 400042, China

<sup>4</sup>Affiliated Three Gorges Hospital of Chongqing University, Chongqing Three Gorges Central Hospital, Chongqing 404100, China

<sup>5</sup>Chongqing Key Laboratory of Translational Research for Cancer Metastasis and Individualized Treatment, Chongqing University Cancer Hospital, Chongqing 400030, China

<sup>6</sup>Institut für Virologie, Freie Universität Berlin, Robert-von-Ostertag-Str. 7-13, 14163 Berlin, Germany

<sup>7</sup>Technical Center of Chongqing Customs, Chongqing 401147, China

<sup>8</sup>School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chongqing University, Chongqing 401331, China

<sup>9</sup>Advanced Medical Research Institute, Cheeloo College of Medicine, Shandong University, Jinan, Shandong 250012, China

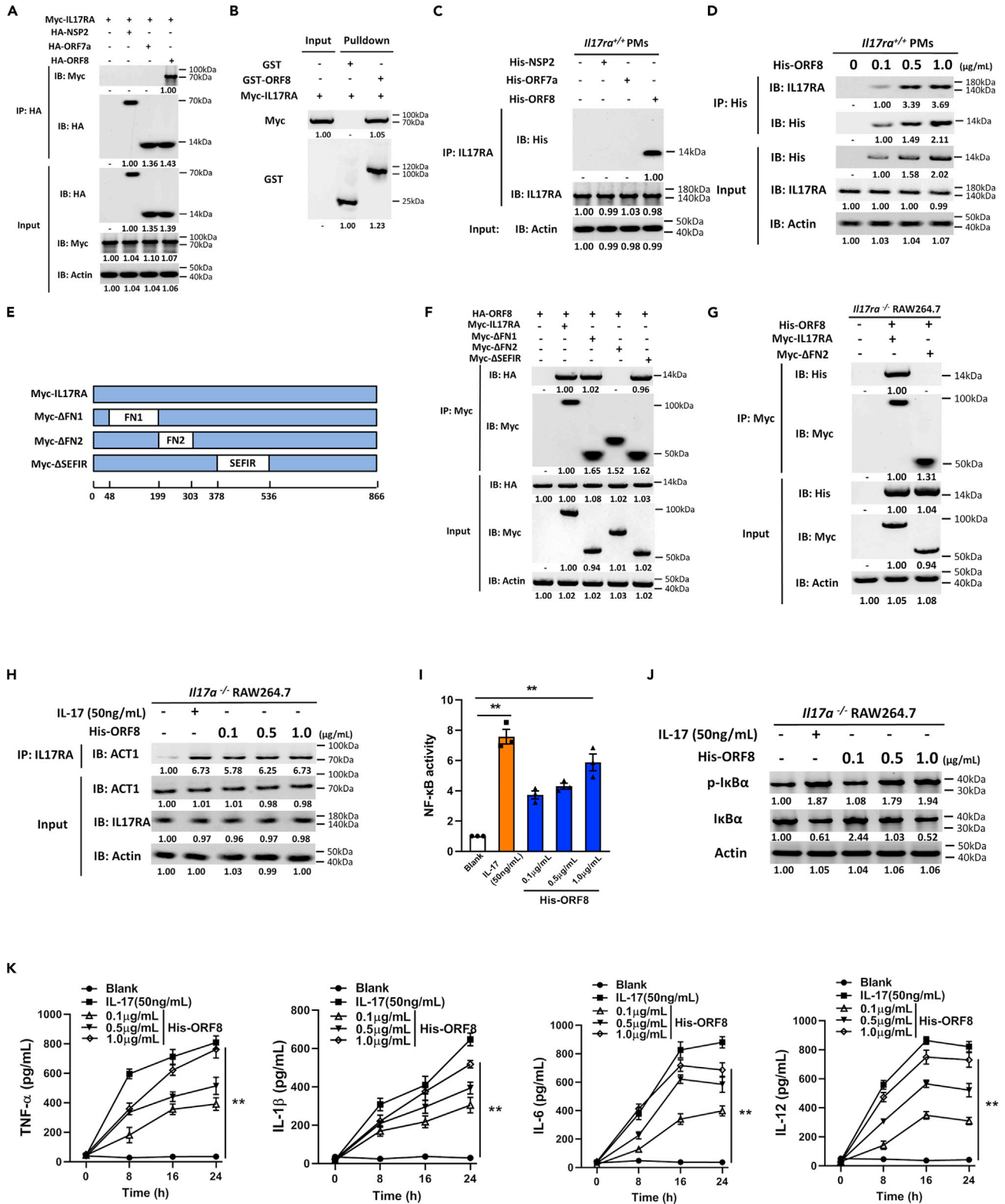
<sup>10</sup>Department of Respiratory Medicine, Affiliated Central Hospital of Chongqing University, Chongqing Emergency Medical Center, Chongqing 400014, China

<sup>11</sup>These authors contributed equally

<sup>12</sup>Lead contact

\*Correspondence: [nwqone@126.com](mailto:nwqone@126.com) (W.N.), [shengxw73@163.com](mailto:shengxw73@163.com) (X.W.), [hbwu023@cqu.edu.cn](mailto:hbwu023@cqu.edu.cn) (H.W.)  
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**Figure 1. ORF8 promotes the secretion of inflammatory factors by activating IL-17 pathway**

(A) HEK293T cells were co-transfected with Myc-IL17RA and HA-NSP2/HA-ORF7a/HA-ORF8 for 24 h, and the interaction of IL17RA with NSP2/ORF7a/ORF8 was detected by immunoprecipitation.

**Figure 1. Continued**

(B) GST pulldown analysis of the interaction between GST-ORF8 and Myc-IL17RA.

(C) *Il17ra*<sup>+/+</sup> PMs were treated with 1  $\mu$ g/mL His-tagged NSP2/ORF7a/ORF8 for 24 h, and immunoprecipitation was performed to detect the interaction of IL17RA with NSP2/ORF7a/ORF8.

(D) *Il17ra*<sup>+/+</sup> PMs were treated with different concentrations of purified His-ORF8 protein for 24 h, and immunoprecipitation was performed to detect the interaction of IL17RA with ORF8.

(E) Schematic diagram of IL17RA truncations.

(F and G) Co-immunoprecipitation analysis of the interaction between ORF8 and IL17RA truncations in HEK293T cells co-transfected with HA-ORF8 and truncation plasmids for 24 h (F), or in *Il17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 transfected with IL17RA truncation plasmids for 24 h, and treated with 1  $\mu$ g/mL His-ORF8 protein for 24 h (G).

(H–K) *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 were treated with 50 ng/mL IL-17 or 0.1–1  $\mu$ g/mL His-ORF8 protein as indicated for 24 h. The interaction between IL17RA and ACT1 was detected by co-immunoprecipitation (H); NF- $\kappa$ B activity was detected by dual luciferase reporter analysis (I); phosphorylation level of I $\kappa$ B $\alpha$  was detected by western blotting (J); and secretion of TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-6, and IL-12 was detected by ELISA analysis (K).

Data are representative of three independent experiments (A–D, F–H, and J) or three independent experiments with n = 3 technical replicates (I and K) (shown as mean  $\pm$  SEM in I and K). Individual data points represent individual technical replicates (I). Data are analyzed by two-tailed Student's t test (I and K). \*\*p < 0.01.

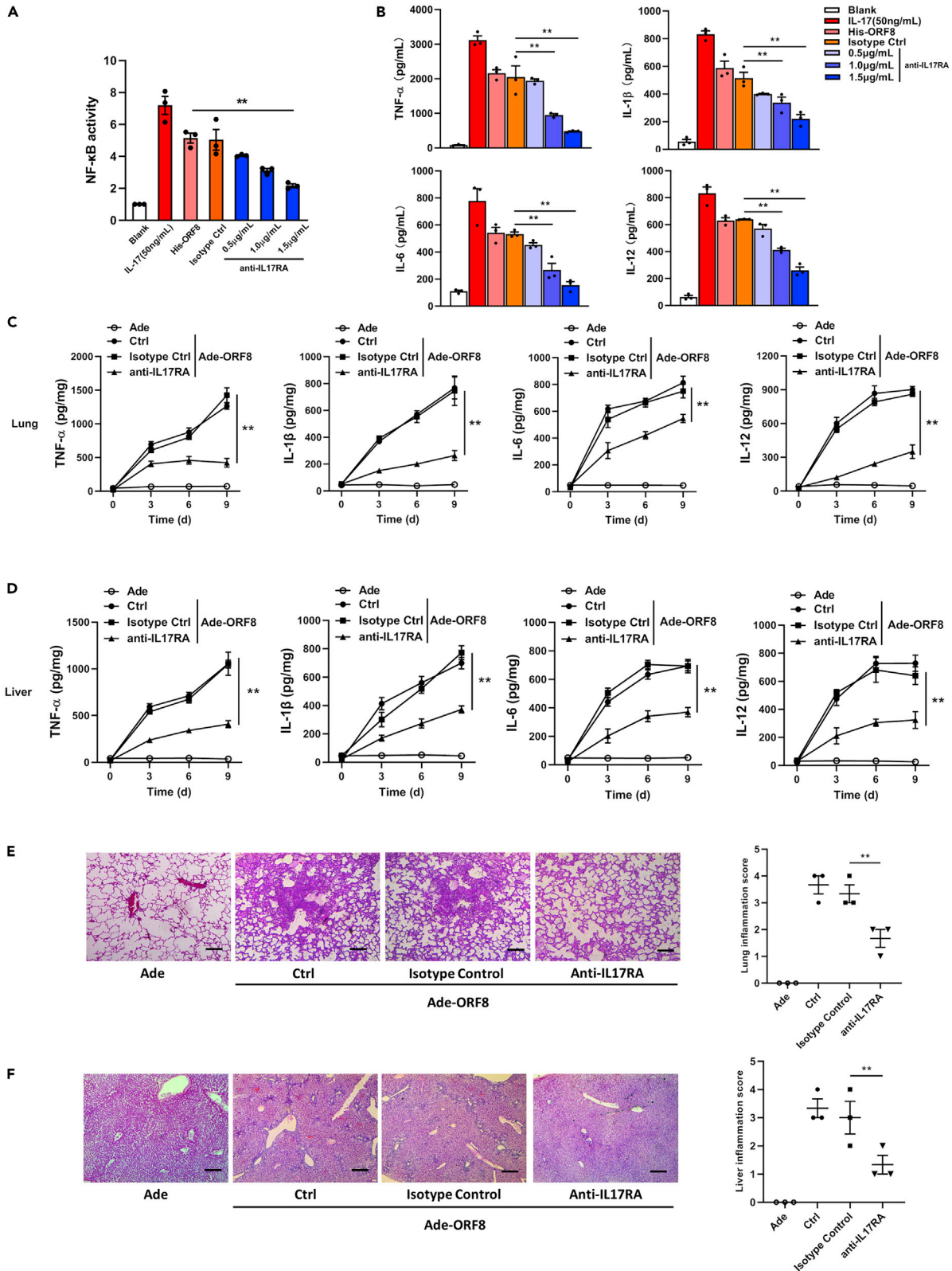
the interaction was further examined by immunoprecipitation experiments. As a result, only the interaction between ORF8 and IL17RA was successfully verified (Figure 1A), which is consistent with the predicted SARS-CoV-2 protein interaction map (Gordon et al., 2020). It has been reported that ORF8 is associated with COVID-19 severity (Young et al., 2020). Patients infected with the ORF8 mutant ( $\Delta$ 382-variant) of SARS-CoV-2 had lower concentrations of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines (Young et al., 2020), indicating an important role of ORF8 in the study of cytokine storm caused by COVID-19. We further validated the interaction between ORF8 and IL17RA using GST pulldown assay and proved an *in vitro* interaction of ORF8 and IL17RA (Figure 1B). As IL17RA is an important receptor mainly expressed in immune cells (Lore et al., 2016), *in vitro* purified His-ORF8 protein was supplemented into wild-type mouse peritoneal macrophages (*Il17ra*<sup>+/+</sup> PMs) to further validate its interaction with IL17RA. The results showed that ORF8 interacted with endogenous IL17RA, and this interaction was in a dose-dependent manner (Figures 1C and 1D). These evidences indicated that SARS-CoV-2 ORF8 protein interacted with host receptor IL17RA.

We then constructed domain truncations of IL17RA to investigate the IL17RA-ORF8 interaction (Figure 1E). IL17RA is composed of three main functional domains: fnIII\_D1, fnIII\_D2, and SEFIR. In HEK293T cells, co-immunoprecipitation showed that deletion of fnIII\_D2 domain in IL17RA impaired IL17RA-ORF8 interaction (Figure 1F). Furthermore, we transfected IL17RA or fnIII\_D2 domain truncation into *Il17ra*-deficient RAW264.7 cells (*Il17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7) (Figure S2) and treated cells with ORF8 protein. The results showed that ORF8 could interact with the complete IL17RA, instead of the truncation lacking fnIII\_D2 domain (Figure 1G). Taken together, these results indicated that the binding of ORF8 to host IL17RA is fnIII\_D2 domain dependent.

IL-17 pathway is an important pro-inflammatory signaling in mammals (McGeachy et al., 2019). IL-17 ligand binds to and activates the corresponding receptor, and then the complex recruits ACT1 from the cytoplasm through the SEFIR domain. ACT1 initiates TNF receptor-associated factor 6 (TRAF6) to activate NF- $\kappa$ B signaling pathway, thus improving the expression levels of pro-inflammatory factors (Schwandner et al., 2000). Given the fact that ORF8 interacts with IL17RA, we investigated the effect of ORF8 on IL-17 pathway. To eliminate the possibility that ORF8 directly influences the expression of IL-17, we generated *Il17a*-deficient RAW264.7 cells (*Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7) (Figure S3) and *Il17a*-deficient mouse models (Figure S4). After ORF8 treatment, it was found that ACT1 was recruited by IL17RA, and the recruitment effect was not significantly affected by ORF8 concentrations (Figure 1H). However, a dose-dependent activation in NF- $\kappa$ B signaling pathway was observed in *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 (Figures 1I and 1J). In addition, a dose-dependent manner in cytokine TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-6, and IL-12 release was identified (Figure 1K). Taken together, these results implied that ORF8 could bind to IL17RA receptor, leading to IL-17 pathway activation and an increased secretion of pro-inflammatory factors.

**Inhibition of IL-17 pathway protects mice from ORF8-induced inflammation**

We further explored methods for blocking the ORF8-induced IL-17 pathway activation using IL17RA antibody. Compared with the isotype control, the activity of NF- $\kappa$ B signaling pathway was significantly inhibited after IL17RA antibody treatment (Figure 2A). Similarly, the secretion of cytokines, such as TNF- $\alpha$ ,



**Figure 2. IL17RA antibody protects mice from ORF8-induced inflammation**

(A and B) *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 were treated with IL17RA antibody as indicated for 8 h and treated by 1 µg/mL His-ORF8 protein for 24 h. NF-κB activity was detected by dual luciferase reporter analysis (A), and the secretion of TNF-α, IL-1β, IL-6, and IL-12 was detected by ELISA (B). Blank: negative control; IL-17:

**Figure 2. Continued**

cells were treated with 50 ng/mL IL-17 for 24 h; His-ORF8: cells were treated with 1  $\mu$ g/mL His-ORF8 for 24 h; Isotype Ctrl: cells were treated with Isotype antibody of IL17RA for 8 h and further treated by 1  $\mu$ g/mL His-ORF8 protein for 24 h.

(C and D) *Il17a*-deficient C57BL/6 mice were intraperitoneally injected with 200  $\mu$ g IL17RA antibody, and the injection was repeated every 3 days. After the second injection, mice were intratracheally infected with the adenovirus expressing ORF8 ( $10^8$  PFU/mouse). The time was recorded as day 0. Afterward, lung (C) and liver (D) sections were taken every 3 days. The secretion of TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1, IL-6, and IL-12 was detected by ELISA.

(E and F) H&E staining in lung (E) and liver (F) sections on day 9 post-infection. The degree of organ damage was assessed by a scoring system. Scale bar, 400  $\mu$ m.

Data are representative of three independent experiments (E and F) or three independent experiments with  $n = 3$  technical replicates (A–F) (shown as mean  $\pm$  SEM in A–F). Individual data points represent individual technical replicates (A, B, E, and F). Data are analyzed by two-tailed Student's *t* test (A–F). \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-6, and IL-12, was also reduced to varying degrees according to concentration gradient of IL17RA antibody (Figure 2B). To study the effect of ORF8 on inflammation, we packaged a pseudovirus expressing ORF8 by using adenovirus. *Il17a*-deficient mice were infected with  $10^8$  plaque-forming unit (PFU) pseudoviruses through intratracheal infection. qRT-PCR results of lung and liver showed that ORF8 was stably expressed in mice within 9 days after injection (Figure S5). Meanwhile, IL-17 receptors were blocked by intraperitoneal injection with IL17RA antibody. As a result, the secretion of pro-inflammatory factors in lung continued to increase after ORF8 pseudovirus infection in the isotype control groups (Figure 2C). However, for the mice injected with IL17RA antibody, although the secretion of pro-inflammatory factors increased, the total amount was much lower compared with that of the isotype control (Figure 2C). Liver, another organ with a high rate of impairment in patients with severe COVID-19 (Zhang et al., 2020a), showed a similar trend as lung during ORF8 pseudovirus infection (Figure 2D). In addition, by using H&E staining and a scoring system, we observed a histological damage on day 9 post-infection. Lungs and livers of the mice injected with IL17RA antibody underwent a slight inflammation compared with those of the untreated mice (Figures 2E and 2F). Collectively, our study indicated that SARS-CoV-2 coding protein ORF8 might be a contributing factor to the cytokine storm during COVID-19 and treatment with IL17RA antibody could protect organs from inflammation and damage.

**DISCUSSION**

The control of cytokine storm has always been a difficulty in clinical therapy. At present, studies on SARS-CoV-2 have basically clarified the mechanisms of viral invasion (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Shang et al., 2020), whereas the process of viral replication, viral release, and host immune regulation still needs in-depth exploration. Here, we identified that SARS-CoV-2 ORF8 emulated the function of IL-17 by interacting with host IL17RA, and then promoted the secretion of pro-inflammatory factors by activating NF- $\kappa$ B signaling pathway. To eliminate the possibility that ORF8 stimulates the expression of endogenous IL-17, we generated *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> cells and mouse models. Supplementation of either IL-17 or ORF8 to *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 activated NF- $\kappa$ B pathway, indicating an independent role of ORF8 in promoting inflammation.

In this study, we found that ORF8 protein acted as a contributing factor to the cytokine storm by inducing IL-17 signaling pathway, and the interaction between ORF8 and IL17RA was pivotal in the progress of inflammation. However, two questions remain unanswered. First, IL17RA is a transmembrane protein (Lore et al., 2016), and we found that ORF8 bound to the extracellular domain of IL17RA. It is unclear how the virus exposes ORF8 and interacts with IL17RA. Second, SARS-CoV-2 invades alveolar epithelial cells mainly through ACE2 receptors on the cell surface (Hoffmann et al., 2020). However, monocytes/macrophages play a more critical role in the secretion and regulation of cytokines. Interestingly, due to the low abundance of ACE2 receptors on the surface, monocytes/macrophages are not the main targets of the virus (Kuba et al., 2010). Therefore, the question is how the virus achieves communication from the alveolar epithelial cells to the monocytes/macrophages. A fact that has caught our attention is that clinical cases have shown that the viral loads in patients are not directly proportional to the severity of disease symptoms (Lescure et al., 2020; To et al., 2020). This indicates the possible existence of a unique indirect cellular communication mechanism (not by virion release) in the occurrence and development of cytokine storm. Chan et al. suggested that ORF8 might be a secretory protein of SARS-CoV-2 that can be released outside the cell (Chan et al., 2020). Previous studies have demonstrated that certain viruses can secrete virulence factors to manipulate host cell machinery, thus allowing infection, survival, or replication of pathogens (McNamara et al., 2018; Mukhamedova et al., 2019; Nordholm et al., 2017). For example, HIV only infects a limited repertoire of cells expressing HIV receptors. However, the HIV protein NEF released from infected cells in extracellular vesicles can be taken up by uninfected cells, thereby impairing cholesterol metabolism in these cells. This impairment causes the formation of excessive lipid rafts and re-localization of the inflammatory

receptors into rafts and triggers inflammation (Mukhamedova et al., 2019). In a recent study, ORF8 has been shown to interact with MHC-I (Zhang et al., 2020b), which is one of the marker proteins located on the surface of exosomal membranes (Becker et al., 2016). If ORF8 interacts with MHC-I and appears on the surface of exosomal membranes, it will increase the possibility that ORF8 protein interacts with the extracellular domain of IL-17 receptor and subsequently activates the NF- $\kappa$ B signaling pathway and increases the transcription of cytokines. In this way, ORF8 protein achieves being transmitted from alveolar epithelial cells to monocytes/macrophages, thereby leading to the outbreak of cytokine storm. Transwell system has been reported to study cellular communications in different studies, such as the communication between dendritic cells and endothelial cells (Gao et al., 2016), nerve cells and microglial cells (Yin et al., 2020), and even the triple interaction of epithelial cells, endothelial cells, and THP-1 cells (Costa et al., 2019). It would be interesting to construct an epithelial cell-macrophage co-culture system using a Transwell model, so as to study the transmission process of ORF8 from epithelial cells to macrophages.

ORF8 also has an inhibitory effect on the interferon pathway (Li et al., 2020; Rao et al., 2021), and Blanco-Melo et al. have reported that reduced interferon pathway coupled with exuberant inflammatory cytokine production are the defining and driving features of COVID-19 (Blanco-Melo et al., 2020). In a recent study, Miorin et al. have showed that ORF6 has the effect of antagonizing interferon signaling (Miorin et al., 2020), whereas we have found that ORF8 has the effect of promoting inflammatory cytokine production. This is consistent with the study of Blanco-Melo et al. Therefore, we speculate that the roles of these ORFs may be opposing, which also makes the pathogenesis of SARS-CoV-2 more complicated than that of common respiratory viruses. In our current work, we have proved that the binding of IL17RA with ORF8 depends on the fnIII\_D2 domain of IL17RA and the binding site in ORF8 has not been determined. Young et al. found that  $\Delta$ 382-variant infection tended to be milder compared with those caused by the wild-type virus, with less pronounced cytokine release during the acute phase of infection (Young et al., 2020). Considering that the interaction between ORF8 and IL17RA has an important contribution in improving the expression of pro-inflammatory factors, we speculate that  $\Delta$ 382 variant might show a reduced ability to interact with IL17RA, which, however, needs to be verified with further experiments.

As a universal subunit of the IL-17 receptor family, IL17RA participates in the assembly of almost all the receptor complexes (Li et al., 2019), providing a broader site for ORF8 binding. However, it is worth considering that the other members of IL-17 receptor family have a similar structure to IL17RA, which may also be potential binding targets of ORF8. It has been reported that orphan receptor IL17RD can regulate various pathways employed by IL-17A in different ways (Mellett et al., 2012). The lack of IL17RD in cells leads to an enhancement in pre-inflammatory signals (Mellett et al., 2015). If ORF8 interacts with orphan IL17RD, the ORF8-IL17RD complex could disrupt the interaction between ACT1 and TRAF6. In this way, there will be a different regulatory mechanism existed, and further studies on this could be interesting.

### Limitations of study

In this study, we found that ORF8 protein of SAR-CoV-2 can activate IL-17 signaling pathway by interacting with IL17RA, thereby up-regulating the secretion of inflammatory factors. Treatment with IL17RA antibody can protect mice from inflammatory damages caused by ORF8. However, as we have discussed in the article, IL17RA is a transmembrane protein, and the way in which ORF8 interacts with its extracellular domain is unclear. In addition, the main findings of this article should be further clarified using SARS-CoV-2 live virus instead of pseudovirus.

### Resource availability

#### Lead contact

Further information and requests for resources should be directed to and will be fulfilled by the lead contact, Haibo Wu ([hbwu023@cqu.edu.cn](mailto:hbwu023@cqu.edu.cn)).

#### Materials availability

This study did not generate new unique reagents.

#### Data and code availability

Yeast two-hybrid screening data associated with this study are available from "Mendeley Data: <https://doi.org/10.17632/ty66rbxkk8.1>."

## METHODS

All methods can be found in the accompanying [transparent methods supplemental file](#).

## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Supplemental Information can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2021.102293>.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.W., W.N., X.W., and X.L. conceived and designed the study. H.W., X.L., B.F., S.Y., Z.L., H.L., H.Z., N.X., Y.W., W.X., Y.X., S.Z., Q.Z., S.X., X.W. performed the experiments. P.W. and J.Z. helped with plasmids construction. H.W., S.Y., B.F., and X.L. analyzed the data. H.W., X.L., and B.F. wrote the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

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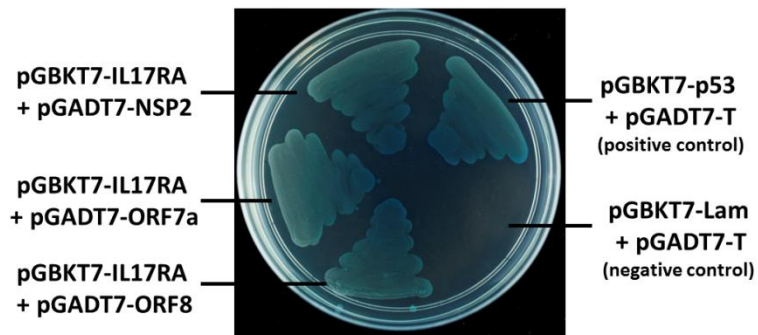
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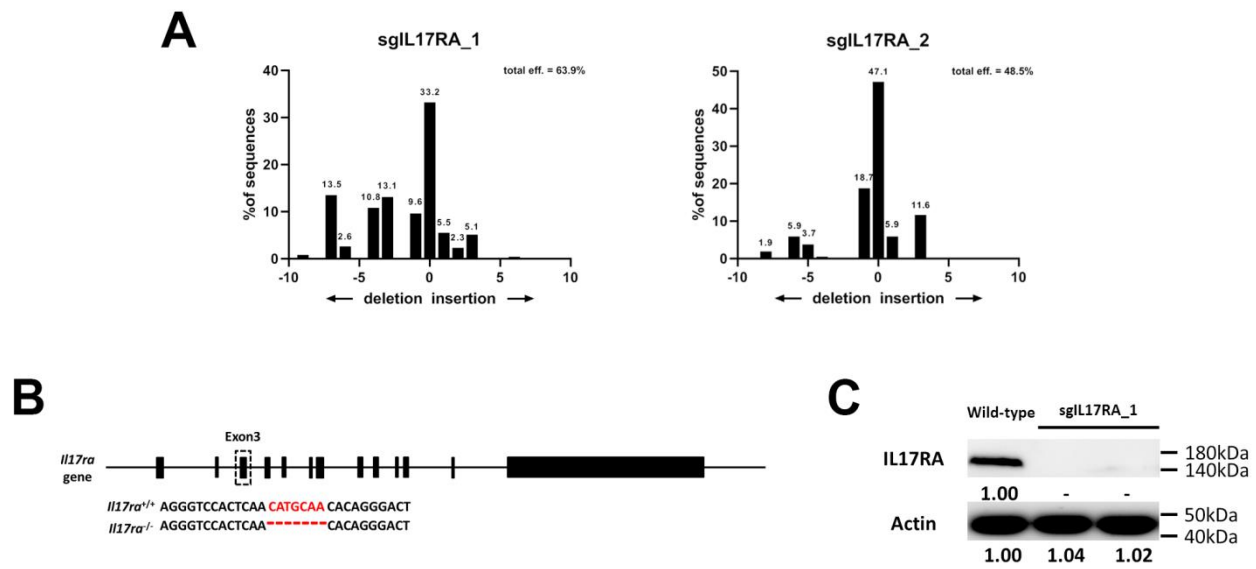
## **Supplemental information**

### **ORF8 contributes to cytokine storm during SARS-CoV-2 infection by activating IL-17 pathway**

**Xiaoyuan Lin, Beibei Fu, Songna Yin, Zhifeng Li, Huawen Liu, Haiwei Zhang, Na Xing, Yu Wang, Weiwei Xue, Yan Xiong, Shanfu Zhang, Qingting Zhao, Shiyao Xu, Jing Zhang, Peihui Wang, Weiqi Nian, Xingsheng Wang, and Haibo Wu**



- 1 Figure S1 NSP2, ORF7a and ORF8 are the potential candidates that interacts
- 2 with IL17RA. Related to Figure 1.
- 3 Positive clones obtained by yeast two-hybrid screening. pGBKT7-p53+pGADT7-T:
- 4 positive control; pGBKT7-Lam+pGADT7-T: negative control.



5 Figure S2 **Validation of *Il17ra*-deficient RAW264.7 cells. Related to Figure 1.**

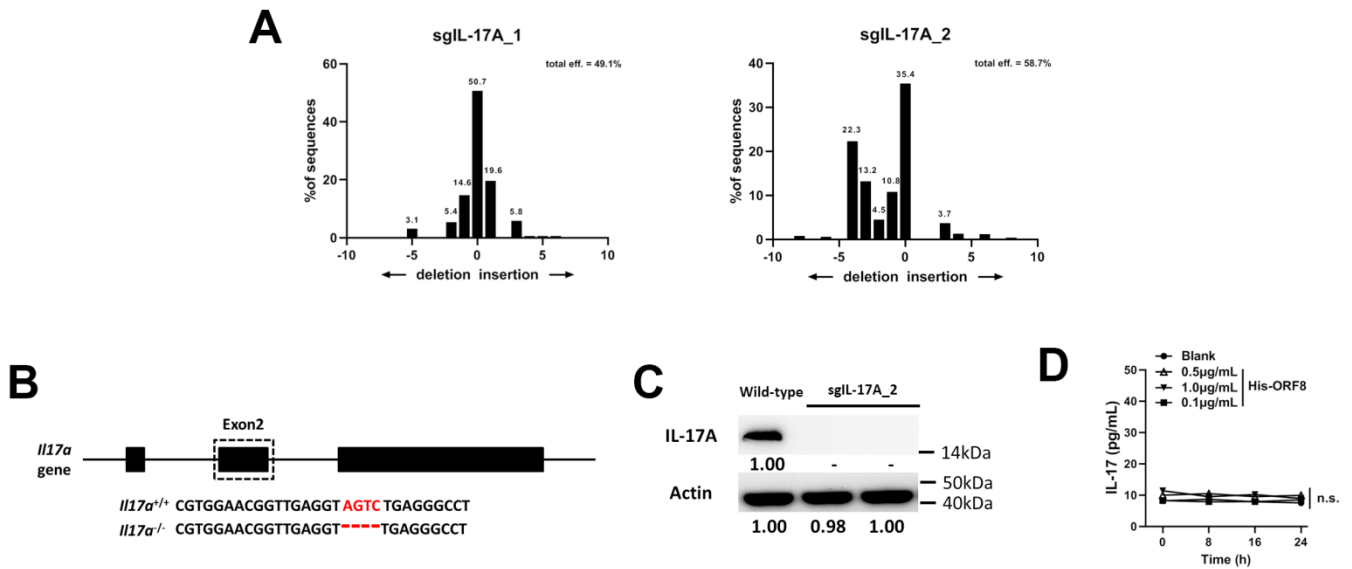
6 (A) TIDE analysis of *Il17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cell pools produced by sgRNA1 and

7 sgRNA2. (B) Schematic illustration of the target region of *Il17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cell

8 clone. (C) IL17RA expression in *Il17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cell clone was analyzed by

9 Western Blotting. The clone was derived from the cell pool produced by sgRNA1.

10 Data are representative of three independent experiments (C).



11 **Figure S3 Validation of *Il17a*-deficient RAW264.7 cells. Related to Figure 1.**

12 (A) TIDE analysis of *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cell pools produced by sgRNA1 and

13 sgRNA2. (B) Schematic illustration of the target region of *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cell

14 clone. (C) IL-17A expression in *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cell clone was analyzed by

15 Western Blotting. The clone was derived from the cell pool produced by sgRNA2. (D)

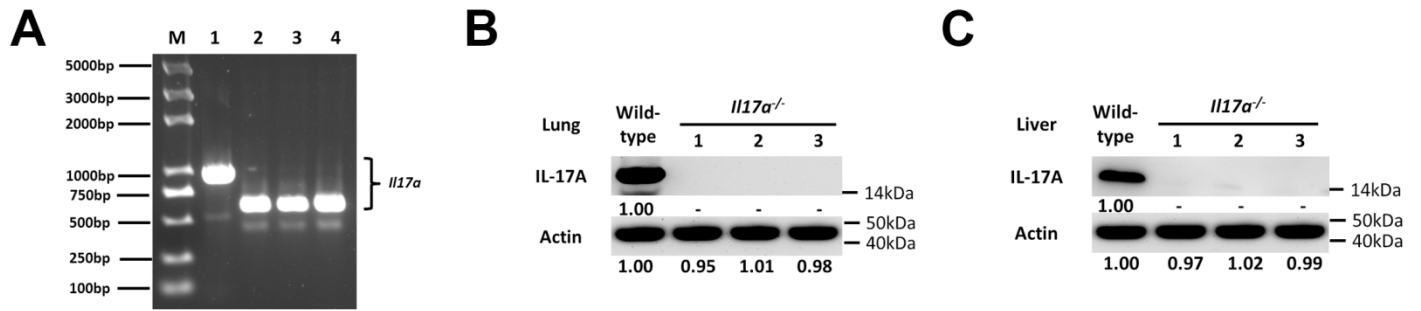
16 His-ORF8 was added to culture media of *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 cells, and IL-17

17 expression was analyzed by ELISA. Data are representative of three independent

18 experiments (C) or three independent experiments with n = 3 technical replicates (D)

19 (shown as mean ± s.e.m. in D). Data are analyzed by two-tailed Student *t* test (D).

20 Abbreviations: n.s., not significant.



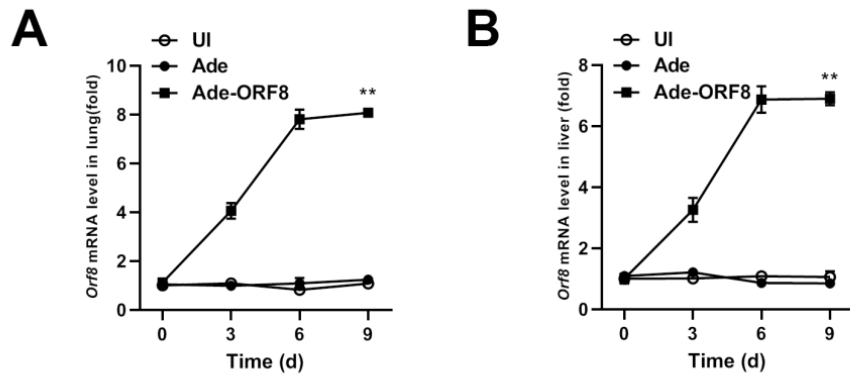
21 **Figure S4 Validation of *Il17a*-deficient mice. Related to Figure 2.**

22 (A) IL-17A expression in *Il17a*-deficient mice was analyzed by gel electrophoresis. M:

23 marker; 1: wild-type mice; 2-4: *Il17a*-deficient mice. (B-C) IL-17A expression in

24 lungs (B) and livers (C) of *Il17a*-deficient mice. Data are representative of three

25 independent experiments.



26 Figure S5 Adenovirus-mediated ORF8 expression in mice. Related to Figure 2.

27 (A-B) ORF8 expression in lungs (A) and livers (B) of *Il17a*-deficient mice after

28 injection of Ade-ORF8. UI: uninfected. Data are representative of three independent

29 experiments with  $n = 3$  technical replicates (shown as mean  $\pm$  s.e.m.). Data are

30 analyzed by two-tailed Student  $t$  test. \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ .

31 **Transparent Methods**

32 **Ethic statement**

33 This study was carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for the Care and Use of  
34 Animals of Chongqing University. All animal experimental procedures were approved  
35 by the Animal Ethics Committees of the School of Life Sciences, Chongqing  
36 University.

37

38 **Mice**

39 Six- to eight-week-old wild-type C57BL/6 mice and *Il17a*-deficient mice  
40 (C57BL/6N-*Il17a*<sup>em1cyagen</sup>) were purchased from Cyagen Biosciences (Guangzhou,  
41 China). Mice used in each experiment were half male and half female, and age- and  
42 sex- matched in experimental group and control group. All animal study protocols  
43 were reviewed and approved by Chongqing University School of Life Sciences  
44 review boards for animal studies. The upstream and downstream primers were  
45 designed on exon 1 and exon 3 of mouse *Il17a* (NM\_010552)  
46 (F-GCAAACATGAGTCCAGG, R-TGGTTTTACCCCATTC). Three knockout  
47 mice were randomly selected to extract genomic DNA, and PCR was used to detect  
48 the length of the knockout fragment (~212bp). Meanwhile, lung and liver were taken  
49 to detect IL17RA expression by Western Blotting.

50

51 **Plasmids construction**

52 Full-length coding sequence (CDS) of SARS-CoV-2 NSP2, ORF7a and ORF8 (NCBI



53 Accession number: NC\_045512.2) were synthesized by Beijing Genomics Institute  
54 (BGI, Beijing, China). NSP2, ORF7a, or ORF8 CDS was inserted into pCMV-HA  
55 (for eukaryotic expression) or pET-28a (+) (for protein production and purification),  
56 respectively. For GST pulldown assay, ORF8 CDS was inserted into pGEX-4T-1.  
57 Full-length CDS of IL17RA (NCBI Accession number: NM\_008359.2) was inserted  
58 into pCMV-Myc. Primers are as follows: F-AATTGTCGACTATGGCGATTCGG,  
59 R-ATAAGCGGCCGCCCAAATGTCTGAT. The pNL3.2.NF- $\kappa$ B-RE plasmid used in  
60 the measurement of NF- $\kappa$ B activity was purchased from Promega (Madison, WI,  
61 USA).

62

### 63 **Yeast two-hybrid screening**

64 Yeast two-hybrid screening was performed using the Matchmaker Gold Yeast  
65 Two-Hybrid System (Takara, Dalian, China). Briefly, a SARS-CoV-2 protein  
66 expressing library was constructed by using the Make Your Own "Mate & Plate"  
67 Library System (Takara) strictly according to the manufacturer's instructions. Then  
68 the library was cloned to a yeast Gal4 activation domain (AD) vector pGADT7, and  
69 transformed into yeast strain Y187 to serve as "prey"; IL17RA cDNA was cloned to a  
70 Gal4 binding domain (BD) vector pGBKT7, and transformed into yeast strain  
71 Y2HGold to serve as "bait". Prey and bait were combined together to screen for  
72 positive interactions. Colonies grown on the synthetic defined (SD) plate lacking  
73 adenine, histidine, leucine, and tryptophan (SD/-Ade-His-Leu-Trp) were picked for  
74 Sanger sequencing (Supplemental File Sets).

75

## 76 **Protein production and purification**

77 Production and purification of ORF8, NSP2, or ORF7a protein were performed as  
78 follows(Walls et al., 2020): pET-28a(+)-ORF8, pET-28a(+)-NSP2, or  
79 pET-28a(+)-ORF7a construct was transformed into *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) and cultured  
80 in LB media at 37 °C until OD600 reached 0.6. The recombinant expression of  
81 His-tagged protein was induced by adding isopropyl β-D-thiogalactoside (IPTG) with  
82 a final concentration of 125 μM and stimulating for 16 h at 12 °C. Cells were  
83 harvested by centrifugation at 4 °C, and lysed by freezing/thawing method.  
84 Purification of the supernatants containing His-tagged protein was performed by  
85 Ni-affinity chromatography in an ÄKTA Primer FPLC system (GE Healthcare Life  
86 Sciences, Chicago, IL, USA) using the HisTrap FF columns (GE Healthcare Life  
87 Sciences) according to the manufacturer's instructions.

88

## 89 **Cell culture and treatment**

90 HEK293T cells were purchased from American Type Culture Collection (ATCC,  
91 Manassas, VA, USA). The culture medium was composed of Dulbecco's Modified  
92 Eagle's Medium (DMEM, Gibco, San Jose, CA, USA) and 10% fetal bovine serum  
93 (Gibco). Plasmid DNA was transfected into indicated cells using Lipofectamine 3000  
94 Transfection Reagent (Invitrogen, Life Technologies, CA, USA) according to the  
95 manufacturer's instructions. *III17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> and *III17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 were generated using  
96 CRISPR-Cas9. To be detailed, two sgRNAs were designed for each gene

97 (*Il17ra*-sgRNA1: TCCACTCAACATGCAACACA; *Il17ra*-sgRNA2:  
98 GGGGGTGGATTCATTCCACA; *Il17a*-sgRNA1: CTCAGCGTGTCCAAACACTG;  
99 *Il17a*-sgRNA2: GAACGGTTGAGGTAGTCTGA), and ligated into  
100 pSpCas9(BB)-2A-Puro (PX459) after being digested by Bbs I. The recombinant was  
101 then transfected into RAW264.7 (ATCC) using Lipo 3000 Transfection Reagent  
102 (Invitrogen). After 48 h, DMEM containing 3 µg/mL puromycin was used for  
103 screening for 7 days to obtain the cell pool. Half of the cells were taken for TIDE  
104 analysis (<http://shinyapps.datacurators.nl/tide/>), and the remaining cells were used for  
105 limiting dilution to obtain the cell clone. Genomic DNA was extracted and sequenced,  
106 and the indels were analyzed. For the obtained homozygous knockout monoclonal,  
107 total cell protein was extracted and Western Blotting was used to detect expressions of  
108 IL17RA and IL-17A. *Il17ra*<sup>+/+</sup> PMs were isolated as follows (Kim et al., 2016) : mice  
109 were intraperitoneally injected with HBSS containing 2 mM EDTA and 2% FBS.  
110 After flushing the abdominal cavity, 5 ml of flushing solution was collected and  
111 centrifuged 10 min at 400×g, 4°C. Supernatant was discarded and cell pellet was  
112 resuspended in cold DMEM/F12. The cells were cultured at 37°C for 2 h and attached  
113 to the substrate. The nonadherent cells were removed by gently washing with warm  
114 PBS three times. The purified PMs were plated at a density of 1×10<sup>6</sup> cells/60 mm  
115 plastic dish. Afterwards, purified NSP2, ORF7a, or ORF8 was added to culture media  
116 of *Il17ra*<sup>+/+</sup> PMs for treatment. After 24 h, cells were harvested for  
117 immunoprecipitation. In addition, purified ORF8 was added to culture media of  
118 *Il17ra*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 or *Il17a*<sup>-/-</sup> RAW264.7 for treatment. After 24 h, cells were

119 harvested for immunoprecipitation.

120

### 121 **GST pulldown assay**

122 GST pulldown assay was performed using the GST Protein Interaction Pull-Down Kit  
123 (Thermo Fisher Scientific, San Jose, CA, USA) following the manufacturer's  
124 instructions. Briefly, the glutathione-S-transferase (GST)-tagged SARS-CoV-2 ORF8  
125 fusion proteins were expressed in *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and immobilized on the  
126 glutathione agarose resin, and then incubated with HEK293T cell lysates transfected  
127 with pCMV-Myc-IL17RA. After incubation at 4°C for at least 4 h (overnight if  
128 possible) with gentle rocking motion on a rotating platform, elution was collected for  
129 detection of protein interaction by Western Blotting.

130

### 131 **Immunoblot and Immunoprecipitation**

132 Immunoblot analysis was performed as follows(Fu et al., 2020) : total proteins were  
133 collected and separated by SDS-PAGE, and transferred to PVDF membrane. Blots  
134 were probed with 1/1000 anti-Actin (AF5001), 1/1000 anti-GST (AF2299) (Beyotime,  
135 Shanghai, China), 1/1000 anti-HA (SAB2702196), 1/1000 anti-Myc (SAB2702192)  
136 (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA), 1/200 anti-IL-17 (sc-374218) (Santa Cruz  
137 Biotechnology, Santa Cruz, CA, USA), 1/200 anti-IL17RA (PA5-47199), 1/200  
138 anti-ACT1 (14-4040-82) (Invitrogen), 1/200 anti-phospho-I $\kappa$ B $\alpha$  (Ser32/36) (9246),  
139 1/500 anti-I $\kappa$ B $\alpha$  (9242) (Cell Signaling Technology, Inc., Danvers, MA, USA)  
140 antibodies. Co-immunoprecipitation was performed according to previous studies

141 (Lafont et al., 2018; Su et al., 2019). Briefly, cells were harvested and lysed with  
142 RIPA Lysis Buffer (50 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl, 1% Triton X-100, 1%  
143 sodium deoxycholate, 0.1% SDS) (P0013B, Beyotime) containing protease inhibitor  
144 cocktail. Cell lysate was centrifuged at 12, 000×g for 10 min. Part of the supernatant  
145 was taken to determine the total protein concentration and used as the input for  
146 immunoblotting, and the remaining supernatant was incubated with appropriate  
147 antibodies and Protein A/G beads (Thermo Fisher Scientific) overnight at 4°C.  
148 Precipitated protein complex was mixed with 5× SDS Loading Buffer and boiled at  
149 98°C for 8 min, followed by immunoblotting with indicated antibodies.

150

#### 151 **NF-κB activity assay**

152 Dual Luciferase Reporter (DLR) Assay System (Promega) was used to perform  
153 NF-κB activity assays as follows(Fu et al., 2020) : firefly luciferase plasmid  
154 pNL3.2.NF-κB-RE and Renilla luciferase plasmid pRL-SV40 (internal control) were  
155 co-transfected to cells. Twenty-four h after treatment or stimulation, cell lysates were  
156 harvested for DLR assays. Data were collected with a VICTOR X5 Multilabel Plate  
157 Reader (PerkinElmer, Waltham, MA, USA). The relative NF-κB activity was  
158 measured by Firefly luciferase luminescence divided by Renilla luciferase  
159 luminescence.

160

#### 161 **Exposure of mice to adenoviral vectors**

162 The construction and characterization of recombinant adenovirus vector encoding

163 SARS-CoV-2 ORF8 (Ade-ORF8) were referred as follows(Huang et al., 2019): the  
164 CDS of ORF8 was cloned into pENTR™/D-TOPO vector (Thermo Fisher Scientific)  
165 followed by recombination into the pAd/CMV/V5-DEST (Thermo Fisher Scientific).  
166 The replication-deficient recombinant Ade-ORF8 adenovirus was produced in  
167 HEK293A cells. Mice were anesthetized, and then intratracheally instilled with  
168 Ade-ORF8 at  $10^8$  PFU/mouse diluted in 50  $\mu$ L PBS.

169

#### 170 **IL17RA blocking**

171 Anti-mouse IL17RA antibody (MAB4481) and mouse IgG1 isotype control  
172 (MAB002) were purchased from R&D Systems. For injections, antibody stocks were  
173 diluted in sterile PBS and each mouse received 200  $\mu$ g per injection.

174

#### 175 **H&E staining**

176 On the 9<sup>th</sup> day after infection, the lung and liver of mice were fixed with 10% buffered  
177 formaldehyde for more than 24 h, embedded in paraffin, sectioned, and stained with  
178 H&E according to the standard procedure. Photographs were obtained by microscope  
179 (Carl Zeiss, Jena, Germany). A scoring system was set as follows (Kleiner et al., 2005;  
180 Matute-Bello et al., 2011) : five fields at 200 $\times$  magnification were randomly selected  
181 for each slice. The lung scoring criteria are as follows: 0, pulmonary lobes lacked  
182 lesions; 1, multifocal lesions with mild lymphocyte and macrophage infiltration; 2,  
183 mild infiltration of peri-bronchial, peri-vascular and alveolar; 3, small range of  
184 blocked terminal bronchioles, fibroplasia or organization; 4, wide range of alveolar

185 necrosis and hyaline thrombus. The liver scoring criteria are as follows: 0, hepatic  
186 lobules lacked lesions; 1, scattered inflammation with  $\leq 3$  lesions in hepatic lobules; 2,  
187 3-7 lesions in hepatic lobules, accounting for  $< 1/3$  of the hepatic lobule; 3, scattered  
188 inflammation with  $> 7$  lesions, accounting for  $1/3$ - $2/3$  of the hepatic lobule; 4,  
189 inflammatory lesions spread throughout hepatic lobules, with large areas of  
190 hepatocyte necrosis.

191

### 192 **Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA)**

193 Mouse TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-6, IL-12 ELISA kits were purchased from BD Biosciences  
194 (Franklin Lakes, NJ, USA). Cell culture supernatants were assayed according to the  
195 manufacturer's protocols. Mice were sacrificed and lungs/livers were quickly excised,  
196 rinsed of blood, and homogenized by adding 1 mL homogenization buffer (PBS  
197 containing 0.05% sodium azide, 0.5% Triton X-100, and a protease inhibitor cocktail,  
198 pH 7.2, 4°C), and then sonicated for 10 minutes. Homogenates were centrifuged at  
199 12,000 $\times g$  for 10 minutes, and the supernatant was taken to determine the total protein  
200 concentration, followed by ELISA analysis. The concentration of each cytokine was  
201 calculated against a standard curve.

202

### 203 **Statistical analysis**

204 Two-tailed Student's *t* test was used to compare the means between two groups. A  
205 value of  $P < 0.05$  was considered significant.

206

207 **Supplemental References**

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231