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Inability of GSTT1 to Activate Iodinated Halomethanes to Mutagens in Salmonella

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Abstract

Drinking water disinfection by-products (DBPs), including the ubiquitous trihalomethanes (THMs), are formed during the treatment of water with disinfectants (e.g., chlorine, chloramines) to produce and distribute potable water. Brominated THMs (Br-THMs) are activated to mutagens via glutathione S-transferase theta 1 (GSTT1); however, iodinated THMs (I-THMs) have never been evaluated for activation by GSTT1. Among the I-THMs, only triiodomethane (iodoform) has been tested previously for mutagenicity in *Salmonella* and was positive (in the absence of GSTT1) in three strains (TA98, TA100, and BA13), all of which have error-prone DNA repair (pKM101). We evaluated five I-THMs (chlorodiiodomethane, dichloroiodomethane, dibromoiodomethane, bromochloroiodomethane, and triiodomethane) for mutagenicity in *Salmonella* strain RSJ100, which expresses GSTT1, and its homologue TPT100, which does not; neither strain has pKM101. We also evaluated chlorodiiodo-, dichloroiodo-, and dibromoiodo-methanes in strain TA100 +/− rat liver S9 mix; TA100 has pKM101. None were mutagenic in any of the strains. The I-THMs were generally more cytotoxic than their brominated and chlorinated analogues but less cytotoxic than analogous trihalonitromethanes tested previously. All five I-THMs showed similar thresholds for cytotoxicity at ~2.5 μmoles/plate, possibly due to release of iodine, a well-known

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Hannah K. Liberatore and David M. DeMarini conceived of and designed the study. Susan D. Richardson had the I-THMs synthesized and provided some of them for this study. Sarah H. Warren prepared media and maintained and grew cells, and David M. DeMarini performed the experiments. Weston J. Smith and David M. DeMarini conceived of the molecular mechanism by which iodoform is mutagenic. All the authors helped write the paper, and all approved of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

This article was reviewed by the Chemical Characterization and Exposure Division, Center for Computational Toxicology and Exposure, Office of Research and Development, U.S. EPA, and approved for publication. Approval does not signify that the contents reflect the views of the agency nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use. The authors declare no financial conflict of interests.

antimicrobial. Although none of these I-THMs were activated by GSTT1, iodoform appears to be the only I-THM that is mutagenic in *Salmonella*, only in strains deficient in nucleotide excision repair (uvrB) and having pKM101. Given that only iodoform is mutagenic among the I-THMs and is generally present at low concentrations in drinking water, the I-THMs likely play little role in the mutagenicity of drinking water.

Keywords

mutagenicity; GSTT1; disinfection by-products; drinking water; DBPs

INTRODUCTION

Drinking water disinfected primarily by chlorine has been ubiquitous in most regions of the world for a century; however, the potential health effects of disinfection by-products (DBPs), which are formed by the reaction of chlorine with organics and halides in the water, were not recognized until the 1970s (DeMarini 2020). Among the >700 DBPs identified, >100 have been tested and found to be genotoxic in vitro, and 20 out of 22 that have been tested are carcinogenic in rodents (Richardson et al., 2007; Wagner and Plewa 2017; Cortés and Marcos 2018; DeMarini 2020).

Chloramine (primarily $NH₂Cl$) is often used instead of chlorine because it produces lower concentrations of the regulated trihalomethanes (THMs) and haloacetic acids (HAAs) (Krasner *et al.*, 2006; Hong *et al.*, 2007; Richardson *et al.*, 2007; Liu *et al.*, 2017, 2019), allowing drinking water treatment plants to meet regulations more easily. Chloramine disinfection produces water that is generally less mutagenic in *Salmonella* (DeMarini et al., 1995); however, with Br or I in the source water, it generates finished water that induces higher levels of DNA damage (comet assay) in mammalian cells (Plewa *et al.*, 2008; Yang *et* $al., 2014$). As reviewed by Ersan et $al.$ (2019), chloramination relative to chlorination typically promotes the formation of more unregulated DBPs, including iodinated DBPs (I-DBPs), when iodide is present in the source waters, which can result in higher cytotoxicity and genotoxicity of the treated water (Jeong et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2014; Plewa and Wagner 2015; Liu et al., 2017, 2019).

As assessed by Richardson et al. (2008) in chlorinated and chloraminated drinking waters from 23 cities in the U.S. and Canada, as well as reviewed by Dong et al. (2019) and Postigo et al. (2019), various I-DBPs have been found in drinking water during the disinfection of waters containing iodide and/or organic iodine. The types and concentrations of I-DBPs are influenced by the concentration of iodide (Jones et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2008; Postigo *et al.*, 2017), the molecular size of the natural organic matter (NOM) (Zhang *et al.*, 2016), and the presence of iodinated X-ray contrast media in the source water (Duirk et al., 2011; Wendel et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2017, Postigo et al., 2018; Ackerson et al., 2020). A U.S. nationwide DBP occurrence study found that the concentrations of I-THMs increased with chloramination more than with chlorination, with most I-THMs present at sub- to lowμg/L concentrations among various drinking water samples (Weinberg et al., 2002; Krasner et al., 2006). The increased formation of I-THMs with chloramine vs. chlorine is due to

faster rates of formation of I-THMs compared to competing reactions to form iodate (Bichsel and von Gunten 2000).

Among five I-THMs evaluated, only chlorodiiodomethane (CDIM) induced DNA damage in Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells (Richardson et al., 2008). Triiodomethane (iodoform) has also been evaluated for additional genotoxic endpoints in other mammalian cell lines. In mouse embryonic NIH3T3 cells, iodoform did not induce DNA damage detectable by the comet assay, double-strand DNA breaks, micronuclei, or cell transformation (Wei et al., 2013). In Syrian hamster embryo cells, iodoform did not induce chromosome aberrations (Hikiba et al., 2005). Thus, iodoform is not a chromosomal mutagen.

Consistent with its lack of ability to induce cell transformation (Wei et al., 2013), iodoform was not carcinogenic in male or female rats and mice in a 78-week gavage study (NCI 1978). Although chloroform and bromoform are carcinogenic in rodents (Richardson et al., 2007), chloroform is not mutagenic and requires repeated toxic doses causing necrosis to be carcinogenic in rodents; thus, it has been evaluated as only a possible (2B) human carcinogen (IARC 1999). Bromoform is unclassifiable as a human carcinogen due to limited data (IARC 1991), and iodoform has never been evaluated as a human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

Although iodoform is not a chromosomal mutagen, it is a gene mutagen, being positive in Salmonella strains TA98 and TA100 +/ $-$ S9 (Haworth et al., 1983; NTP 2020) and in the forward-mutation Ara assay in Salmonella strain BA13 +/− S9 (Roldán-Arjona et al., 1991; Roldán-Arjona and Pueyo 1993). All three of these strains contain both a uvrB mutation that eliminates nucleotide excision DNA repair, as well as the pKM101 plasmid, which confers error-prone DNA repair to the cells due to the presence of the *mucA* and *mucB* genes on the plasmid (Walker et al., 1985). The Br-THMs are activated to mutagens in Salmonella by GSTT1 (DeMarini et al., 1997; Pegram et al., 1997), as are five halonitromethanes (Kundu et al., 2004b). Although iodoacetic acid is not activated to a mutagen by GSTT1 (Postigo et al., 2018), it is the most genotoxic among the HAAs (Plewa et al., 2002, 2004b; Attene-Ramos et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2010) and induces cell transformation in NIH3T3 cells (Wei et al., 2013). No other DBPs have been evaluated for their ability to be activated to mutagens in Salmonella by GSTT1, including the I-THMs.

To further characterize the mutagenicity of the I-THMs, we evaluated the mutagenicity of five I-THMs in Salmonella strain RSJ100, which expresses GSTT1, and strain TPT100, which does not; neither strain contains pKM101. The I-THMs were chlorodiiodomethane (CDIM), dichloroiodomethane (DCIM), dibromoiodomethane (DBIM), bromochloroiodomethane (BCIM), and iodoform. Because of the availability of sufficient quantities of standards, we also evaluated the first three compounds (CDIM, DCIM, DBIM) in strain TA100 with and without rat liver S9 mix. We describe the threshold for cytotoxicity exhibited by these compounds, explore possible mechanisms by which iodoform is mutagenic uniquely among the I-THMs, and discuss the limited role that the I-THMs may play in the mutagenicity of drinking water.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Chemicals

We purchased three of the I-THMs from Toronto Research Chemicals, Inc., Toronto, ON, Canada: chlorodiiodomethane (CDIM), dichloroiodomethane (DCIM), and dibromoiodomethane (DBIM). We purchased iodoform, or triiodomethane (TIM), from Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO. Bromochloroiodomethane (BCIM) was purchased from CanSyn Chem Corp., Toronto, ON, Canada. Further details regarding the I-THM standards used in this study are shown in Table 1. HPLC-grade dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) was obtained from Burdick and Jackson, Muskegon, MI. General reagents for buffer solutions and positive controls (see below) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO. Stock solutions of each I-THM were prepared at 1000 μmoles/ml in DMSO, and 1:10 dilutions in DMSO of these stocks were made and stored at 4°C until use.

Mutagenicity assays and cytotoxicity

We evaluated all five I-THMs for mutagenicity in the absence of S9 in *Salmonella* strain RJS100, which expresses the rat $GSTT-1$ gene, and its homologue TPT100, which does not. These strains were derived by Thier et al. (1993) from the base-substitution strain TA1535, which contains a $uvrB$ mutation, preventing nucleotide excision DNA repair; they do not contain the pKM101 plasmid, which confers error-prone trans-lesion DNA repair. These strains were provided by Dr. F.P. Guengerich, Department of Biochemistry, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN. These strains contain a plasmid containing the rat GSTT1 gene, which is inserted in the correct orientation in RSJ100, permitting expression of the gene, but which is inserted in the opposite orientation in TPT100, preventing expression (Thier *et al.*, 1993).

Because of the availability of sample, we also evaluated three of the I-THMs (CDIM, DCIM, and DBIM) in strain TA100 of Salmonella [his G46 chl-1005 (bio uvrB gal) rfa-1001 $pKM101+ Fels-1+ Fels-2+ Gifsy-1+ Gifsy-2+ (Porwollik *et al.*, 2001), which was also$ derived from strain TA1535 (Maron and Ames 1983; Porwollik et al., 2001). Although strains TA1535, RSJ100, TPT100, and TA100 all contain the uvrB mutation, only strain TA100 also contains the pKM101 plasmid. We obtained strain TA100 from Dr. Bruce N. Ames, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Strains were maintained and grown as recommended by Maron and Ames (1983).

We evaluated the I-THMs in a pre-incubation assay as we have done with other halomethanes (Kundu *et al.*, 2004a) because they are semi-volatile and should be tested in a closed system. We evaluated all five I-THMs in RSJ100 and TPT100 in amber glass 8-ml screw-cap tubes as described previously (Kundu et al., 2004a), and we evaluated CDIM, DCIM, and DBIM in TA100 in 6-ml screw-cap tubes due to lack of availability of the 8-ml tubes. Tubes were kept in an ice bath while the following were added to each tube: 100 μl of the appropriate concentration of each I-THM, 500 μl of either 15-mM phosphate buffer or S9 mix prepared from Aroclor-induced Sprague Dawley rat liver S9 (Moltox, Boone, NC), and 100 μl of an overnight culture of cells. Thus, the total reaction volume was 700 μl.

After securing the caps, the tubes were vortexed and incubated at 37°C for 30 min without shaking in a water bath. We then added 2.5 ml of molten top agar to each tube, replaced the cap, vortexed the tube, and then poured the contents onto the surface of Vogel-Bonner medium E (VBME) plates. We incubated the plates at 37°C for 3 days and then counted the colonies on an automatic colony counter (ProtoCOL 3, Synbiosis, Frederick, MD). Due to the limited amounts of halomethanes available, we performed all experiments at one tube per dose and performed two experiments with each I-THM. We evaluated 8–10 doses for each compound, spanning 2–3 orders of magnitude; depending on the compound, the doses ranged from 0.001 to 10 μmoles/plate. We used three plates for the DMSO control and for each of the positive controls (also dissolved in DMSO): sodium azide (3 μg/plate) in the absence of S9 and 2-aminoanthracene (0.5 μg/plate) in the presence of S9.

As with past studies, compounds were determined to be mutagenic if they produced a doserelated increase in revertants (rev)/plate that approached or exceeded a twofold increase relative to the DMSO control and gave a significant $(P \t 0.05)$ trend test (Prism, GraphPad, San Diego, CA). The minimum cytotoxic doses were those causing a reduction in the number of rev/plate and/or a thinning of the background lawn of cells. Thus, cytotoxicity was assessed indirectly as is done when using the plate-incorporation assay, and efforts were made to test the I-THMs at doses that caused cytotoxicity as defined above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mutagenicity

The mutagenicity data (rev/plate) for all five I-THMs in strains RSJ100 and TPT100 showed that none of the compounds were mutagenic (Table 2); all were tested to toxicity as recommended by OECD TG471 (OECD 2020). Thus, as with chloroform, the I-THMs were not activated to mutagens by GSTT1, in contrast to the Br-THMs (DeMarini *et al.*, 1997; Pegram et al., 1997) and some halonitromethanes (Kundu et al., 2004b), which are activated by GSTT1. The high amount of GSTT1 activity exhibited by RSJ100 (18,900 units) relative to TPT100 (<4 units) (Ross and Pegram 2003) was insufficient to activate these I-THMs, although RSJ100 activates the Br-THMs and other dihalomethanes (Thier et al., 1993).

The mutagenicity data (rev/plate) for three of the I-THMs in strain TA100 showed that none of these compounds were mutagenic in either the presence or absence of S9 (Table 3); all were tested to toxicity as recommended by OECD TG471 (OECD 2020). As noted above, the Ames strains contain only a small amount of GSTT1 activity. Thier et al. (1993) showed that addition of S9 to the standard Ames strains did not activate the dihalomethanes, presumably because the activated form of the THM was too unstable to pass through the cell membrane, prompting the construction of strain RSJ100, which over-expresses GSTT1 internally. Likely for this reason, S9 had no impact on the mutagenic potency of iodoform in TA98 or TA100 (Haworth *et al.*, 1983), as we demonstrated by calculating the mutagenic potencies (rev/μg) of iodoform based on the slopes of the linear regressions of the doseresponse data from Haworth *et al.* (1983). We found the rev/µg to be 0.54 (-S9) and 0.55 (+ rat liver S9) in TA100, and 0.51 (-S9) and 0.45 (+S9) in TA98; thus, neither S9 nor GSTT1 influences the mutagenicity of iodoform.

Studying the ability of GSTT1 to activate agents to genotoxic forms is equally challenging in many mammalian cells lines, such as Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells, which do not express GST activity; even primary cell lines can pose problems when studying the role of GSTT1 to activate agents to genotoxic compounds. For example, we showed that freezing or culturing primary human lung cells prevented the expression of GSTT1 activity even in cells that had the GSTT1 gene based on PCR analysis, preventing an assessment of the role of GSTT1 on the induction by THMs of DNA damage as determined by the comet assay (Landi et al., 2003).

Cytotoxicity

In RSJ100 and TPT100, all five I-THMs were tested to toxicity as evidenced by the reduced number of rev/plate relative to the controls (in some cases to complete cell killing as evidenced by clear plates and no colonies) (Table 2). Interestingly, none of the I-THMs showed a dose-related decrease in rev/plate in these strains but, instead, exhibited a threshold, generally starting at 2.5 μmoles/plate (~3 mM in the 700-μl reaction).

In TA100, all three I-THMs were tested to toxicity as evidenced by the reduced number of rev/plate relative to the controls except for CDIM in the absence of S9 due to a limited amount of compound (Table 3). In TA100, these three I-THMs exhibited a reduction in rev/ plate that started at 0.5 to 5 µmoles/plate, whereas this reduction began at \sim 3 to \sim 12 µmoles/ plate by the non-iodinated THM analogues of these compounds (Kundu *et al.*, 2004a), making the I-THMs ~6 times more cytotoxic than their brominated or chlorinated analogues.

Considering the doses at which the various analogues of the THMs initiated a reduction in rev/plate in *Salmonella* TA100, the trihalonitromethane (nitro-THM) homologues were at least 7 times more cytotoxic than the I-THMs, initiating a reduction rev/plate at ~ 0.07 to \sim 3.39 µmoles/plate (Kundu *et al.*, 2004a). Based on this metric, the cytotoxic potencies of the various classes of THMs in *Salmonella* TA100 rank as follows: nitro-THMs > I-THMs > Br-THMs > Cl-THMs (Figure 1), which is generally consistent with their ranking for cytotoxic potency in mammalian (CHO) cells (Plewa et al., 2004a; Plewa and Wagner 2009; Richardson et al., 2008; Wagner and Plewa 2007).

The reduction in rev/plate induced by these I-THMs, including the killing of all the cells on the plate by some of them, may be due to cytotoxic reaction products resulting from the probable scission of iodine from the I-THMs. Iodine is the strongest leaving group of all the halogens (Cottrell 1958; Danen and Winter 1971); however, it is unclear what potentially cytotoxic reaction products might be formed after removal of iodine from the I-THMs. Given the high cytotoxicity of the iodinated DBPs noted here in *Salmonella* and in mammalian cells (Richardson *et al.*, 2008), as well as the potential exposure of people to such compounds in drinking water (Krasner *et al.*, 2006; Richardson *et al.* 2008), research is needed to understand more fully the formation and types of potentially cytotoxic reaction products resulting from the scission of iodine from the I-THMs.

Interpretation of X-ray contrast media study

Recently, we assessed the impact of four iodinated contrast media, which are used to enhance medical X-ray imaging for soft tissues, on the mutagenicity of source water after

the contrast media-containing water was chlorinated (Postigo *et al.*, 2018). We found that organic extracts of the chlorinated waters containing either of two of the contrast media, iopamidol (IPAM) and iohexol (IHX), were more mutagenic in the GSTT1-expressing strain of Salmonella (RSJ100) than in the non-expressing strain (TPT100). The concentrations of Br-THMs as well as I-THMs were increased in these waters; however, there were no correlations between the concentrations of these DBPs and the mutagenicity of the waters.

Because nothing was known at the time about the ability of the I-THMs to be activated by GSTT1, we ascribed the enhanced mutagenicity of these water extracts by GSTT1 to the Br-THMs, which we had detected in the waters and that are activated by GSTT1. Beyond five halonitromethanes (Kundu et al., 2004b), none of the other halonitromethanes are activated by GSTT1, nor is iodoacetic acid (Postigo et al., 2018); no other DBPs have been evaluated for their ability to be activated to mutagens by GSTT1. The I-THM data reported here support our original conclusion, eliminating the I-THMs as a contributor to the enhanced mutagenicity of the IPAM- or IHX-containing waters in RSJ100 that we reported in Postigo et al. (2018).

Relative to their chlorinated and brominated analogues, the I-HAAs, like the I-THMs, are generally more cytotoxic. However, unlike all but CDIM among the I-THMs, all the I-HAAs induce DNA damage in CHO cells as assessed by the comet assay (Plewa et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 2008) and are more genotoxic than their brominated or chlorinated analogues (Wagner and Plewa 2017); they are also 8 times more mutagenic at the Hprt locus in CHO cells than their chlorinated or brominated analogues (Zhang et al., 2010). We have shown that iodoacetic acid (IAA) is also mutagenic in *Salmonella* TA100 and not activated by GSTT1 (Postigo et al., 2018).

Proposed mechanism for the mutagenicity of iodoform in Salmonella TA98, TA100, and BA13

Among the I-THMs, only iodoform is mutagenic in *Salmonella*, and only in strains containing both the *uvrB* mutation, which eliminates nucleotide excision DNA repair, and the pKM101 plasmid, which provides error-prone, trans-lesion DNA repair synthesis (Haworth et al., 1983). In addition, neither S9 (Haworth et al., 1983) nor GSTT1 (Table 2) influences the mutagenicity of iodoform. The DNA damage induced by iodoform that results in mutagenesis in Salmonella strains containing both $uvrB$ and $pKM101$ does not induce other types of genotoxicity, as evidenced by the fact that iodoform in mammalian cells does not produce DNA damage detectable by the comet assay (Wagner and Plewa 2017) and does not induce cell transformation, DNA strand breaks, or micronuclei (Wei *et al.*, 2013) or chromosome aberrations (Hikiba et al., 2005). These results show that iodoform does not induce chromosomal mutations but, instead, induces gene mutations in *Salmonella* strains TA98, TA100, and BA13, likely by forming a DNA adduct that in these strains is not repaired due to the *uvrB* mutation and is then available to be misread by the error-prone DNA polymerase provided by pKM101, resulting in a mutation.

It is unclear why only an I-THM with three iodine moieties might do this, whereas those with just one or two iodine moieties might not. This is especially the case given that the carbon-iodine bond is the weakest between carbon and any of the halogens (Cottrell, 1958),

promoting a high probability of bond scission (Danen and Winter 1971), which would likely occur among all the I-THMs. However, we speculate that scission of an iodine from iodoform would result in a carbon-centered radical whose remaining two iodine moieties would provide sufficient resonance stability to confer a lifetime long enough to form a stable DNA adduct. This would be consistent with the processing of such a DNA adduct into a gene mutation in cells containing both uvrB and pKM101, which are required for mutagenesis by iodoform. In contrast, scission of an iodine from either the mono- or di-I-THMs would not leave two iodine moieties available to create the necessary resonance stability to form a stable DNA adduct.

Two of the I-THMs contained bromine (DBIM and BCIM), and we have shown previously that Br-THMs are activated to mutagens by GSTT1 (DeMarini *et al.*, 1997; Pegram *et al.*, 1997). Our finding that neither of these brominated I-THMs was activated by GSTT1 may be due to the scission of iodine and the subsequent formation of cytotoxic products prior to any potential activation by GSTT1. Another possibility is that the presence of iodine in these THMs made them sterically incompatible with the GSTT1 enzyme.

CONCLUSIONS

The five I-THMs evaluated here were not activated to mutagens in Salmonella by GSTT1; however, all five showed the same threshold for a reduction in rev/plate at \sim 2.5 µmoles/plate. Iodoform appears to be the exception among the I-THMs in that it is a gene mutagen, being positive in Salmonella strains lacking nucleotide excision DNA repair but having error-prone DNA repair. However, it is not a chromosomal mutagen, being negative for induction of DNA strand breaks, micronuclei, and chromosome aberrations in mammalian cells. In addition, iodoform was not carcinogenic in a 78-week gavage study in rats and mice. The two iodinated Br-THMs evaluated here were not activated by GSTT1. The I-THMs have been found at low concentrations in many drinking-water samples, and because only iodoform among the I-THMs is mutagenic, the I-THMs as a class of DBPs likely play little role in the mutagenicity of drinking water.

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Range of Lowest Cytotoxic Doses of THMs in TA100

Figure 1.

Range of lowest cytotoxic doses of THMs in Salmonella TA100. Data for Br-, Cl-, and nitro-THMs are from Kundu et al. (2004a); data for I-THMs are from the present study.

TABLE 1

Iodinated trihalomethane compound information

a DSSTox substance identifier (U.S. EPA 2020).

TABLE 2

Mutagenicity (rev/plate) of I-THMs in Salmonella RSJ100 and TPT100^a

²Values represent counts from single plates except for the zero (0) DMSO controls and positive controls, which represent the average counts from three plates. Cells within the table with dashes represent doses that were not tested.

 b_r These plates showed a thinning of the background lawn, indicative of cytotoxicity.

 c Positive control.

TABLE 3

Mutagenicity (rev/plate) of I-THMs in Salmonella TA100 a

²Values represent counts from single plates except for the zero (0) DMSO controls and positive controls, which represent the average counts from three plates. Cells within the table with dashes represent doses that were not tested.

 b_T These plates showed a thinning of the background lawn, indicative of cytotoxicity.

 c Positive control.