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Supplementary appendix

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Appendix

Rapid implementation of SARS-CoV-2 sequencing to investigate healthcare-associated COVID-19 infections: a genomic epidemiology study

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Supplementary Methods

SARS-CoV-2 molecular testing

Nucleic acid extraction was undertaken using the NUCLISENS easyMAG platform (Biomerieux, Marcy L-Etoile), in accordance with manufacturers' instructions. Nucleic acids were extracted from 500µL of sample, with a dilution of MS2 bacteriophage added pre-extraction to act as an internal extraction and inhibition control. The presence of SARS-CoV-2 was assessed using an in-house generated and validated one-step RT q-PCR assay that detects a 222 base-pair region of the SARS-CoV-2 RdRp genes, along with an MS2 bacteriophage internal extraction control. The RdRp gene was detected using the RdRp For primer (ATGGGTTGGGATTATCCTAAATGTGA) and the RdRp Rev primer (AGCAGTTGTGGCATCTCCTGATGAG) with a FAM labelled MGB RdRp Probe 3 (ATGCTTAGAATTATGGCCTCAC). The internal extraction control was detected using the MS2 For primer (TGGCACTACCCCTCTCCGTATTCACG), the MS2 Rev primer (GTACGGGCGACCCCACGATGAC) and a ROX-BHQ2 labelled MS2 probe (CACATCGATAGATCAAGGTGCCTACAAGC). Amplification reactions and detection of PCR products were performed using the Rotorgene™ PCR instrument. A typical reaction contained 400nM of For and Rev primers for the RdRp genes and 200nM of the the MS2 internal control For and Rev primer pair, along with 120nM of the RdRpand MS2 probes. TaqPath™ 1-Step RT-qPCR Mastermix (Thermo) was used. Reactions typically contained 25% extracted nucleic acid and were cycled through the following conditions: RT (25°C for 2 mins, 50°C for 15 mins, 95°C for 2 mins) followed by 45 cycles of (95°C for 3 secs and 60°C for 30 secs) acquiring on FAM and ROX on the Rotor-Gene Q real-time PCR instrument. Samples that generated a Ct value ≤36 were considered positive. Samples and negative control (molecular grade water) were individually spiked with MS2 bacteriophage internal control (4600 pfu per extraction) prior to nucleic acid extraction to identify any inhibitors or extraction issues. Positive control material, BetaCoV/England/02/2020, was obtained from PHE Colindale and was essentially purified virus RNA diluted down to give a cycle threshold value of 26-28. Negative controls included extracted molecular grade water.

Sequencing details

Samples were sequenced using Nanopore technology following the ARTICnetwork V3 protocol (https://dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.bbmuik6w) and assembled using the ARTICnetwork assembly pipeline (https://artic.network/ncov-2019/ncov2019-bioinformatics-sop.html). Median genome depth of coverage was 6,612x across all 747 genomes. 14 samples in our dataset were also sequenced with Illumina technology at the Wellcome Sanger Institute as part of COG-UK. There was 100% concordance in called nucleotides between sample pairs. Four genomes differed because of base pairs called in the Illumina data that were missing in the Nanopore sequences. The accession numbers of the samples included in this study are available in Appendix pp 24-28.

Bioinformatic analysis

Consensus fasta sequence quality control cutoffs were: size >29Kb, N count <2990 (~10%). After QC filtering, de-duplication and matching with metadata, the first sample set analysed comprised 197 genomes collected up to 10th April 2020; set 2 had 444 genomes up to 15th April, and set 3 (presented here) had 747 genomes up to 24th April. 30 reference genomes were added to the sample sets downloaded from GISAID (https://www.gisaid.org/; Appendix pp 22-23). The reference genomes were chosen to represent the major branches of the global phylogenetic tree as visualised in Nextstrain (https://nextstrain.org/) to provide broader context, including a sample from December 2019 collected in Wuhan, China, used to root the tree. Multiple sequence alignment was performed using MAFFT (v 7.458) with default settings, command:

/PATH/mafft" --retree 2 --inputorder "multi_fasta.fasta" > "aligned_multi_fasta The alignment was manually inspected using AliView. Maximum likelihood trees were produced using IQ-TREE software¹⁵ for all samples passing QC filters and the subset of samples from CUH (n=299 for this dataset). Initial tests with the ModelFinder Plus option³², which selects the optimal nucleotide substitution model out of over 200 options (http://www.iqtree.org/doc/Substitution-Models), consistently identified GTR+F+I as the best model. Therefore from 24th April (including analysis presented here) we specified GTR+F+I.

Command using ModelFinder Plus:

/PATH/iqtree -s aligned_filtered_multi_fasta -m MFP Command with GTR+F+I model specified:

/PATH/iqtree -s aligned_filtered_multi_fasta -m GTR+F+I

Trees were manually inspected in FigTree, rooted on the 2019 Wuhan sample (EPI ISL 402123), ordered by descending node and exported as Newick files. Trees were visualised in online software Microreact¹⁶ in a private account to explore relationships between wards and clinico-epidemiological questions for our weekly reports. Further visualisations were produced in R using the packages *Ape*³³ (v 5.3) and *ggtree*¹⁷ (v 2.0.4).

A SNP difference matrix was produced from the multiple sequence alignment using the *snp-dists* package (v 0.7.0; https://github.com/tseemann/snp-dists; installed into a conda environment), command:

snp-dists -c aligned_filtered_multi_fasta.aln > snp_dist_matrix.csv

The matrix was exported as .csv and manipulated in R using the *Matrix* and *tidyverse* packages for ward and pairwise SNP comparisons and plotted using the *ggplot2* (v 3.3.0) package. A heatmap was produced in python using the seaborn (v 0.10.0) clustermap function. To identify clusters with zero SNP differences we initially used the scipy.cluster.hierarchy functions *linkage* and *fcluster* (scipy v 1.4.1), with additional samples in complete linkage (zero SNP differences between all members of the cluster) identified using a custom R script that searched for zero SNP differences between pairwise sample comparisons and kept the largest groups containing each sample. Clusters were named in descending size order and linked with sample metadata and lineage data.

Investigation of genetic clusters with zero SNP differences

Patient records from each case within a putative genomic cluster were manually reviewed in detail by authors BW, WLH and MET and assigned a score of 1 (strong evidence supporting a recent linked transmission chain, e.g. patients co-located on the same ward becoming positive within the incubation period of the virus), 2 (a plausible transmission chain is present e.g. patients becoming positive while located in nearby wards within the hospital but who did not appear to be in direct contact), and 3 (no evidence of any connections between cases) – see Appendix pp 17 – 20 for further details.

Epidemiological analysis methods

Timeline plotting

Space time relationships between patients were plotted using patient specific time lines by exporting the bed and ward admission dates, dates of transfer, dates of discharge or date of death obtained from hospital information system (EPIC Systems Corporation, Verona, USA) and importing them into a cloudbased timeline plotter application (Cluster Track, Camart Ltd, Cambridge available at Clusterack.com). Earliest positive specimen date for COVID19 was obtained from the laboratory records and date of onset of symptoms from the clinical records and uploaded.

The application aided visualisation of ward and time relations by assigning unique colours to wards and then ward presence by date along the x axis shown in days, such that a solid timeline bar by colour and by date permitted the visualisation of the location of each patient over time. The positive specimen date for COVID 19, genomic cluster, death and discharge were each overlaid on the patient timeline using standard visual representation built into the application. Visualisation was aided by using the sort command within the application on admission date, earliest positive specimen date, or first ward to which admitted. Separate plots of subset of the total cases were created to provide clearer visualisation when needed

Ward time and genomic cluster plots

A clustering and network analysis function was used in the Cluster track application in which an algorithm links patients with admission days to the same ward on the same date and displays a network diagram to indicate these overlapping cases.

More advanced space time clustering was undertaken by exporting these timeline data sets into an SQL database running a more advanced clustering algorithm in which time parameters were set for the presumed susceptible, infectious and non-infectious/ recovered intervals counting from the earliest positive specimen date. The algorithm identified and linked cases in which two or more patients had an overlap on the same ward of the time interval of infectiousness of an earlier case with the interval of susceptibility in a later case or cases. Links continue to be made until no further overlaps of the infectious interval in an earlier case occurred with the interval of susceptibility in a later case on the same ward: this ended the space time cluster.

The cluster diagrams of the space time clustered cases were reviewed. Cases within the same space time cluster that belonged to the same genomic cluster were deemed to be supportive of a recent transmission event.

Data and Sample Processing at CUH

HAI = Hospital Acquired Infection

HCW = Healthcare Worker

Flow diagram representing sample and metadata flow between clinical diagnostics and sequencing centres.

Process for investigating healthcare associated COVID-19 infections

Conceptual flow diagram shows investigation process for healthcare associated COVID-19 infections at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Review meetings took place weekly.

Baseline characteristics of COVID-19 patients at CUH

Baseline characteristics of confirmed COVID-19 patients at CUH (with confirmed results between 10th March to 24th April, excluding 37 healthcare workers diagnosed as part of staff screening. Genomic clusters were defined as 2 or more identical virus. Genomic singletons had unique genomes in the dataset.

CUH COVID-19 infections and sequence data availability

Table shows breakdown of COVID-19 infection classification at CUH and availability of SARS-CoV-2 sequences for analysis.

Genome coverage plotted against Ct value

Ct value plotted against the percent of SARS-CoV-2 genome sequenced prior to internal screening and for which a Ct value is available (N=947). Median Ct value of samples failing 70% coverage threshold is 34 (N=85).

Correlation between Ct and Percent Genome Coverage for two biological samples diluted 1:9 from a Ct of 25 to 37. Samples were sequenced in duplicate. The effective Ct value yielding 70% genome coverage averaged 32.19 ± 0.14 (n=2, SD).

Location and frequency of SNPs across sequenced genomes

Cumulative number and location of SNPs compared to the original Wuhan strain (Accession No. MN908947) observed across 747 genomes sequenced in East of England. This shows the total occurrence of SNPs, 10,536nt across 22,337,541nt sequenced (0.005%) occurring at 1,196 positions. Of the 1,196 positions, 1,192 SNPs were found to be single SNPs, while 4 sites had 2 SNPs. 5 common SNPs were found in the majority of sequenced genomes (A23403G, C14408T, C241T, C3037T, T deletion at 24981) while G28881A, G28882A, G28883 were also found in ~50% of samples. These are not unique mutations and have been observed in other cases in the global NextStrain analysis.

SARS-CoV-2 lineages identified over time

Week commencing

In the weeks commencing 9 and 13 March 2020 lineages (and descendent lineages) of B, B.1, B.2, B.3 and B.8 were present in the EoE (amalgamated here as there were only 2 samples for week commencing 9 March). Diversification of lineages already present from earlier weeks was seen over time, with the detection of descendants of lineages B.1 and B.2, but no new lineages emerged during this period, likely an impact of lockdown measures preventing new viruses being introduced from other regions. Changes in lineage frequency may be stochastic due to changes in the available sample size during each week of the sampling period. Lineage B.8 was only detected in the week commencing 16 March 2020. Lineage B.4 viruses (associated with export from Iran) were not seen in our sample set. Lineage A viruses (or A descendants), most commonly reported in China, USA, South Korea and Australia, were not detected in our EoE samples.

Phylogenetic tree and lineages of East of England genomes

Phylogenetic tree of 747 East of England SARS-CoV-2 genomes and 30 reference genomes used to provide further genetic and geographic context. The reference genomes are highlighted with coloured tips and are the same used in Figure 4. As with Figure 4, the tree is rooted on a December 2019 sample from Wuhan, China, with older samples from Asia represented at the base of the tree as expected. The lineages are indicated by the colour bar.

Phylogenetic tree of CUH SARS-CoV-2 genomes highlighting samples taken in the Emergency Department

Phylogenetic tree of 299 CUH SARS-CoV-2 genomes and 30 reference genomes. The inner ring shows emergency department (ED) samples in blue and samples collected from all other sites in grey. The outer ring shows the different classifications of infection: 1. Community onset, community associated; 2. Community onset, suspected healthcareassociated; 3. Hospital onset, indeterminate healthcare-associated; 4. Hospital onset, suspected healthcareassociated; 5. Hospital onset, healthcare-associated; 6. Healthcare worker; 7. Unable to determine/ data missing.

SNP difference matrix for CUH SARS-CoV-2 genomes

SNP difference matrix for 299 SARS-CoV-2 genomes from CUH. Darker colouring indicates more similar genomes. Several clusters of identical viruses are present in the dataset, as discussed in main text. The left-hand bar shows wards A, B, C and the dialysis unit highlighted in colour and other wards in grey

Distribution of SNP differences among CUH SARS-CoV-2 genomes

Frequency distribution of pairwise SNP differences between CUH SARS-CoV-2 genomes

Distribution of pairwise SNP differences for 299 CUH samples. The total number of pairwise comparisons is 44,551. The median difference was 8 SNPs (range 0 to 24 SNPs). 4.5% of genomes were identical or 1-SNP different.

Box plot of SNP differences between SARS-CoV-2 genomes from selected sampling locations

Box plot of SNP differences between SARS-CoV-2 genomes at CUH within different sampling locations. The number of SNP differences was very low on certain wards (0 to 1 SNPs) compared with the emergency department (ED), the Trust (CUH) and the East of England (EoE) as a whole, consistent with shared recent transmission events on these wards (discussed in main text).

Epidemiological analysis of clusters of identical SARS-CoV-2 genomes

Descriptions of the 35 clusters of genomically identical viruses (zero SNP differences) in this study.

*Possible HAIs = patients swabbed 2-14 days from admission, or patients swabbed <2 days from admission who have had healthcare contact in the 2 weeks prior to admission (categories 2-4 in table 1, main paper).

Strong epidemiological link defined as either: patient co-location in the same clinical area within the incubation period of the virus (for hospital-acquired cases); cases with the same residential address (community acquired cases); patients working in social care in the same named care home as a patient resident in this home; HCWs working in the same clinical area as other HCWs or patients.

Plausible epidemiological links defined as: patients working in social care in an unnamed care home in the same genomic cluster as a patient resident in a care home; HCWs working on different clinical areas within the same hospital department as other HCWs or patients; patients temporally co-located on neighbouring wards or clinical areas within the same department.

Epidemiological timelines of hospital clusters

Timeline plots generated using Cluster Track (detailed in Appendix p 3).

Hospital cluster 2 (Ward B)

Four transplant patients on ward B (shown in khaki) were diagnosed with COVID-19 infection between 3 and 20 April 2020. A fifth patient, who had been recently discharged from the ward, presented to the ED with COVID-19 infection. The sample dates are shown in yellow circles (patients) and diamonds (HCW). Genomic analysis revealed that all 5 patients had identical genomes. Two HCW were found to have identical genomes in the same cluster as the ward B cases; one had worked on ward B and had professional contact with the other HCW. The renal ward is shown in blue, the emergency department in red and the admissions unit in yellow. Other wards are shown in grey.

Dialysis unit cluster

Six patients with end-stage renal failure were diagnosed with COVID-19 between 1 and 20 April 2020, testing positive in several locations including ED and an acute admissions ward. The sample dates are shown in yellow circles. Their viral genomes were identical, and epidemiological investigation revealed they dialysed at the same outpatient dialysis unit. This suggests linked recent transmission of community-onset healthcare-associated infections. Black triangles indicate patient deaths. The darker green blocks represent the dialysis unit with suspected transmission; the light green and grey blocks represent different dialysis units. The renal ward is shown in blue and the emergency department in red. Other wards are shown in grey.

GISAID genomes included in phylogenetic tree

*Sample from China used to root the tree

Table of sequences / accession numbers

