



Letter to the Editor

Tixagevimab-cilgavimab (AZD7442) for the treatment of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 (DisCoVeRy): A phase 3, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial


Dear Editor,

We read with great interest the recent article by Kamboj et al., in which they described the risk of developing moderate to severe Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in patients with hematological malignancies receiving tixagevimab-cilgavimab (T-C) during a period in which the dominant circulating variants of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) were resistant to T-C.¹ The authors highlight the ongoing need to urgently address the mAb treatment gap, particularly for immunocompromised patients. The unmet need is further highlighted by the DisCoVeRy Phase 3, adaptive, multicenter European, randomized, double-blind, superiority trial that evaluated the efficacy and safety of intravenous T-C in SARS-CoV-2 antigenic positive patients (i.e. those with a high SARS-CoV-2 viral load) hospitalized with COVID-19 and followed-up to day 90.

In the ambulatory setting, and while ancestral strains were circulating, the administration of intramuscular T-C to treat SARS-CoV-2 infections significantly reduced the risk of hospitalization and death in patients at risk for disease progression, compared to placebo.² In the hospital setting, the double-blinded, placebo-controlled ACTIV-3-TICO trial evaluating T-C in 1417 patients with COVID-19, with > 50% of participants infected with the Delta variant, demonstrated that treatment with T-C was associated with a 30% relative risk reduction in mortality (9% vs. 12%; hazard ratio [HR] 0.70 [95% confidence interval (CI) 0.50–0.97]; $p = 0.032$) through day 90.³ The EU DisCoVeRy placebo-controlled trial (NCT04315948) began enrolling on April 28, 2021, after these trials were initiated (January 28, 2021, and February 10, 2021, respectively) and aimed to confirm efficacy and safety data in hospitalized COVID-19 patients during a later stage of the pandemic when the natural evolution of SARS-CoV-2 strains had led to the emergence of variants of concern (VOC), and mass vaccination campaigns had been ramped up worldwide.⁴

In DisCoVeRy, participants were randomly assigned (1:1) to receive placebo or T-C in addition to standard of care (SoC), not including remdesivir. The primary outcome was the clinical status at day 15 measured by the WHO seven-point ordinal scale. Clinical, virological, immunological and safety endpoints were also assessed.

In the context of *in-vitro* evidence showing loss of neutralization activity against emerging VOC,^{5,6} enrollment slowed down until recruitment was stopped on July 1, 2022, before reaching the predetermined targeted sample size of 1240 patients. As shown in Table 1, the antigen positive modified intention-to-treat population (mITT) included 173 participants randomized to T-C ($n = 91$) or placebo ($n = 82$), among whom 91.9% (159/173) needed supplementary oxygen, 19.6% (24/173) were immunocompromised, and

47.4% (82/173) were previously vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 at inclusion. There was no difference in the distribution of the WHO ordinal scale at day 15 between the two groups (odds ratio (OR) 0.93, 95%CI [0.54–1.61]; $p = 0.81$) nor in any clinical, virological or safety secondary endpoints (Fig. 1). In the global mITT population ($n = 226$), neutralization antibody titers were significantly higher in the T-C recipients compared to placebo at day 3 (least-square mean differences (LSMD) 1.44, 95%CI [1.20–1.68]; $p < 10^{-23}$) and day 8 (LSMD 0.91, 95%CI [0.64–1.18]; $p < 10^{-8}$) and it was greatest for patients infected with a pre-Omicron variant, both at day 3 (LSMD 1.94, 95% CI [1.67–2.20], $p < 10^{-25}$) and day 8 (LSMD 1.17, 95% CI [0.87–1.47], $p < 10^{-9}$), with a significant interaction ($p < 10^{-7}$ and $p = 0.01$ at days 3 and 8, respectively). A total of 178 adverse events (AEs), including 90 serious AEs (SAEs) were reported, of which 28 (31.1%) were considered related to the investigational medicinal product. In the T-C group, 51/123 (41.5%) patients had at least one AE, 30/123 (24.4%) had at least one grade 3 or 4 AE, and 28/123 (22.8%) had at least one SAE, against 45/103 (43.7%), 33 (32.0%), and 32 (31.1%) in the control group ($p = 0.70, 0.18, \text{ and } 0.13$), respectively. Among 19 fatal SAEs, none were of cardiac origin. Complete results and all supporting documents are available on medRxiv (doi: [10.1101/2024.02.23.24302586](https://doi.org/10.1101/2024.02.23.24302586)).

Although T-C combination was safe and well-tolerated, showing no excess cardiac events, it did not significantly improve patients' clinical status in the DisCoVeRy study, nor accelerate viral clearance, despite a significant increase in neutralizing antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 at days 3 and 8 compared to placebo. The difference with the ACTIV-3-TICO trial concerning mortality is due to the underpowered nature of the DisCoVeRy trial, and possibly amongst other reasons, the changes in infecting SARS-CoV-2 variants. The Delta variant was the predominant one in both trials, but the DisCoVeRy trial enrolled 40% of patients infected with the Omicron variant compared to none in the ACTIV-3-TICO trial.³ Indeed, the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant and its multiple sub-lineages have proven to be more evasive than the ancestral strain or Delta variant to vaccines and therapeutic mAbs, including T-C, as assessed by *in-vitro* live-virus neutralization assays.^{5,6} Infections due to the Omicron variant have overall proven to be less virulent than prior variants, including Delta,⁷ however, many patients who did require hospitalization were still at risk of dying, as illustrated by the mortality rate of 15% at day 90 in our trial and the important morbidity described by Kamboj et al.¹

The early termination of this DisCoVeRy trial, with only 19% of the planned enrollment, is an example of the difficulties to evaluate mAbs in the changing variant landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the evolving genomics⁴ as well as the increased capacity of the virus for immune escape, vulnerable individuals unable to mount an adequate immune response (e.g. the immunocompromised), remain at risk for severe COVID-19. Consequently, further reflections are needed on how best to evaluate mAbs in the clinical setting to rapidly address this

Table 1 Baseline characteristics, clinical endpoints, and safety of participants in the antigen positive and global modified intention-to-treat populations, overall and according to the treatment group.

	Antigen positive (N = 173)				Global (N = 226)			
	Tixagevima- cilgavimab		Placebo		Tixagevima- cilgavimab		Placebo	
	N = 91	(N = 82)	Effect measure (95% CI)	Effect measure (95% CI)	N = 123	(N = 226)	N = 103	Effect measure (95% CI)
Baseline characteristics								
Median age, years	66.0 [55.0–79.0]	65.0 [56.0–80.0]	66.5 [55.0–78.0]	66.0 [53.0–76.0]	64.0 [53.0–76.0]	68.0 [52.0–76.0]	68.0 [52.0–76.0]	
Sex male,	117 (67.6%)	56 (61.5%)	61 (74.4%)	155 (68.6%)	78 (63.4%)	77 (74.8%)	77 (74.8%)	
Number of comorbidities*								
0	38 (22.0%)	17 (18.7%)	21 (25.6%)	52 (23.0%)	28 (22.8%)	24 (23.3%)	24 (23.3%)	
1	49 (28.3%)	26 (28.6%)	23 (28.0%)	71 (31.4%)	38 (30.9%)	33 (32.0%)	33 (32.0%)	
2	43 (24.9%)	23 (25.3%)	20 (24.4%)	50 (22.1%)	27 (22.0%)	23 (22.3%)	23 (22.3%)	
3	25 (14.5%)	14 (15.4%)	11 (13.4%)	32 (14.2%)	18 (14.6%)	14 (13.6%)	14 (13.6%)	
> 3	18 (10.4%)	11 (12.1%)	7 (8.5%)	21 (9.3%)	12 (9.8%)	9 (8.7%)	9 (8.7%)	
Coexisting condition								
Chronic cardiac disease	62 (35.8%)	39 (42.9%)	23 (28.0%)	72 (31.9%)	43 (35.0%)	29 (28.2%)	29 (28.2%)	
Obesity (BMI ≥ 30)	46 (26.6%)	27 (29.7%)	19 (23.2%)	63 (27.9%)	38 (30.9%)	25 (24.3%)	25 (24.3%)	
Diabetes	46 (26.6%)	30 (33.0%)	16 (19.5%)	58 (25.7%)	37 (30.1%)	21 (20.4%)	21 (20.4%)	
Current smoker	13 (48.1%)	6 (42.9%)	7 (53.8%)	15 (48.4%)	7 (46.7%)	8 (50.0%)	8 (50.0%)	
Chronic pulmonary disease (including asthma)	43 (24.9%)	22 (24.2%)	21 (25.6%)	53 (23.5%)	27 (22.0%)	26 (25.2%)	26 (25.2%)	
Active cancer (including hematological malignancy)	23 (13.3%)	9 (9.9%)	14 (17.1%)	30 (13.3%)	12 (9.8%)	18 (17.5%)	18 (17.5%)	
Median days from symptoms onset and random assignment ^{†,‡}	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	7.0 [6.0–9.0]	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	7.0 [6.0–9.0]	8.0 [6.0–9.0]	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	
NEWS2 score*	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	7.0 [5.0–8.0]	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	7.0 [5.0–9.0]	7.0 [5.0–8.0]	6.0 [5.0–9.0]	6.0 [5.0–9.0]	
Clinical status								
3. Hospitalized, not requiring supplemental oxygen	7 (4.0%)	5 (5.5%)	2 (2.4%)	9 (4.0%)	6 (4.9%)	3 (2.9%)	3 (2.9%)	
4. Hospitalized, requiring supplemental oxygen	141 (81.5%)	71 (78.0%)	70 (85.4%)	179 (79.2%)	93 (75.6%)	86 (83.5%)	86 (83.5%)	
5. Hospitalized, on non-invasive ventilation or high flow oxygen devices	25 (14.5%)	15 (16.5%)	10 (12.2%)	38 (16.8%)	24 (19.5%)	14 (13.6%)	14 (13.6%)	
Randomization site								
Intensive care unit	21 (12.1%)	15 (16.5%)	6 (7.3%)	32 (14.2%)	21 (17.1%)	11 (10.7%)	11 (10.7%)	
Conventional unit	152 (87.9%)	76 (83.5%)	76 (92.7%)	194 (85.8%)	102 (82.9%)	92 (89.3%)	92 (89.3%)	
Vaccination initiation (partly or fully)	82 (47.4%)	43 (47.3%)	39 (47.6%)	102 (45.1%)	56 (45.5%)	46 (44.7%)	46 (44.7%)	
Serology*								
Negative (anti-N antibodies - and anti-S RBD antibodies -)	69 (40.4%)	40 (44.4%)	29 (35.8%)	76 (34.4%)	44 (36.4%)	32 (32.0%)	32 (32.0%)	
Positive (anti-N antibodies + or anti-S RBD antibodies +)	102 (59.6%)	50 (55.6%)	52 (64.2%)	145 (65.6%)	77 (63.6%)	68 (68.0%)	68 (68.0%)	
Variant Omicron on day 1 (imputed)*								
Pre-Omicron	99 (57.2%)	52 (57.1%)	47 (57.3%)	133 (58.8%)	70 (56.9%)	63 (61.2%)	63 (61.2%)	
Omicron BA1	44 (25.4%)	25 (27.5%)	19 (23.2%)	53 (23.5%)	32 (26.0%)	21 (20.4%)	21 (20.4%)	
Omicron BA2/5	20 (11.6%)	10 (11.0%)	10 (12.2%)	22 (9.7%)	11 (8.9%)	11 (10.7%)	11 (10.7%)	
Unknown	10 (5.8%)	4 (4.4%)	6 (7.3%)	18 (8.0%)	10 (8.1%)	8 (7.8%)	8 (7.8%)	
Median normalized viral load in nasopharyngeal swabs at baseline, log ₁₀ copies per 10,000 cells [†]	4.4 [3.3–5.4]	4.4 [3.4–5.3]	4.4 [3.3–5.6]	4.0 [2.5–5.2]	3.9 [2.4–5.1]	4.1 [2.7–5.3]	4.1 [2.7–5.3]	

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Table 1 (continued)

	Antigen positive (N = 173)			Global (N = 226)		
	Overall	Tixagevimab-cilgavimab	Placebo	Overall	Tixagevimab-cilgavimab	Placebo
	(N = 173)	(N = 91)	(N = 82)	(N = 226)	(N = 123)	(N = 103)
Clinical endpoints						
7-point ordinal scale at day 15						
1. Not hospitalized, no limitations on activities	35 (20.2%)	15 (16.5%)	20 (24.4%)	48 (21.2%)	20 (16.3%)	28 (27.2%)
2. Not hospitalized, limitation on activities	77 (44.5%)	45 (49.5%)	32 (39.0%)	104 (46.0%)	63 (51.2%)	41 (39.8%)
3. Hospitalized, not requiring supplemental oxygen	18 (10.4%)	9 (9.9%)	9 (11.0%)	24 (10.6%)	14 (11.4%)	10 (9.7%)
4. Hospitalized, requiring supplemental oxygen	9 (5.2%)	7 (7.7%)	2 (2.4%)	13 (5.8%)	10 (8.1%)	3 (2.9%)
5. Hospitalized, on non-invasive ventilation or high flow oxygen devices	6 (3.5%)	2 (2.2%)	4 (4.9%)	7 (3.1%)	2 (1.6%)	5 (4.9%)
6. Hospitalized, on invasive mechanical ventilation or ECMO	11 (6.4%)	5 (5.5%)	6 (7.3%)	12 (5.3%)	6 (4.9%)	6 (5.8%)
7. Death	17 (9.8%)	8 (8.8%)	9 (11.0%)	18 (8.0%)	8 (6.5%)	10 (9.7%)
Time to sustained recovery through day 90 (days)	22.0 [19.0–27.0]	22.0 [19.0–27.5]	21.0 [18.0–27.0]	21.0 [18.0–27.0]	22.0 [19.0–27.5]	21.0 [18.0–27.0]
Days to hospital discharge before day 90	8.0 [6.0–13.0]	8.0 [6.0–11.0]	9.0 [5.0–13.0]	8.0 [5.0–13.0]	8.0 [5.0–12.0]	8.0 [5.0–13.0]
Mortality rate at day 90	26 (15.0%)	12 (13.2%)	14 (17.1%)	28 (12.4%)	12 (9.8%)	16 (15.5%)
Safety						
Number of patients with at least one adverse event						
Any adverse events				96 (42.5%)	51 (41.5%)	45 (43.7%)
Any grade 1 adverse events				20 (8.8%)	12 (9.8%)	8 (7.8%)
Any grade 2 adverse events				29 (12.8%)	18 (14.6%)	11 (10.7%)
Any grade 3 adverse events				34 (15.0%)	18 (14.6%)	16 (15.5%)
Any grade 4 adverse events				35 (15.5%)	14 (11.4%)	21 (20.4%)
Any grade 1 and 2 adverse events				43 (19.0%)	25 (20.3%)	18 (17.5%)
Any grade 3 and 4 adverse events				63 (27.9%)	30 (24.4%)	33 (32.0%)
Number of patients with at least one serious adverse event						
Any serious adverse events				60 (26.5%)	28 (22.8%)	32 (31.1%)
Any serious adverse events leading to outcome of death				19 (8.4%)	9 (7.3%)	10 (9.7%)
Effect measure						
				(95% CI)		(95% CI)
				OR = 0.93 (0.54–1.61) [p = 0.81]		OR = 0.85 (0.52–1.37) [p = 0.50]
				HR = 0.98 (0.71–1.36) [p = 0.92]		HR = 1.01 (0.77–1.34) [p = 0.93]
				HR = 1.06 (0.78–1.45) [p = 0.70]		HR = 1.10 (0.84–1.43) [p = 0.49]
				OR = 0.773 (0.31–1.72) [p = 0.47]		OR = 0.56 (0.25–1.28) [p = 0.17]
						OR = 0.90 (0.53–1.54) [p = 0.70]
						OR = 0.67 (0.37–1.20) [p = 0.18]
						OR = 0.63 (0.35–1.15) [p = 0.13]

Data are median [IQR] or n (%).

Analyses were stratified on the vaccination status at randomization and adjusted effect measures are reported in the table. For the ordinal scale results, an odds ratio above 1 is in the direction of tixagevimab-cilgavimab being better than placebo. For time to event analyses, a hazard ratio above 1 is in the direction of tixagevimab-cilgavimab being better than placebo. Estimates are reported with their 95% confidence interval. As per the definition in the protocol, adverse events and serious adverse events do not include disease-related events. CI: confidence interval; OR: odds ratio; HR: hazard ratio; BMI: body mass index; ECMO: extracorporeal membrane oxygenation.

* Denotes variables with missing data. The number of missing data is presented for the antigen positive/the global mITT for each variable, respectively. Data on smoking status (current) were missing in 3/3 participants; data on delay between first laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection and admission date at facility were missing in 1/1 participant; data on delay between first laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection and randomization were missing in 1/1 participant; data on serology test were missing on 2/5 participants; data on variant sequencing were missing in 35/71 participants; data on body weight were missing on 10/11 participants; data on NEWS2 score were missing on 16/20 participants.

† Only conditions with a relative frequency greater than 10% are displayed in the table.
‡ Undetectable viral load values (i.e. values < 1 log₁₀ copies/10 000 cells) were imputed to 0.7 log₁₀ copies/10 000 cells.

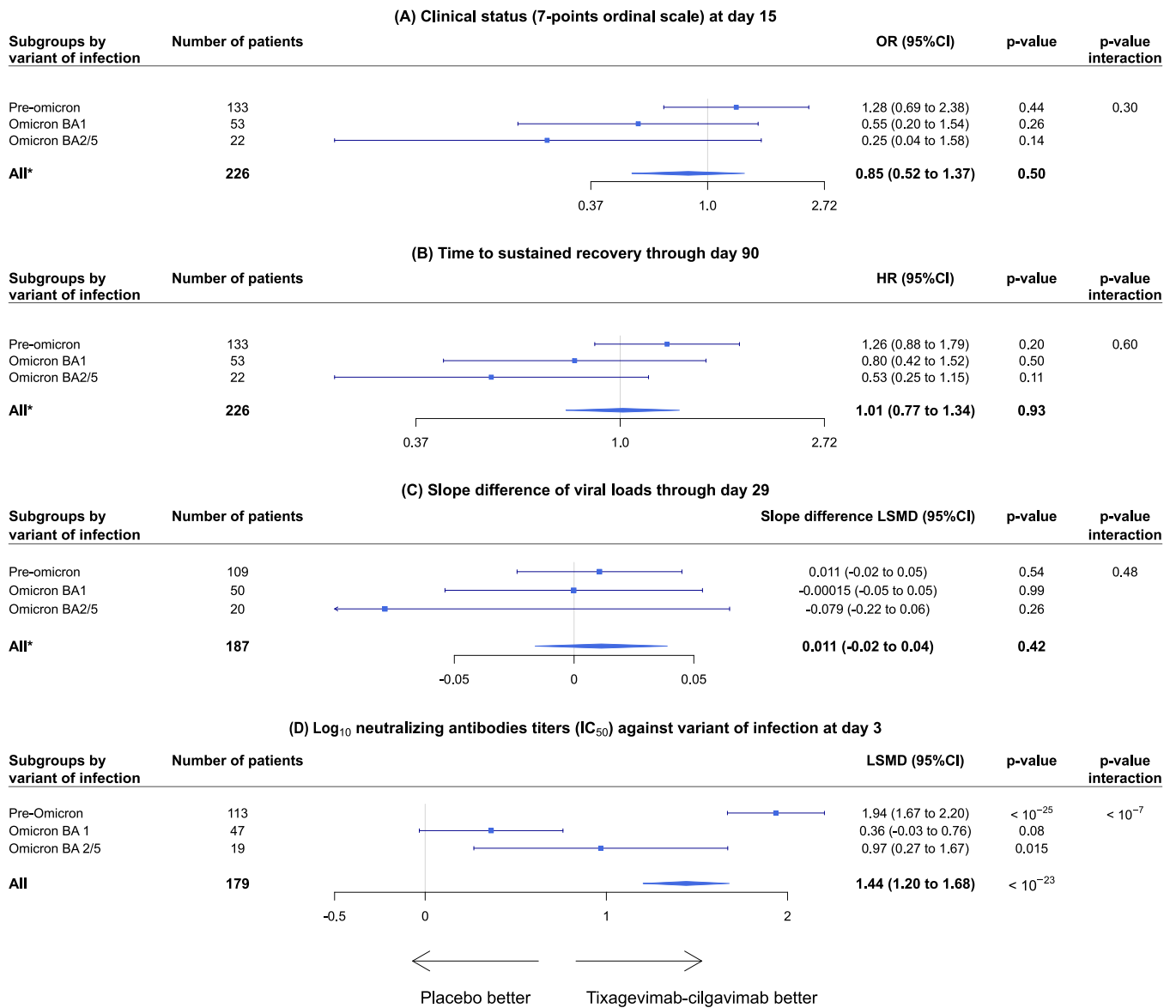


Fig. 1. Forest plots of subgroup analyses according to the variant of infection, for the (A) clinical status (7-points ordinal scale) at day 15, (B) time to sustained recovery through day 90, (C) slope difference of viral loads through day 29, (D) log₁₀ neutralizing antibody titers against variant of infection at day 3, in patients from the global modified intention-to-treat population.

urgent unmet need by bringing new therapeutic options to patients, particularly immunocompromised, while ensuring their safety. Novel approaches for evaluating mAbs include immuno-bridging trials, where humoral and/or cellular immune parameters are evaluated in a controlled trial to establish whether an intervention is effective⁸ and the adoption of a global surveillance system with criteria for *in-vitro* evaluation of antiviral susceptibility correlated to clinical data.⁹ Modeling antiviral effects while accounting for vaccination status, SARS-CoV-2 antibody levels, infecting viral strains, and other parameters, may provide better insight into antiviral efficacy of mAbs, as we have previously shown with remdesivir.¹⁰

Declaration of Competing Interest

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Maya Hites ^{*1}, Eva Larranaga Lapique
Clinic of Infectious Diseases, Hôpital Universitaire de Bruxelles (HUB),
Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium

Clément R. Massonnaud ², Drifa Belhadi
Université Paris Cité, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, Hôpital Bichat, Département d'Épidémiologie, Biostatistique et
Recherche Clinique, F-75018 Paris, France

Simon Jamard
Service de Maladies Infectieuses Et Tropicales (SMIT), Centre Hospitalier
Universitaire de Tours, 37044 Tours, France

François Goehringier
Université de Lorraine, CHRU de Nancy, Service des Maladies
Infectieuses et Tropicales, F-54000 Nancy, France

François Danion
Hôpitaux Universitaires de Strasbourg, Département de maladies
infectieuses et tropicales, F-67091 Strasbourg, France

Jean Reignier
CHU de Nantes, Service de Médecine Intensive et Réanimation,
Université de Nantes, F-44093 Nantes, France

Nathalie de Castro
Département des Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, GH Saint-Louis/
Lariboisière-Fernand Widal, Université de Paris Cité, INSERM U 944,
Paris, France

Denis Garot
CHRU Tours, Service de Médecine Intensive Réanimation, F-37044 Tours,
France

Karine Lacombe
Sorbonne Université, Inserm, Institut Pierre-Louis d'Épidémiologie et de
Santé Publique, F-75013 Paris, France
APHP, Hôpital Saint-Antoine, Service de maladies infectieuses et
tropicales, F-75012 Paris, France

Violaine Tolsma
Centre Hospitalier Annecy Genevois, Service des Maladies Infectieuses et
Tropicales, F-74374 Annecy, France

Emmanuel Faure
Université de Lille, CNRS, Inserm, CHU Lille, Institut Pasteur de Lille,
U1019 - UMR 9017 - CIIL - Center for Infection and Immunity of Lille, F-
59000 Lille, France

Denis Malvy
Department of Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine, CHU
Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France

Thérèse Staub
Centre hospitalier de Luxembourg, Service des maladies infectieuses, L-
1210 Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Johan Courjon
Université Côte d'Azur, CHU Nice, Nice, France, Infectious Disease Unit,
Nice, France

France Cazenave-Roblot
Département des Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, CHU de Poitiers,
INSERM U1070, Poitiers, France

Anne Ma Dyrhol Riise
Department of Infectious Diseases, Oslo University Hospital, 0424 Oslo,
Norway

Paul Leturnier
Department of Infectious Diseases, Hôtel-Dieu University Hospital,
University Hospital of Nantes, Nantes, France

Guillaume Martin-Blondel
CHU de Toulouse, Service des maladies infectieuses et Tropicales, F-
31320 Toulouse, France
Institut Toulousain des Maladies Infectieuses et Inflammatoires
(Infinity) INSERM UMR1291 - CNRS UMR5051 - Université Toulouse III,
F-31320 Toulouse, France

Claire Roger
Department of Anesthesiology, Critical Care Pain, and Emergency
Medicine, Nimes University Hospital, Nimes, France

- Karolina Akinosoglou
Department of Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, University
General Hospital of Patras, Patras, Greece
- Vincent Le Moing
CHU de Montpellier, Service des Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, F-
34295 Montpellier, France
- Lionel Piroth
CHU de Dijon, Département de Maladies Infectieuses, F-21000, Dijon,
France
Université Bourgogne Franche-Comté, CIC 1432, INSERM, F-21000,
Dijon, France
- Pierre Sellier
Infectious Diseases Department, Lariboisière Hospital, AP-HP, Paris,
France
- Xavier Lescure
Université Paris Cité, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, Hôpital Bichat, Service de Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, F-
75018 Paris, France
- Marius Trøseid
Research Institute of Internal Medicine, Division of Surgery,
Inflammatory Diseases and Transplantation, Oslo University Hospital
Rikshospitalet, Oslo, Norway
- Philippe Clevenbergh
Infectious Diseases Clinic, CHU Brugmann, ULB, Brussels, Belgium
- Olav Dalgard
Department of Infectious Diseases, Division of Medicine, Akershus
University Hospital, Lørenskog, Norway
Institute for Clinical Medicine, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
- Sébastien Gallien
APHP, Hôpital Henri Mondor, Département de maladies infectieuses, F-
94000 Créteil, France
INSERM U955, Team 16, IMRB Créteil, Créteil, France
- Marie Gousseff
Maladies infectieuses, Centre Hospitalier Bretagne-Atlantique, Vannes,
France
- Paul Loubet
Infectious and Tropical Diseases Department, Nimes University Hospital,
Nimes, France
VBIC, INSERM U1047, University of Montpellier, Nimes, France
- Fanny Vardon-Bouines
CHU de Toulouse, Département d'anesthésie et de soins intensifs, F-
31300 Toulouse, France
Université Toulouse 3 Paul Sabatier, Inserm U1297, F-31300 Toulouse,
France
- Clotilde Visée
Department of Infectious Disease, Centre Hospitalier Régional Mons-
Hainaut/Groupe Jolimont, Mons Belgium/Groupe Helora, Mons, Belgium
- Leila Belkhir
Department of Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, Cliniques
universitaires Saint-Luc, Brussels, Belgium
- Élisabeth Botelho-Nevers
CHU de Saint-Etienne, Service d'Infectiologie, F-42055 Saint-Etienne,
France
Université Jean Monnet, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, GIMAP, CIRI,
INSERM U1111, CNRS UMR5308, ENS Lyon, F-42023 Saint-Etienne,
France
CIC 1408, INSERM, F, 42055 Saint-Etienne, France
- André Cabié
PCCEI, Univ Montpellier, Univ Antilles, Inserm, EFS, F-34394 Montpellier,
France
CHU de Martinique, Service des maladies infectieuses et tropicales,
Inserm CIC1424, F-97200 Fort de France, France
- Anastasia Kotanidou
First Department of Critical Care Medicine and Pulmonary Services,
Evangelismos Hospital, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Medical School, 45-47 Ipsilantou Street, 10676 Athens, Greece
- Fanny Lanternier
Infectious Diseases Unit, Necker-Enfants Malades University Hospital,
AP-HP, Paris, France
- Elisabeth Rouveix-Nordon
AP-HP, Hôpital Ambroise-Paré, Service de Maladies Infectieuses et
Tropicales, Boulogne-Billancourt, France
- Susana Silva
EPIUnit - Instituto de Saúde Pública, Universidade do Porto, Rua das
Taipas, no 135, 4050-600 Porto, Portugal
- Guillaume Thiery
CHU Saint-Etienne, Hopital Nord, Medical Intensive Care Unit, Saint-
Priest-En-Jarez, France
- Pascal Poinard
Groupe de Recherche en Infectiologie Clinique CIC-1406, Inserm -
CHUGA - Université Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France
Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CEA, CNRS, Institut de Biologie Structurale (IBS),
Grenoble, France
Laboratoire de Virologie, Center Hospitalier Universitaire Grenoble-
Alpes, Grenoble, France
- Guislaine Carcelain
Immunology Department, Robert Debré Hospital, Assistance Publique
Hôpitaux de Paris, Paris, France
Université Paris Cité, INSERM U976, Paris, France
- Alpha Diallo, Noémie Mercier, Vida Terzic
ANRS | Maladies Infectieuses Emergentes, Paris, France
- Maude Bouscambert-Duchamp, Alexandre Gaymard
Hospices Civils de Lyon, Laboratoire de Virologie, Institut des Agents
Infectieux de Lyon, Centre National de Référence des virus respiratoires
France Sud, F-69317 Lyon, France
Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Virpath, CIRI, INSERM U1111, CNRS
UMR5308, ENS Lyon, F-69372 Lyon, France
- Mary-Anne Trabaud
Hôpital de la Croix-Rousse, Hospices Civils de Lyon, Lyon, France
- Grégory Destras, Laurence Josset
Hospices Civils de Lyon, Laboratoire de Virologie, Institut des Agents
Infectieux de Lyon, Centre National de Référence des virus respiratoires
France Sud, F-69317 Lyon, France
- Nicolas Billard, Thi-Hong-Lien Han
AP-HP, Hôpital Bichat, Département d'Épidémiologie, Biostatistique et
Recherche Clinique, F-75018 Paris, France
- Jérémy Guedj
Université Paris Cité, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
- Sandrine Couffin-Cadiergues
Institut de santé publique, Pôle recherche clinique, INSERM, Paris,
France
- Aline Dechanet
AP-HP, Hôpital Bichat, Unité de recherche clinique, F-75018 Paris, France

- Christelle Delmas, H el ene Esperou
Institut de sant e publique, P ole recherche clinique, INSERM, Paris,
France
- Claire Fougerou-Leurent
CHU de Rennes, Universit e Rennes 1, Inserm CIC 1414, F-35000 Rennes,
France
- Soizic Le Mestre
ANRS | Maladies Infectieuses Emergentes, Paris, France
- Anabelle M etois
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, Unit e de recherche clinique, F-75018 Paris, France
- Marion Noret
Renarci, R eseau National De Recherche Clinique En Infectiologie, Paris,
France
- Isabelle Bally, Sebasti an Dergan-Dylon
Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CEA, CNRS, Institut de Biologie Structurale (IBS),
Grenoble, France
- Sarah Tubiana
Universit e Paris Cit e, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, Centre de ressources biologiques, F-75018 Paris,
France
- Ouifiya Kalif
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, Centre de ressources biologiques, F-75018 Paris,
France
- Nathalie Bergaud, Benjamin Leveau
Hospices Civils de Lyon, Lyon, France
- Joe Eustace
University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
- Richard Greil
Department of Internal Medicine III with Haematology, Medical
Oncology, Haemostaseology, Infectiology and Rheumatology, Oncologic
Center, Salzburg Cancer Research Institute - Laboratory for
Immunological and Molecular Cancer Research (SCRI-LIMCR),
Paracelsus Medical University Salzburg, 5020 Salzburg, Austria
Cancer Cluster Salzburg, 5020 Salzburg, Austria
AGMT, 5020 Salzburg, Austria
- Edit Hajdu
Department of Internal Medicine Infectiology Unit, Albert Szent-Gy orgyi
Health Centre, University of Szeged,  Allom as Street 1-3, 6725 Szeged,
Hungary
- Monika Halanova
LF UPJŠ - Pavol Jozef Šaf arik University in Košice Faculty of Medicine,
Košice, Slovakia
- Jose-Artur Paiva
Centro Hospitalar S ao Jo o, Emergency and Intensive Care Department,
Porto, Portugal
Universidade do Porto, Faculty of Medicine, Porto, Portugal
- Anna Piekarska
Department of Infectious Diseases and Hepatology, Medical University
of Ł dź, Ł dź, Poland
- Jesus Rodriguez Ba no
Infectious Diseases and Microbiology Division, Hospital Universitario
Virgen Macarena, Sevilla, Spain
- Kristian Tonby
Department of Infectious Diseases, Oslo University Hospital, 0424 Oslo,
Norway
- Milan Troj anek
Department of Infectious Diseases, University Hospital Bulovka,
Bud nova 2, 180 81, Prague, Czech Republic
- Sotirios Tsiodras
Fourth Department of Internal Medicine, Attikon University Hospital,
Athens Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,
12462 Athens, Greece
- Serhat Unal
Department of Infectious Diseases, Hacettepe University Faculty of
Medicine, Ankara, Turkey
- Charles Burdet
Universit e Paris Cit e, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, D epartement d' pid miologie, Biostatistique et
Recherche Clinique, F-75018 Paris, France
- Dominique Costagliola
Sorbonne Universit e, Inserm, Institut Pierre-Louis d' pid miologie et de
Sant e Publique, F-75013 Paris, France
- Yazdan Yazdanpanah
Universit e Paris Cit e, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, Service de Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, F-
75018 Paris, France
- Nathan Peiffer-Smadja
Universit e Paris Cit e, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, Service de Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, F-
75018 Paris, France
National Institute for Health Research, Health Protection Research Unit
in Healthcare Associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance,
Imperial College London, London, UK
- France Mentr e³
Universit e Paris Cit e, Inserm, IAME, F-75018 Paris, France
AP-HP, H opital Bichat, D epartement d' pid miologie, Biostatistique et
Recherche Clinique, F-75018 Paris, France
- Florence Ader⁴, on behalf of the DisCoVeRy study group,
Hospices Civils de Lyon, H opital de la Croix-Rousse, D epartement des
Maladies Infectieuses et Tropicales, F-69004 Lyon, France
Universit e Claude Bernard Lyon 1, CIRI, INSERM U1111, CNRS UMR5308,
ENS Lyon, F-69372 Lyon, France

*Correspondence to: Clinique des maladies infectieuses, H opital
Universitaire de Bruxelles, 808 Route de Lennik, 1070 Brussels,
Belgium.

E-mail address: Maya.Hites@hubruxelles.be (M. Hites)

¹ Co-first authors.

² Co-first authors.

³ Co-last authors.

⁴ Co-last authors.