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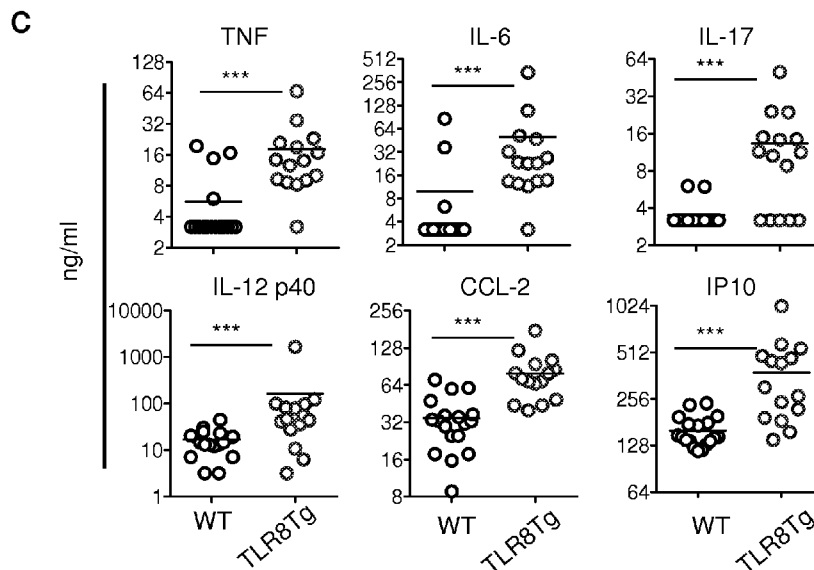
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: TLR8 TRANSGENIC ANIMALS

Figure 6



(57) Abstract: Provided herein are human Toll-like receptor 8 (TLR8)-expressing transgenic animals and methods of use thereof.

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TLR8 TRANSGENIC ANIMALS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/469,055, filed March 29, 2011, which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

SUBMISSION OF SEQUENCE LISTING AS ASCII TEXT FILE

[0002] The content of the following submission on ASCII text file is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety: a computer readable form (CRF) of the Sequence Listing (file name: 377882005000SeqList.txt, date recorded: March 29, 2012, size: 184 KB).

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] This application relates to human Toll-like receptor 8 (TLR8)-expressing transgenic animals and methods of use thereof.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Immunity can generally be classified as innate immunity or as adaptive immunity. Innate immune responses typically occur immediately upon infection to provide an early barrier to infectious disease, whereas adaptive immune responses occur later with the generation of antigen-specific effector cells and immunological memory. Innate immune responses do not generate lasting protective immunity, but appear to play a role in the generation of later arising adaptive immune responses.

[0005] Toll-like receptors (TLRs) are essential for innate immune responses as they recognize several different antigens and initiate immune responses (e.g., activation of dendritic cells and macrophages, and cytokine production). TLRs are type-I transmembrane proteins that recognize a variety of pathogen-associated molecular patterns (PAMPs) from bacteria, viruses and fungi. In this way PAMPs serve as a first-line of defense against invading pathogens. Human TLRs can elicit overlapping yet distinct biological responses due to differences in cellular expression and activation of downstream signal transduction pathways (Akira et al., *Adv. Immunol.* 78: 1-56, 2001).

[0006] TLRs are characterized by an ectodomain composed of leucine-rich repeats and a cytoplasmic domain, known as a Toll/interleukin-1 receptor domain. The ectodomain is responsible for recognition of PAMPs, while the cytoplasmic domain is required for downstream signaling. TLRs usually undergo dimer formation and/or a conformation change to activate downstream signal transduction pathways. Studies have shown that LRR8 is involved in DNA and RNA recognition, whereas LRR17 is involved in nucleic acid binding (Smits et al., *Oncologist*, 13: 859-875, 2008).

[0007] The family of TLRs consists of ten members in human (TLR1-TLR10) and twelve members in mice (TLR1-TLR9 and TLR11-TLR13). The TLRs that are located in the plasma membrane recognize bacterial membrane components, whereas the TLRs that detect nucleic acid-based ligands are predominately located within endosomal compartments. The nucleic acid-sensing TLRs include TLR3, TLR7, TLR8, and TLR9. Upon ligand-binding, TLRs initiate a signal transduction cascade leading to activation of NF κ B through the adapter protein myeloid differentiation primary response gene 88 (MyD88) and recruitment of the IL-1 receptor associated kinase (IRAK). Phosphorylation of IRAK in turn leads to the recruitment of TNF-receptor associated factor 6 (TRAF6), which results in the phosphorylation and degradation of the NF- κ B inhibitor, I- κ B, thereby releasing NF- κ B. NF- κ B enters the cell nucleus and initiates gene transcription, leading to production of proinflammatory cytokines, chemokines, and type I interferons (IFNs), as well as the upregulation of costimulatory molecules.

[0008] TLR8 belongs to the same subfamily as the TLR7 and TLR9 endosomal receptors and is highly homologous to TLR7 (Liu et al., *Mol Immunol.* 47:1083-90, 2010). The role of TLR8, and of its close homologue TLR7, is to detect the presence of “foreign” single-stranded RNA within a cell, as a means to respond to viral invasion (Heil et al., *Science* 303:1526, 2004; and Diebold et al., *Science* 303:1529, 2004). While the *TLR8* gene in humans is closely related to TLR7, TLR8 has distinct, but overlapping specificity for RNA and synthetic small molecules with a structure related to nucleic acids (Medzhitov et al., *Immunol. Rev.* 173:-89-97, 2000). Some ssRNA synthetic sequences containing repetitive A/U motifs are able to specifically activate TLR8 but not TLR7 (Gorden et al. *J Immunol.* 174:1259-68, 2005). Further, in humans, TLR8 is highly expressed in monocytes, macrophages, myeloid dendritic cells (mDC) and neutrophils, whereas TLR7 in blood cells is principally expressed in pDCs, B-cells, and neutrophils. Because of this difference in cellular expression, triggering by RNA through TLR7 in blood leads to a response dominated by Type I IFN production, whereas activation through TLR8 induces multiple pro-inflammatory cytokines: TNF, IL-12, IL-6, IL-8 and IL-1 (Barrat et al., *J Exp Med.* 2202:1131-9, 2005; and Gorden et al., *J Immunol.* 174:1259-68, 2005).

[0009] Although *TLR8* polymorphisms have been associated with some autoimmune diseases, the role of TLR8 and its specific ligands has not been clearly defined. One key limitation in elucidating TLR8 biology is the lack of an animal model. For example, mouse TLR8 has a very different specificity than human TLR8. Mouse TLR8 lacks the ability to respond to ssRNA ligands, RNA viruses or small molecules; all of which have been shown to activate human TLR8 (Heil et al. *Science* 303:1526-9, 2004; Jurk et al. *Nat Immunol* 3:499, 2002; Hemmi et al. *Nat. Immunol* 3:196-

200, 2002; and Lund et al. *PNAS* 101:5598-603, 2004). Further, by comparing the amino acid sequence, TLR8 of mice and rats lack a five amino-acid sequence required for ligand recognition in man (Liu et al. *Mol Immunol.* 47:1083-90, 2010). The lack of useful animal models and the very different ligand specificities of human TLR8 and its rodent orthologs have proven to be major limitations to the study of TLR8 biology.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] Provided herein are transgenic animals comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding human Toll-like receptor 8 (TLR8), wherein the human TLR8 is expressed in the transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is a nonhuman mammal. In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is a small mammal selected from the group consisting of a mouse, hamster, rat, guinea pig, and rabbit. In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is a mouse. In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is a chimeric transgenic animal. In some embodiments, both germ cells and somatic cells of the transgenic animal comprise the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is stably integrated into the genome of the transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is present at a copy number of from 1 to 15 (e.g., from 1 to 5, from 6 to 10, from 11 to 15, or 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15). In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is operatively linked to a promoter and/or other regulatory regions. In some embodiments, the promoter and/or other regulatory regions are those of human *TLR8*. In some embodiments, the human TLR8 is expressed in a similar expression pattern in the transgenic animal as human TLR8 is expressed in humans. In some embodiments, the levels of expression of human TLR8 in the transgenic animal is similar to the level of expression of human TLR8 in humans. In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is predisposed to development of inflammation in one or more organs (e.g., pancreas, kidney, liver, joints, reproductive tissue, etc.). In some embodiments, the inflammation comprises an autoimmune disease (e.g., pancreatitis, nephritis, hepatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, diabetes-related disorder, reproductive disease, etc.). In some embodiments, the present disclosure provides a cell obtained from the transgenic animal described herein, wherein the human TLR8 is expressed in the cell. In some embodiments, the cell is a hematopoietic cell. In some embodiments, the hematopoietic cell is a monocyte. Provided herein are also methods of screening candidate agents, the methods comprising: administering a candidate agent to the transgenic animal; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the animal (e.g., as compared to a control such as untreated animal or an animal receiving a placebo). Some methods comprise administering a candidate agent to the transgenic animal; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on a

TLR8-mediated response of the animal (e.g., as compared to a control such as an untreated animal or an animal receiving a placebo). Additionally, provided herein are methods of screening candidate agents, the method comprising: contacting the cell obtained from the transgenic animal with a candidate agent; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell (e.g., as compared to a control such as an untreated or mock-treated cell). Some methods comprise contacting the cell obtained from the transgenic animal with a candidate agent; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell (e.g., as compared to a control such as untreated or mock-treated cell). In some embodiments, the effect comprises inhibition of the TLR8-mediated response (e.g., reduction of the response to less than 50, 60, 70, 75, 80, 85, 90 or 95% of that observed in the absence of the candidate agent). In alternative embodiments, the effect comprises stimulation of the TLR8-mediated response (e.g., elevation of the response to at least 150, 160, 170, 180, 190 or 200% of that observed in the absence of the candidate agent). In some, the TLR8-mediated response is evidenced by a change in TLR8-mediated cytokine production, cell proliferation, and/or cell surface marker expression. A TLR8-mediated response is one that is stimutable by a TLR7/8 agonist such as R848 and CL075 or a TLR8 agonist such as a TLR8 ligand stabilized immunomodulatory RNA (e.g., SEQ ID NO:3). TLR8-mediated responses are assessed by measuring expression of a cytokine or a cell surface marker. Suitable cytokines are selected from but not limited to TNF- α , IFN- α , IFN- β , IFN- γ , IL-1 α , IL-1 β , IL-6, IL-8, IL-10, IL-12, IL-23, IP-10, MIP-1, and MCP-1. Suitable cell surface molecules are selected from but not limited CD40, CD80, CD86, ICAM-1, ICAM-2, ICAM-3, and CCR7. In some embodiments, the cytokine comprises one or more of the group consisting of TNF, IL-12, IL-6, MIP-1 α , IFN γ , IP-10, IL-1 α , and IL-1 β . In some embodiments, the candidate agent is an antibody. In some embodiments, the candidate agent is a small molecule. In some preferred embodiments, the candidate agent is a polynucleotide. In some preferred embodiments, the TLR8-mediated cytokine production comprises production of one or more of the group consisting of TNF, IL-12, IL-6, MIP-1 α , IFN γ , IP-10, IL-1 α , and IL-1 β .

[0011] Moreover, the present disclosure provides methods for screening, and/or identifying, TLR8 modulators, the method comprising: providing a candidate agent to a cell culture, wherein cells of the cell culture comprises cells derived from a TLR8 transgenic animal which comprises a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture (as compared to a control such as untreated or mock-treated cell culture). Further, provided are methods of screening for, and/or identifying, TLR8 modulators, the method comprising: providing a candidate agent to a cell culture, wherein cells of the cell culture are obtained or prepared from a transgenic animal described herein which comprise a nucleotide sequence encoding human

TLR8; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture (as compared to a control such as untreated or mock-treated cell culture). In some embodiments, the cells are hematopoietic cells. In some embodiments, the cells are monocytes. In some embodiments, the effect is inhibition of cytokine production, cell proliferation and/or cell surface molecule expression. In some embodiments, the effect is stimulation of cytokine production, cell proliferation and/or cell surface molecule expression. Suitable cytokines are selected from but not limited to TNF- α , IFN- α , IFN- β , IFN- γ , IL-1 α , IL-1 β , IL-6, IL-8, IL-10, IL-12, IL-23, IP-10, MIP-1, and MCP-1. Suitable cell surface molecules are selected from but not limited CD40, CD80, CD86, ICAM-1, ICAM-2, ICAM-3, and CCR7. In some embodiments, the cytokine comprises one or more of the group consisting of TNF, IL-12, IL-6, MIP-1 α , IFN γ , IP-10, IL-1 α , and IL-1 β . In some embodiments, the candidate agent is an antibody (*e.g.*, antibody fragment). In some embodiments, the candidate agent is a small molecule. In some embodiments, the candidate agent is a polynucleotide. In some embodiments, the polynucleotide comprises a TLR8 immunoregulatory sequence (IRS). In some embodiments, the polynucleotide comprises a TLR8 immunostimulatory sequence (ISS). In some embodiments, the candidate agent is an antagonist. In some embodiments, the candidate agent is an agonist.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] Figure 1 shows the level of expression of human *TLR8* in purified human subsets: plasmacytoid dendritic cells (PDC), monocytes, myeloid dendritic cells (MDC), CD4+ T-cells, CD8+ T-cells, and neutrophils.

[0013] Figure 2A-B shows the effect of 200, 100, and 20 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of TLR7 or TLR8-stimulating RNA polynucleotides (PN) (SEQ ID NO:2 and SEQ ID NO:3, respectively) or medium alone on hIL-6 and hTNF production (pg/mL) by human peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) and monocytes.

[0014] Figure 3A-C shows the effect of 100 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of TLR7-stimulating RNA PN (SEQ ID NO:2), 100 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of TLR8-stimulating RNA PN (SEQ ID NO:3), or medium alone on hIL-6, hTNF and hIFN- α production (pg/mL) by human PDC.

[0015] Figure 4A-D shows the effect of 100 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of TLR7-stimulating RNA PN (SEQ ID NO:2), 100 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of TLR8-stimulating RNA PN (SEQ ID NO:3), or medium alone on mIL-12 production (pg/mL) and mTNF production (pg/mL) by mouse splenocytes and mouse PBMC, respectively.

[0016] Figure 5 shows the *TLR8* BAC construct used to produce the *TLR8* transgenic mice.

[0017] Figure 6A-C shows the correlation between survival and the level of human *TLR8* gene expression in chimeric mice, and the elevated level of expression of TNF, IL-6, IL-17, IL-12p40,

CCL-2 and IP10 in sera of TLR8Tg mice. Figure 6A shows the survival curve of human *TLR8* chimeric mice from clone 6 (number of mice=14), clone 23 (number of mice=8), clone 12 (number of mice=18), and clone 8 (number of mice=18). Figure 6B shows the TLR8 expression levels as relative CT in these mice. Figure 6C shows the elevated level of inflammatory cytokines in serum of TLR8Tg mice from clone 12 (n=15) as compared to control, wild-type C57BL/6 mice (n=18).

[0018] Figure 7A-F shows upregulation of expression of inflammatory cytokines IFN- γ , IL12-p40, TNF- α , IP-10, IL-1 α , IL-1 β by relative CT in the pancreas from chimeric mice from clone 6, 12 and 23 (total number of mice=6) compared to wild-type mice C57BL/6 (total number of mice=6). Figure 7G-7I shows the titers of anti-nuclear antibody (ANA), anti-double stranded DNA (dsDNA) antibody and anti-ribonucleoprotein (RNP) antibody in the serum of TLR8TgCL12 (n=27) and age-matched controls (n=37).

[0019] Figure 8A-D shows the levels of CD80, GITRL, CD40, and OX40L as determined by FACS analyses of myeloid dendritic cells (MDC) from chimeric TLR8TGCL23 mice as compared to wild-type C57BL/6 mice.

[0020] Figure 9 shows the percentage survival per day post-bone marrow transplant of mice receiving bone marrow from *TLR8* chimeric mice from clones 6, 12 and 23.

[0021] Figure 10A-B shows example of dot blot results of FACS analyses of T-cells from the spleen and blood of mice transplanted with bone marrow from chimeric TLR8TGCL12 mice. Examples of dot blots for both CD4 T-cells (Figure 10A) and for CD8 T-cells (Figure 10B) are provided.

[0022] Figure 11A-L shows cumulative data of FACS analyses of T-cells from the spleen and blood of mice transplanted with bone marrow from chimeric TLR8TGCL12 mice.

[0023] Figure 12A-E shows expression of MHC Class II, CD80, GITRL, OX40L, and PDL-1, respectively, as determined by FACS analyses of dendritic cells of mice transplanted with human *TLR8* transgenic mouse bone marrow.

[0024] Figure 13A-C shows activation of TLR8 expressed from the human *TLR8* transgene in blood cells in TLR8TGCL8 mice as compared to C56BL/6 wild-type mice upon activation with 200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ or 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ of TLR8-stimulating RNA PN (SEQ ID NO:3), or media alone as assayed by measuring levels of mIL-12 (pg/mL), mTNF- α (pg/mL), and mIL-6 (pg/mL), respectively.

[0025] Figure 14A-B shows activation of TLR8 expressed from the human *TLR8* transgene in bone marrow (BM) cells from TLR8TGCL8 mice upon activation with 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ or 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ of a TLR8-specific ligand (SEQ ID NO:3) as assayed by measuring levels of mTNF- α (pg/mL) and mIL-6 (pg/mL), respectively.

[0026] Figure 15A-C shows that mice over expressing human TLR8 spontaneously develop arthritis. Chimeric mice from clone 12 (n=6) and C57BL/6 CTLR animals (n=6) were euthanized 90 days after birth. All the hTLR8 animals exhibited signs of swelling in forelimbs and hindlimbs. Paws and joints were fixed, sectioned and stained with toluidine blue. Figure 15A provides a representative section of a joint from WT (C57BL/6 CTLR) mice. Figure 15B provides a representative section of a joint from a TLR8Tg mouse. The histological changes, degree of inflammation and cartilage damage were evaluated by a pathologist in a blinded fashion and scored 1 to 5 as follows: 1=minimal, 2=mild, 3=moderate, 4=marked, 5=severe. Two paws and two ankles were evaluated for each mouse, and the scores were summed to obtain the histological disease score shown in Figure 15C.

[0027] Figure 16A-B shows the cumulative score and the percentage incidence of symptoms with a clinical score of greater than or equal to four, respectively, using a collagen-induced rheumatoid arthritis (CIA) model for wild-type mice (C57BL/6) and TLR8 transgenic mice (TLR8TGCL8) in days after first collagen injection. Figure 16C-E shows that hTLR8, F4/80 and TNF were significantly elevated in joints of hTLR8 transgenic mice (TLR8Tg clone 8) as compared to wild-type mice (C57BL/6). Figure 16F-H shows hTLR8, F4/80 and TNF expression relative to the disease score or level of hTLR8 expression respectively. Clearly, the levels of F4/80 and TNF were directly correlated with the level of hTLR8 in the transgenic mice. Likewise, the levels of proinflammatory cytokines (IL-1beta, IL-1alpha, IL-6, IL-18, IP-10, and MMP-9) were found to be directly correlated with hTLR8 expression.

[0028] Figure 17 shows a significant increase in blood glucose level (mg/dL) in mice over-expressing human TLR8 (C57BL/6-SJL WT mice transplanted with TLR8TGCL12 bone marrow cells) compared to C57BL/6-SJL WT mice transplanted with WT C57BL/6 bone marrow cells.

[0029] Figure 18A shows that human TLR8 is expressed in monocytes, neutrophils and dendritic cells of hTLR8Tg mice. The expression pattern of huTLR8 in leukocyte subsets from these mice is very similar to its expression in human leukocytes. Figure 18B-D shows that hTLR8 is functional in hTLR8Tg mice. Briefly, PBMC from hTLR8Tg chimeras, but not from wild-type mice produced IL-12 and TNF when stimulated with an RNA-based TLR8 agonist, ORN-8L (Figure 18B-C). Similarly, elevated levels of IL-12 were detected in the serum from hTLR8Tg mice, but not from wild-type mice, which were injected intravenously with an RNA-based TLR8 agonist (ORN-8L) or a small molecule-based TLR8 agonist (CL075).

[0030] Figure 19A-C shows that hTLR8Tg mice develop lymphopenia (decrease in number of circulating lymphocytes), granulocytosis (increase in number of granulocytes, which are primarily neutrophils) and monocytosis (increase in number of monocytes). Cell number was assessed in

peripheral blood (Figure 19A) and in spleens of hTLR8Tg chimeras or age-matched control C57BL/6 mice (Figure 19B). There is a significant decrease in circulating lymphocytes paralleled by an increase in granulocytes and monocytes in the blood of the hTLR8-expressing mice as compared to WT mice CTRL (Figure 19C).

[0031] Figure 20A-C shows that T lymphocytes from mice over-expressing human TLR8 produce more TNF and IFN-gamma as compared to T lymphocytes from wild type mice.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0032] Provided herein are hTLR8 transgenic animals, and cells therefrom that express human TLR8. Also provided are methods of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators using the hTLR8 transgenic animals or cells expressing human TLR8.

[0033] Unless otherwise indicated, reference to an agent can include the compound in any pharmaceutically acceptable form, including any isomer (*e.g.*, diastereomer or enantiomer), salt, solvate, polymorph, and the like. In particular, if a compound is optically active, reference to the compound can include each of the compound's enantiomers as well as racemic mixtures of the enantiomers.

Definitions

[0034] The terms “nucleic acid,” “polynucleotide,” and “oligonucleotide” include single-stranded DNA (ssDNA), double-stranded DNA (dsDNA), single-stranded RNA (ssRNA) and double-stranded RNA (dsRNA), modified polynucleotides and polynucleosides or combinations thereof. The polynucleotide can be linearly, branched, or circularly configured, or the polynucleotide can contain one or more linear, branched, and/or circular segments. Polynucleotides are polymers of nucleosides joined, generally, through phosphodiester linkages, although alternate linkages, such as phosphorothioate esters may also be used in polynucleotides. A nucleoside consists of a purine (adenine (A) or guanine (G) or derivative thereof) or pyrimidine (thymine (T), cytosine (C) or uracil (U), or derivative thereof) base bonded to a sugar. The four nucleoside units (or bases) in DNA are called deoxyadenosine, deoxyguanosine, thymidine, and deoxycytidine. A nucleotide is a phosphate ester of a nucleoside.

[0035] The term “peptide” includes polypeptides that are of any length and composition to affect a biological response, *e.g.*, antibody production or cytokine activity whether or not the peptide is a hapten. The term “peptide” further includes modified amino acids (whether or not naturally or non-naturally occurring), such modifications including, but not limited to, phosphorylation, glycosylation, pegylation, lipidization and methylation.

[0036] The terms “promoter element” or “promoter” refer to a DNA regulatory region capable of binding an RNA polymerase in a cell (*e.g.*, directly or through other promoter-bound proteins or substances) and initiating transcription of a coding sequence. A promoter sequence is, in general, bounded at its 3' terminus by the transcription initiation site and extends upstream (5' direction) to include the minimum number of bases or elements necessary to initiate transcription at any level. Within the promoter sequence may be found a transcription initiation site (conveniently defined, for example, by mapping with nuclease S1), as well as protein binding domains (consensus sequences) responsible for the binding of RNA polymerase. The promoter may be operably associated with other expression control sequences, including enhancer and repressor sequences.

[0037] The term “vector” refers to a nucleic acid assembly capable of transferring gene sequences to target cells (*e.g.*, viral vectors, non-viral vectors, particulate carriers, and liposomes). The term “expression vector” refers to a nucleic acid assembly containing a promoter that is capable of directing the expression of a sequence or gene of interest in a cell. Vectors typically contain nucleic acid sequences encoding selectable markers for selection of cells that have been transfected by the vector. Generally, “vector construct,” “expression vector,” and “gene transfer vector,” refer to any nucleic acid construct capable of directing the expression of a gene of interest and which can transfer gene sequences to target cells. Thus, the term includes cloning and expression vehicles, as well as viral vectors.

[0038] The term “wild-type” refers to a nucleic acid, protein, and/or animal (*e.g.*, mouse) that has the characteristics of that nucleic acid, protein, and/or animal (*e.g.*, mouse) when isolated from a naturally occurring source. A wild-type nucleic acid, protein, and/or animal (*e.g.*, mouse) is that which is most frequently observed in a population and is thus arbitrarily designed the “normal” or “wild-type” form of that molecule. In contrast, the term “modified” or “mutant” refers to a nucleic acid, protein, and/or animal (*e.g.*, mouse) that displays modifications in sequence and/or functional properties (*i.e.*, altered characteristics) when compared to the wild-type nucleic acid, protein, and/or animal (*e.g.*, mouse).

[0039] The term “agonist” is used in the broadest sense and refers to a molecule that can elevate or stimulate an induced cellular activity

[0040] The term “antagonist” or “inhibitor” is used in the broadest sense, and refers to a composition that can reduce or inhibit an induced cellular activity.

[0041] The term “antibody” is used in the broadest sense and specifically covers, for example, monoclonal antibodies (including agonist, antagonist, and neutralizing antibodies), antibody compositions with polypeptopic specificity, polyclonal antibodies, single chain antibodies, and

fragments of antibodies as long as they exhibit the desired biological or immunological activity. The term “immunoglobulin” (Ig) is used interchangeably with antibody herein.

[0042] The term “small molecule” as used herein refers to a low molecular weight organic compound (e.g., not a polymer). In some embodiments, the small molecule has a molecular weight of less than 2000, 1600, 800, or 400 daltons.

[0043] The term “immunostimulatory” or “stimulating an immune response” as used herein includes stimulation of cell types that participate in immune reactions and enhancement of an immune response to a specific antigenic substance. An immune response that is stimulated by an immunostimulatory nucleic acid is generally a “Th1-type” immune response, as opposed to a “Th2-type” immune response. Th1-type immune responses are normally characterized by “delayed-type hypersensitivity” reactions to an antigen and activated macrophage function and can be detected at the biochemical level by increased levels of Th1-associated cytokines such as IFN- γ , IL-2, IL-12, and TNF- α . Th2-type immune responses are generally associated with high levels of antibody production, especially IgE antibody production and enhanced eosinophils numbers and activation, as well as expression of Th2-associated cytokines such as IL-4, IL-5 and IL-13.

[0044] The term “immunoregulatory compound” or “IRC”, as used herein, refers to a molecule which has immunoregulatory activity and which comprises a nucleic acid moiety comprising an IRS. The IRC may consist of a nucleic acid moiety that comprises more than one IRS or consists of an IRS. The IRC may comprise a modified and/or unmodified IRS. The IRC may consist of a polynucleotide (a “polynucleotide IRC”) or it may comprise additional moieties. Accordingly, the term IRC includes compounds which incorporate one or more nucleic acid moieties, at least one of which comprises an IRS, covalently linked to a non-nucleotide spacer moiety.

[0045] The term “immunoregulatory sequence” or “IRS”, as used herein, refers to a nucleic acid sequence that inhibits and/or suppresses a measurable immune response as measured *in vitro*, *in vivo*, and/or *ex vivo*. The term “immunoregulatory sequence” or “IRS”, as used herein, refers to both nucleic acid sequences that comprise a modification (*i.e.*, modified IRS) as well as nucleic acids which do not comprise a modification (*i.e.*, unmodified IRS).

[0046] The term “TLR8 modulator” is used in the broadest sense, and includes TLR8 agonists and antagonists.

[0047] The term “cells,” as used herein, is understood to refer not only to the particular subject cell, but to the progeny or potential progeny of such a cell. Because certain modifications may occur

in succeeding generations due to either mutation or environmental influences, such progeny may not in fact be identical to the parent cell, but are still included within the scope of the term as used herein.

[0048] The term “transfection” refers to the uptake of DNA by a cell. A cell has been “transfected” when exogenous (*i.e.*, foreign) DNA has been introduced inside the cell membrane. Transfection can be either transient (*i.e.*, the introduced DNA remains extrachromosomal and is diluted out during cell division) or stable (*i.e.*, the introduced DNA integrates into the cell genome or is maintained as a stable episomal element).

[0049] “Stimulation” of a response or parameter includes eliciting and/or enhancing that response or parameter when compared to otherwise same conditions except for a condition or parameter of interest, or alternatively, as compared to another condition. For example, “stimulation” of an immune response means an increase in the response, which can arise from eliciting and/or enhancement of a response. Similarly, “stimulation” of production of a cytokine (such as IL-1 α , IL-1 β , IL-6, and/or TNF- α) or “stimulation” of cell type (such as CTLs) means an increase in the amount or level of cytokine or cell type.

[0050] “Suppression” or “inhibition” of a response or parameter includes decreasing that response or parameter when compared to otherwise same conditions except for a condition or parameter of interest, or alternatively, as compared to another condition.

[0051] “Correlate” or “correlating” as used herein refer to comparing, in any way, the performance and/or results of a first analysis or protocol with the performance and/or results of a second analysis or protocol. For example, one may use the results of a first analysis or protocol to determine whether a second analysis or protocol should be performed. With respect to the embodiment of gene expression analysis or protocol, one may use the results of the gene expression analysis or protocol to determine whether a specific therapeutic regimen should be performed.

[0052] The term “innate immune response” or “innate immunity” as used herein includes a variety of innate resistance mechanisms by which a cell or individual recognizes and responds to the presence of a pathogen. As used herein, an “innate immune response” includes the intracellular and intercellular events and reactions that occur when the cell recognizes pathogen associated molecular patterns or signals. Cellular receptors active in an innate immune response include a family of Toll-like receptors (TLRs) and microbial ligands have been identified for several TLRs, as described herein.

[0053] The term “individual” refers to a mammal, including humans. An individual includes, but is not limited to, human, bovine, horse, feline, canine, rodent, or primate.

[0054] The term "animal" is used herein to include all vertebrate and invertebrate animals, except humans. It also includes an individual animal in all stages of development, including embryonic and fetal stages. A "transgenic animal" is an animal containing one or more cells bearing genetic information received, directly or indirectly, by deliberate genetic manipulation at a subcellular level, such as by microinjection or infection with recombinant virus. This introduced DNA molecule may be integrated within a chromosome, or it may be extra-chromosomally replicating DNA.

[0055] The term "germ cell-line transgenic animal" refers to a transgenic animal in which the genetic information was introduced into a germ line cell, thereby conferring the ability to transfer the information to offspring. If such offspring in fact possess some or all of that information, then they, too, are transgenic animals.

[0056] "Adjuvant" refers to a substance which, when added to an immunogenic agent such as antigen, nonspecifically enhances or potentiates an immune response to the agent in the recipient host upon exposure to the mixture.

[0057] Administration "in combination with" one or more further therapeutic agents includes simultaneous (concurrent) and consecutive administration in any order.

[0058] "Chronic" administration refers to administration of the agent(s) in a continuous mode as opposed to an acute mode, so as to maintain the initial therapeutic effect (activity) for an extended period of time. "Intermittent" administration refers to treatment that is not consecutively and/or continuously done without interruption, but rather is cyclic in nature.

[0059] An "effective amount" of an agent disclosed herein is an amount sufficient to carry out a specifically stated purpose. An "effective amount" may be determined empirically and in a routine manner, in relation to the stated purpose.

[0060] A "growth inhibitory amount" as used herein is an amount capable of inhibiting the growth of a cell, especially tumor, *e.g.*, cancer cell, either *in vitro* or *in vivo*. A "growth inhibitory amount" for purposes of inhibiting neoplastic cell growth may be determined empirically and in a routine manner.

[0061] The term "therapeutically effective amount" refers to an agent effective to "treat" a disease or disorder in a subject or mammal. In the case of cancer, the therapeutically effective amount of the agent may reduce the number of cancer cells; reduce the tumor size; inhibit (*i.e.*, slow to some extent and preferably stop) cancer cell infiltration into peripheral organs; inhibit (*i.e.*, slow to some extent and preferably stop) tumor metastasis; inhibit, to some extent, tumor growth; and/or relieve to some extent one or more of the symptoms associated with the cancer. See the definition herein of

“treating”. To the extent the drug may prevent growth and/or kill existing cancer cells, it may be cytostatic and/or cytotoxic.

[0062] As used herein, “sample” refers to a composition which contains a molecule which is to be characterized and/or identified, for example, based on physical, biochemical, chemical, physiological, and/or genetic characteristics.

[0063] As used herein, and as well-understood in the art, “treatment” is an approach for obtaining beneficial or desired results, including clinical results. Beneficial or desired clinical results include, but are not limited to, alleviation or amelioration of one or more symptoms, diminishment of extent of disease, stabilized (*i.e.*, not worsening) state of disease, preventing spread of disease, delay or slowing of disease progression, amelioration or palliation of the disease state, and remission (whether partial or total), whether detectable or undetectable. “Treatment” can also mean prolonging survival as compared to expected survival if not receiving treatment. Thus, “treating” or “treatment” does not require complete alleviation of signs or symptoms, and does not require a cure.

[0064] Reference to “about” a value or parameter herein includes (and describes) variations that are directed to that value or parameter per se. For example, description referring to “about X” includes description of “X”.

[0065] As used herein and in the appended claims, the singular forms “a,” “or,” and “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise.

[0066] It is understood that aspects and embodiments described herein include “consisting” and/or “consisting essentially of” aspects and embodiments.

Human TLR8 Transgenic Animals and Cells

[0067] Provided herein are TLR8 transgenic animals and transgenic cells, which comprise a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. For example, provided herein are transgenic animals comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8, wherein the human TLR8 is expressed in the transgenic animal.

[0068] In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal is a chimeric TLR8 transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal is a TLR8 transgenic animal with germ cells and somatic cells containing a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is stably integrated into the genome of the TLR8 transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is extrachromosomal. In some embodiments, the extrachromosomal nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is provided as a minichromosome, yeast artificial chromosome, or bacterial artificial chromosome. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal comprises one or more copies of

the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal comprises more than about any of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, or 15 copies of the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal comprises about any of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, or 15 copies of the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. For example, provided herein are transgenic animals comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8, wherein the human TLR8 is expressed in the transgenic animal, wherein the TLR8 transgenic animal comprises about any of 1 to 2 copies of the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8.

[0069] The terms “human Toll-like receptor 8,” “human TLR8,” “hTLR8,” and “CD288” as used herein refer to a protein and functional variants thereof that bind to viral and synthetic single-stranded RNAs (e.g., ssRNA derived from viruses, synthetic guanosine-rich ssRNA, and uridine-rich ssRNA), as well as small molecules resembling nucleic acids. The amino acid sequence of a common isoform of hTLR8 is set forth as SEQ ID NO:4. Accordingly, hTLR8 comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:4 or variants having at least 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98 or 99% identity to SEQ ID NO:4. In particularly preferred embodiments, the “RQSYA” motif (SEQ ID NO:5) in the ectodomain of hTLR8 is retained.

[0070] Human TLR8 Sequence of GENBANK Accession No. NP_619542.1 (SEQ ID NO:4):

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1  menmflqssm ltcifllisg scelcaeenf srsypcdekk qndsviaecs nrllqevvpqt
61  vgkyvteldl sdnfithitn esfqglqnl kinlnhnpnv qhqngnpgiq snglnitdga
121 flnlknrlrel llednqlpqi psglpeslte lsliqnniyn itkegisrli nlknlylawn
181 cyfnkvcekt niedgvfetl tnlellslsf nslshvppkl psslrklfls ntqikyisee
241 dfkglinltl ldlsqncprc fnapfpcvpc dggasinidr fafqnlqtqr ylnlsstslr
301 kinaawfknm phlkvldlef nylvgeiasg afltmlprle ildlsfnrik gsyppqhinis
361 rnfskllslr alhlrgyvfvq elreddfqp mqlpnlstin lginfikqid fklfqnfsnl
421 eiiylsenri splvkdtrqs yansssfqrh irkrstdfe fdphsnfyhf trplikpqca
481 aygkaldsl nsiffipgnq fenlpdiac nlsansnaqv lsgtefsaip hvkyldltnn
541 rldfdnasal telsdlevld lsynshyfri agvthhlefi qnftnlkvl nshnniytlt
601 dkylnlesksl velvfsgnrl dilwdddnr yisifkglkn ltrldslnr lkipneaf
661 nlpasltelh indnmlkffn wtllqqfprl elldlrgnkl lfltdslsdf tsslrtilis
721 hnrishlpsg flsevsslkh ldlsnllkt inksaletkt tklsmlelh gnpfectcdi
781 gdfrrwmdeh lnvkiprlvd vicaspqqr gksivslelt tcvsdvtavi lffftffitt
841 mvmlaalhh lfywdvwfiy nvclakvkg y rslstsqtfy dayisytdkd asvtdwvine
901 lryhleesrd knvllcleer dwdpqlaid nlmqsinqsk ktvfvltkky akswnfktaf
961 ylalqrlmde nmdviifill epvlqhsqyl rlrqrickss ilqwpdpnka eglfwqtlrn
1021 vvtendsry nmyvdsikq y.

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[0071] Thus the variants comprise homologous TLR8 amino acid sequences having one or more deletions, additions or substitutions as long as the requisite level of sequence identity across the full length of TLR8 is achieved. Sequence identity may be determined using known programs such as BLAST, ALIGN, and CLUSTAL using standard parameters. (See, e.g., Altschul *et al.* [1990] *J. Mol. Biol.* 215:403-410; Henikoff *et al.* [1989] *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 89:10915; Karin *et al.* [1993]

Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci USA 90:5873; and Higgins *et al.* [1988] *Gene* 73:237-244). Software for performing BLAST analyses is publicly available through the National Center for Biotechnology Information. Databases may also be searched using FASTA (Pearson *et al.* [1988] *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 85:2444-2448).

[0072] In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal expresses differential levels of human TLR8. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal expresses high levels of human TLR8. In some embodiments, the high levels of human TLR8 expression is the result of multiple copy number, the site of integration of the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8, and/or the promoter and/or regulatory region operably linked to the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the expression level is between a relative CT value of 10 and 10,000, for example about any of between 100-500, 200-400, or 1500-1700. In some embodiments, the expression level is at least about a relative CT value of any one of 10, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 1000, 1500, 2000, 3000, 4000, 5000, 6000, 7000, 8000, 9000, or 10,000. Relative CT values can be evaluated, for example, by obtaining threshold cycle (CT) values for each gene of interest and normalizing to a housekeeping gene using the formula: $\text{relative CT} = 1.8^{(\text{Avg CT Housekeeping Gene} - \text{CT Gene of Interest})} * 100,000$. In some embodiments, the gene expression is evaluated by the average relative CT. In some embodiments, the Avg CT housekeeping gene is the mean CT of triplicate housekeeping gene runs and/or Avg CT Gene of Interest is the mean CT of duplicate runs of the gene of interest. In some embodiments, the house keeping gene is ubiquitin, myosin, hsp90, and/or actin.

[0073] In some embodiments, the expression level is about the same or greater than the expression level of human TLR8 in TLR8TGCL12. In some embodiments, the expression level is about the same or greater than the expression level of human TLR8 in TLR8TGCL6. In some embodiments, the expression level is about the same or greater than the expression level of human TLR8 in TLR8TGCL23. In some embodiments, the expression level is about the same or greater than the expression of human TLR8 in TLR8TGCL8. In some embodiments, the human TLR8 is expressed in a similar expression pattern in the transgenic animal as human TLR8 is expressed in humans. In some embodiments, the levels of expression of human TLR8 in the transgenic animal is similar to the level of expression of human TLR8 in humans. In some embodiments, the levels of expression of human TLR8 in the transgenic animal is about any of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5-fold the level of expression of human TLR8 in humans. In some embodiments, the levels of expression of human TLR8 in the transgenic animal is similar to the level of expression of mouse TLR8 in mice.

[0074] In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal has reduced survival (*e.g.*, life span), for example, compared to a wild-type animal. For example, in some embodiments, the transgenic

animal survives less than about any of 150, 140, 130, 120, 110, 100, 90, 80, 70, 60 or 50 days. For example, provided herein are transgenic animals comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8, wherein the human TLR8 is expressed in the transgenic animal, wherein the TLR8 transgenic animal survives less than about 150 days. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal has survival (*e.g.*, life span) similar or substantially the same as compared to a wild-type animal.

[0075] The human *TLR8* gene may be of natural or artificial origin. It may be genomic DNA (gDNA), complementary DNA (cDNA), hybrid sequences or synthetic or semi-synthetic sequences. To be expressed, the human *TLR8* gene should be operably linked to one or more regulatory regions. Selection of the appropriate regulatory region or regions is a routine matter, within the level of ordinary skill in the art. Regulatory regions may be used to increase, decrease, or regulate the expression of a gene or to designate the expression of a gene to certain tissues or to certain stages of development. In some embodiments, the regulatory region increases expression of the gene or increases expression of the gene in neutrophils. The regulatory regions may comprise a promoter region for functional transcription, as well as a region situated 3' of the gene of interest, and which specifies a signal for termination of transcription and a polyadenylation site. All these elements constitute an expression cassette.

[0076] Promoters that may be used include both constitutive promoters and regulated (inducible) promoters. The promoter may be naturally responsible for the expression of the nucleic acid. It may also be from a heterologous source. In particular, it may be promoter sequences of eukaryotic or viral genes. For example, it may be promoter sequences derived from the genome of the cell which it is desired to infect. Likewise, it may be promoter sequences derived from the genome of a virus, including the adenovirus used. The promoters of the E1A, MLP, HCMV and RSV genes and the like may be used. In addition, the promoter may be modified by addition of activating or regulatory sequences, or sequences allowing a tissue-specific or predominant expression. The promoter need not be a naturally occurring promoter. The promoter may be an inducible promoter. In some embodiments, the human *TLR8* gene is operably linked to the human *TLR8* promoter. In some embodiments, the human *TLR8* gene is operably linked to the human *TLR8* promoter and human *TLR8* regulatory region.

[0077] Tetracycline-inducible systems can be used, as described in Hickman-Davis et al. (*Pediatric Respiratory Reviews* 2006 7: 49). Two independent transgenic mouse lines are generated: (1) transactivator mice, in which a tetracycline-controlled transactivator is expressed under the control of a tissue-specific promoter and (2) responder mice, in which expression of the DNA of interest is under the control of a tetracycline-dependent promoter (a minimal RNA polymerase II

promoter fused to tet operator sequences). The breeding of these two strains of mice generates a double-transgenic mouse that responds to tetracycline or its derivatives (doxycycline) to control expression of the transgene. There are two possible mirror image tetracycline- inducible systems. In the first system, the absence of doxycycline allows for transcription of the transgene and addition of tetracycline or its derivatives causes transcriptional downregulation (tet-OFF). In the second system transcription of the transgene occurs in the presence of doxycycline and therefore removal of the activator results in transcriptional downregulation (tet-ON).

[0078] Additional useful promoters are the ubiquitous promoters HPRT, vimentin, actin, and tubulin; the intermediate filament promoters desmin, neurofilaments, keratin, and GFAP; the therapeutic gene promoters MDR, CFTR, and factor VIII; promoters which are preferentially activated in dividing cells; cytomegalovirus immediate-early; retroviral LTR, metallothionein; SV-40; E1a and MLP promoters. Tetracycline-regulated transcriptional modulators and CMV promoters are described in WO 96/01313, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,168,062 and 5,385,839, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0079] In some embodiments, a cre/loxP recombinase system is utilized for generation of the transgenic animals. For example, the Cre/loxP recombinase systems described in Hickman-Davis et al. (*Pediatric Respiratory Reviews* 2006 7: 49) can be used. For this system, the generation of two independent mouse lines requires: (1) mice that contain the target gene or gene segment flanked by two 34 bp, asymmetric nucleotide sequences (loxP) sites in the same orientation ('floxed' sequence) and (2) mice that contain a fusion transgene expressing the Cre recombinase of the P1 bacteriophage. The Cre recombinase promotes recombination by recognition of the loxP sites, and when these two mouse strains are crossed, the floxed gene is deleted and a null mutation is created. Cre/loxP recombinase system is also useful in the targeted mutagenesis of embryonic stem cells in vitro to create 'clean' mutations that lack a selection cassette that might interfere with gene regulation, in which pluripotent stem cells containing the gene of interest and only one loxP site with foreign sequence are generated for use in the creation of a transgenic mouse. Several methods have been demonstrated for controlling Cre expression including the creation of fusion proteins containing Cre and having specific ligand-binding domains (*i.e.*, Cre is expressed only in the presence of a specific ligand), as well as a tetracycline-inducible Cre system.

[0080] In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is a mouse or a rat. In some embodiments, the transgenic animal is a mouse. Mouse strains useful for generating transgenic mice include, but are not limited to CD-1® Nude mice, CD-1 mice, NU/NU mice, BALB/C Nude mice, BALB/C mice, NIH-III mice, SCID™ mice, outbred SCID™ mice, SCID Beige mice, C3H mice, C57BL/6 mice,

DBA/2 mice, FVB mice, CB17 mice, 129 mice, SJL mice, B6C3F1 mice, BDF1 mice, CDF1 mice, CB6F1 mice, CF-1 mice, Swiss Webster mice, SKH1 mice, PGP mice, and B6SJL mice.

[0081] The transgenic animals are produced by introducing one or more transgenes into the germline of the transgenic animal. The methods enabling the introduction of DNA into cells are generally available and well-known in the art and different methods of introducing transgenes could be used. See, for example, Hogan et al. *Manipulating the Mouse Embryo: A Laboratory Manual Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory*, 2nd edition, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (1994) and U.S. Pat.Nos. 5,602,299; 5,175,384; 6,066,778 and 6,037,521, which are incorporated herein in their entirety. Technology used in developing transgenic animals include pronuclear microinjection (Gordon, J.W., *PNAS* 77, 7380-7384 (1980) and U.S. Pat. No. 4,873,191), homologous recombination (targeted transgenesis by transferring embryonic stem cells into blastocysts; Thompson et al., *Cell* 56:313-321 (1989)), RNA interference (RNAi) for silencing of specific gene function; retrovirus gene transfer into germ lines (Van der Putten et al., *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci.* 82:6148-6152 (1985)); electroporation of embryos (Lo, *Mol. Cell. Biol.* 3:1803-1814 (1983)); and sperm-mediated gene transfer (Lavitrano et al., *Cell* 57:717-723 (1989)).

[0082] Generally, the zygote is the best target for microinjection. In mice, for example, the male pronucleus reaches the size of approximately 20 μm in diameter, which allows reproducible injection of 1-2 pL of DNA solution. The use of zygotes as a target for gene transfer has a major advantage. In most cases, the injected DNA will be incorporated into the host genome before the first cleavage. Consequently, nearly all cells of the transgenic non-human animal will carry the incorporated transgene. Generally, this will also result in the efficient transmission of the transgene to offspring of the founder since 50% of the germ cells will harbor the transgene. Microinjection of zygotes is one method for incorporating transgenes in practicing the invention. The pronuclear microinjection method of producing a transgenic animal results in the introduction of linear DNA sequences into the chromosomes of the fertilized eggs. Bacterial Artificial Chromosome (BAC) containing the gene of interest or an alternative plasmid construct containing the gene of interest is injected into pronuclei (*i.e.*, fertilized eggs at a pronuclear state). The manipulated pronuclei are subsequently injected into the uterus of a pseudopregnant female. Mice generated can have one or multiple copies of the transgene, which can be assayed by southern blot technology.

[0083] The transgenic animals can also be generated by introduction of the targeting vectors into embryonic stem (ES) cells. ES cells are obtained by culturing pre-implantation embryos in vitro under appropriate conditions (Evans et al., *Nature* 292:154-156 (1981); Bradley et al., *Nature* 309:255-258 (1984); Gossler et al., *PNAS* 83:9065-9069 (1986); and Robertson et al., *Nature*

322:445-448 (1986)). Transgenes can be efficiently introduced into the ES cells by DNA transfection using a variety of methods known to the art including electroporation, calcium phosphate co-precipitation, protoplast or spheroplast fusion, lipofection and DEAE-dextran-mediated transfection. Transgenes can also be introduced into ES cells by retrovirus-mediated transduction or by micro-injection. Such transfected ES cells can thereafter colonize an embryo following their introduction into the blastocoel of a blastocyst-stage embryo and contribute to the germ line of the resulting chimeric animal (reviewed in Jaenisch, *Science* 240:1468-1474 (1988)). Prior to the introduction of transfected ES cells into the blastocoel, the transfected ES cells can be subjected to various selection protocols to enrich for ES cells that have integrated the transgene if the transgene provides a means for such selection. Alternatively, PCR can be used to screen for ES cells that have integrated the transgene. This technique obviates the need for growth of the transfected ES cells under appropriate selective conditions prior to transfer into the blastocoel.

[0084] Retroviral infection can also be used to introduce a transgene into a non-human animal. The developing non-human embryo can be cultured in vitro to the blastocyst stage. During this time, blastomeres may be targets for retroviral infection. Efficient infection of the blastomeres is obtained by enzymatic treatment to remove the zona pellucida. The viral vector system used to introduce the transgene is typically a replication-defective retrovirus carrying the transgene. Transfection is easily and efficiently obtained by culturing the blastomeres on a monolayer of virus-producing cells. Alternatively, infection can be performed at a later stage. Virus or virus-producing cells can be injected into the blastocoel. Most of the founder animals will be mosaic for the transgene since incorporation occurs only in a subset of the cells which formed the transgenic non-human animal. Furthermore, the founder animal may contain retroviral insertions of the transgene at a variety of positions in the genome; these generally segregate in the offspring. In addition, it is also possible to introduce transgenes into the germ line, albeit with low efficiency, by intrauterine retroviral infection of the midgestation embryo.

[0085] Viral vectors may be used to produce a transgenic animal. Preferably, the viral vectors are replication defective, that is, they are unable to replicate autonomously in the target cell. In general, the genome of the replication defective viral vectors which are used lack at least one region which is necessary for the replication of the virus in the infected cell. These regions can either be eliminated (in whole or in part), be rendered non-functional by any technique known to a person skilled in the art. These techniques include the total removal, substitution (by other sequences, in particular by the inserted nucleic acid), partial deletion or addition of one or more bases to an essential (for replication) region. Such techniques may be performed in vitro (on the isolated DNA) or in situ,

using the techniques of genetic manipulation or by treatment with mutagenic agents. Preferably, the replication defective virus retains the sequences of its genome which are necessary for encapsidating the viral particles.

[0086] The retroviruses are integrating viruses which infect dividing cells. The retrovirus genome includes two LTRs, an encapsidation sequence and three coding regions (gag, pol and env). The construction of recombinant retroviral vectors has been described: see, in particular, EP 453242, EP178220, Bernstein et al. *Genet. Eng.* 7 (1985) 235; McCormick, *BioTechnology* 3 (1985) 689, etc. In recombinant retroviral vectors, the gag, pol and env genes are generally deleted, in whole or in part, and replaced with a heterologous nucleic acid sequence of interest. These vectors can be constructed from different types of retrovirus, such as, HIV, MoMuLV ("murine Moloney leukaemia virus"), MSV ("murine Moloney sarcoma virus"), HaSV ("Harvey sarcoma virus"); SNV ("spleen necrosis virus"); RSV ("Rous sarcoma virus") and Friend virus. Defective retroviral vectors are disclosed in WO95/02697.

[0087] In general, in order to construct recombinant retroviruses containing a nucleic acid sequence, a plasmid is constructed which contains the LTRs, the encapsidation sequence and the coding sequence. This construct is used to transfect a packaging cell line, which cell line is able to supply in trans the retroviral functions which are deficient in the plasmid. In general, the packaging cell lines are thus able to express the gag, pol and env genes. Such packaging cell lines have been described in the prior art, in particular the cell line 17 (U.S. Pat. No. 4,861,719); the PsiCRIP cell line (WO90/02806) and the GP+envAm-12 cell line (WO89/07150). In addition, the recombinant retroviral vectors can contain modifications within the LTRs for suppressing transcriptional activity as well as extensive encapsidation sequences which may include a part of the gag gene. Recombinant retroviral vectors are purified by standard techniques known to those having ordinary skill in the art. Additional means of using retroviruses or retroviral vectors to create transgenic animals known to the art involve the micro-injection of retroviral particles or mitomycin C-treated cells producing retrovirus into the perivitelline space of fertilized eggs or early embryos (WO 90/08832 (1990); Haskell and Bowen, *Mol. Reprod. Dev.* 40:386 (1995)).

[0088] Once the founder animals are produced, they can be bred, inbred, outbred, or crossbred to produce colonies of the particular animal. Examples of such breeding strategies include but are not limited to: outbreeding of founder animals with more than one integration site in order to establish separate lines; inbreeding of separate lines in order to produce compound transgenics that express the transgene at higher levels because of the effects of additive expression of each transgene; crossing of heterozygous transgenic mice to produce mice homozygous for a given integration site in order to

both augment expression and eliminate the need for screening of animals by DNA analysis; crossing of separate homozygous lines to produce compound heterozygous or homozygous lines; breeding animals to different inbred genetic backgrounds so as to examine effects of modifying alleles on expression of the transgene and the physiological effects of expression.

Methods of Screening for and/or Identifying TLR8 Modulators

[0089] Provided herein is a method of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators using the transgenic animals described herein or cells therefrom. In some embodiments, the cells are primary cells, for example in cell culture, obtained or prepared from the transgenic animals described herein, which comprise a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the cells are of a stable cell line derived from primary cells of the transgenic animals. In some embodiments, the cells are an early passage of the primary cells. Provided herein are also methods of screening for, and/or identifying, TLR8 modulators, the methods comprising: administering a candidate agent to the transgenic animal or providing a candidate agent to cell(s) and/or cell culture obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animal described herein; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the transgenic animal or cell culture (e.g., as compared to an untreated or mock treated control). Further, provided are methods of screening for, or identifying, TLR8 modulators, the method comprising: providing a candidate agent to a cell culture, wherein cells of the cell culture are obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animals described herein which comprise a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture (e.g., as compared to an untreated or mock treated control). In some embodiments, the cells are from a transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the cells are from a transgenic mouse. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 results in inflammation or autoimmune diseases in one or more organs as compared with a control non-transgenic animal and/or elevated levels of cytokine production as compared with a control non-transgenic animal. In some embodiments the effect is a TLR8-mediated response, evidenced by a change in TLR8-mediated cytokine production, cell proliferation, and/or cell surface marker expression. A TLR8-mediated response is one that is stimutable by a TLR7/8 agonist such as R848 and CL075 or a TLR8 agonist such as a TLR8 ligand stabilized immunomodulatory RNA (e.g., SEQ ID NO:3). TLR8-mediated responses are assessed by measuring expression of a cytokine or a cell surface marker. Suitable cytokines are selected from but not limited to TNF- α , IFN- α , IFN- β , IFN- γ , IL-1 α , IL-1 β , IL-6, IL-8, IL-10, IL-12, IL-23, IP-10, MIP-1, and MCP-1. Suitable cell surface molecules are selected from but not limited CD40, CD80, CD86, ICAM-1, ICAM-2, ICAM-3, and CCR7. In some embodiments, the

cytokine comprises one or more of the group consisting of TNF, IL-12, IL-6, MIP-1 α , IFN γ , IP-10, IL-1 α , and IL-1 β .

[0090] In some embodiments, the candidate agent is selected and/or identified if the candidate agent modulates a TLR8-mediated immune response. In some embodiments, the immune response is evidenced by level or extent of TLR8-mediated inflammation. In some embodiments, the immune response is evidenced by level or extent of TLR8-mediated cytokine production, proliferation, marker gene production, and/or cell surface markers. In some embodiments, the modulation of TLR8-mediated immune response is inhibition of a TLR8-mediated immune response as compared to a control. In some embodiments, the level or extent of TLR8-mediated inflammation in the transgenic animal is reduced upon administration or providing the candidate agent compared to the control. In some embodiments, levels or extent of TLR8-mediated cytokine production, proliferation, marker gene production, and/or cell surface markers in the transgenic animal and/or cell(s) and/or cell culture obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animal described herein is reduced upon administration or providing the candidate agent compared to the control. In some embodiments, the modulation of a TLR8-mediated immune response is stimulation of a TLR8-mediated immune response as compared to a control. In some embodiments, the level or extent of TLR8-mediated cytokine production, proliferation, marker gene production, and/or cell surface markers in the transgenic animal and/or cell(s) and/or cell culture obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animal described herein is increased upon administration or providing the candidate agent compared to the control.

[0091] The control may be cells and/or animals, which do not express human TLR8. In some embodiments, the control may be untreated or mock-treated transgenic cells and/or animals, that express human TLR8. In some embodiments, the effect of the TLR8 modulator on modulating immune responses is compared to its effect in a non-transgenic animal and/or cell(s) and/or a cell culture obtained and/or derived from a non-transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the effect of the TLR8 modulator on modulating immune responses is compared to the effect of the TLR8 modulator in an animal and/or cell(s) and/or a cell culture obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animal described herein that do not express human TLR8 or express a different level of human TLR8. In some embodiments, the effect of the TLR8 modulator on modulating immune responses is compared to the effect of a known TLR8 modulator in a TLR8 transgenic animal and/or cell(s) and/or a cell culture obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animal described herein. In some embodiments, the effect of the TLR8 modulator on modulating immune responses is compared

to the effect of an agent which does not affect human TLR8 in a TLR8 transgenic animal and/or cell(s) and/or a cell culture obtained and/or derived from the transgenic animal described herein.

[0092] In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal is a chimeric TLR8 transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the TLR8 transgenic animal is a TLR8 transgenic animal with germ cells and somatic cells containing a nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is stably integrated into the genome of the TLR8 transgenic animal. In some embodiments, the nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is extrachromosomal. In some embodiments, the extrachromosomal nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is provided as a minichromosome, yeast artificial chromosome, or bacterial artificial chromosome.

[0093] For example, provided herein are methods of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators, the method comprising administering a candidate agent to a transgenic animal having a genome comprising a stably integrated transgene encoding human TLR8; wherein the transgene results in inflammation in one or more organs (e.g., pancreas, kidney, liver, joints, reproductive tissue, etc.) or an autoimmune disease (e.g., pancreatitis, nephritis, hepatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, diabetes-related disorder, reproductive disease, etc.) as compared with a control non-transgenic animal (or elevated levels of cytokine production as compared with a control non-transgenic animal); and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the inflammation or the autoimmune disease of the transgenic animal. Also, for example, provided herein are methods of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators, the method comprising administering a candidate agent to a transgenic animal having an extrachromosomal nucleotide sequence comprising a transgene encoding human TLR8; wherein the transgene results in inflammation in one or more organs (e.g., pancreas, kidney, liver, joints, reproductive tissue, etc.) or an autoimmune disease (e.g., pancreatitis, nephritis, hepatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, diabetes-related disorder, reproductive disease, etc.) as compared with a control non-transgenic animal (or elevated levels of cytokine production as compared with a control non-transgenic animal); and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the inflammation or the autoimmune disease of the transgenic animal.

[0094] Further, for example, provided herein are methods of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators, the methods comprising incubating a transgenic animal cell culture with a candidate agent, the transgenic animal cell culture being derived from a parent transgenic animal, cells of the culture comprising a stably integrated transgene encoding human TLR8; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture.

[0095] Provided herein are also methods of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators, the methods comprising: incubating a transgenic animal cell culture with a candidate agent, the transgenic animal cell culture being derived from a parent transgenic animal, cells of the culture comprising an extrachromosomal nucleotide sequence comprising a transgene encoding human TLR8; and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture.

[0096] Further provided herein are methods of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulators, the methods comprising incubating a transgenic animal cell culture with a candidate agent, the transgenic animal cell culture being derived from a parent transgenic animal, cells of the culture comprising a stably integrated transgene encoding human TLR8; wherein the transgene results in inflammation in one or more organs (e.g., pancreas, kidney, liver, joints, reproductive tissue, etc.) or an autoimmune disease (e.g., pancreatitis, nephritis, hepatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, diabetes-related disorder, reproductive disease, etc.) as compared with a control non-transgenic animal (or elevated levels of cytokine production as compared with a control non-transgenic animal cell culture); and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture.

[0097] Provided herein is a method of screening for and/or identifying TLR8 modulator, the method comprising incubating a transgenic animal cell culture with a candidate agent, the transgenic animal cell culture being derived from a parent transgenic animal, cells of the culture comprising an extrachromosomal nucleotide sequence comprising a transgene encoding human TLR8; wherein the transgene results in inflammation in one or more organs (e.g., pancreas, kidney, liver, joints, reproductive tissue, etc.) or an autoimmune disease (e.g., pancreatitis, nephritis, hepatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, diabetes-related disorder, reproductive disease, etc.) in one or more organs (e.g., pancreas, kidney, liver, joints, reproductive tissue, etc.) as compared with a control non-transgenic animal (or elevated levels of cytokine production as compared with a control non-transgenic animal cell culture); and determining the effect of the candidate agent on the cell culture.

[0098] In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a TLR8 agonist or antagonist. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is an anti-TLR8 antibody. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a TLR8 agonist or antagonist antibody. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator comprises a polynucleotide. In some embodiments, the polynucleotide comprises a TLR8 immunoregulatory sequence (IRS). In some embodiments, the polynucleotide comprising a TLR8 IRS further is not capable of modulating TLR7 and/or TLR9 and/or does not comprise (*i.e.*, lacks) a TLR7 and/or TLR9 IRS sequence. In some embodiments, the polynucleotide comprising a TLR8 IRS further is capable of modulating TLR7 and/or TLR9 and/or comprises a TLR7 and/or TLR9 IRS sequence. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator does not comprise (*i.e.*, lacks) an

immunostimulatory sequence. For example, in some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator does not comprise (*i.e.*, lacks) a CG sequence or TCG sequence wherein the C is unmethylated. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is not (*i.e.*, excludes) an antisense oligonucleotide and/or does not operate by a RNAi pathway. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is not (*i.e.*, excludes) a microRNA and/or siRNA. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is an antisense oligonucleotide. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a small molecule.

[0099] In some embodiments, the effect of the TLR8 modulator on modulating immune responses is determined by measuring TLR8-mediated cytokine production, proliferation, marker gene production, and/or cell surface markers. In some embodiments, the effect on modulating immune responses is inhibition of TLR8. Inhibition of a TLR response, *e.g.*, a TLR8 response, includes, but is not limited to, inhibition at the receptor site, *e.g.*, by preventing or blocking effective ligand - receptor binding, and inhibition of the downstream signal pathway, *e.g.*, after effective ligand - receptor binding.

[0100] The concentration of the candidate agent being assayed by the above methods may range, for example, from about 0.001 μM to about 100 μM , although in some embodiments the assay may be performed with a test compound present in concentrations outside this range. In some embodiments, the concentration of the candidate agent is 0.001 μM , 0.01 μM , 0.1 μM or 1.0 μM or greater. In some embodiments, the concentration of the candidate agent is 100 μM , 10 μM , 1.0 μM or 0.1 μM or less. The cell culture may be incubated with the test compound, for example, from about 10 minutes to about 24 hours, although in some cases the incubation period may be outside this range. The density of cells incubated with the compound to be tested may be, for example, from about 1×10^4 to about 1×10^7 cells/ml, although in some embodiments the assay may be performed using a cell culture having a cell density outside this range.

[0101] In some embodiments, cytokine levels are determined using a commercially available ELISA assay. In other embodiments, cytokine levels are determined using such techniques as, for example, antibody detection and quantitation (*e.g.*, flow cytometry, western blotting, immunohisto/cytochemistry, proteome array assays), and bioassays (*e.g.*, L929 cytotoxicity assay where the amount of cell death is directly proportional to the amount of TNF- α in the sample). See, *e.g.*, Current Protocols in Immunology, John Wiley and Sons, Inc. (2001).

[0102] Many different cytokines and/or markers can be assayed in the methods described above. Suitable measurable cytokines include, but are not limited to one or more of TNF- α , IFN- α , IFN- β , IFN- γ , IL-1 α , IL-1 β , IL-6, IL-8, IL-10, IL-12, IL-23, IP-10, MIP-1, and MCP-1. In some preferred embodiments, the cytokine is selected from the group consisting of TNF α , IL-12, IL-6, IFN γ , IP-10,

IL-1 α , and IL-1 β . Suitable measurable cell surface markers include co-stimulatory markers (*e.g.*, CD40, CD80, CD86), intercellular adhesion molecules (*e.g.*, ICAM-1, ICAM-2, or ICAM-3), and maturation markers such as, for example, CCR7.

[0103] Also provided by the present disclosure are kits comprising the transgenic mice or cells derived therefrom, and instructions for use of the mice to screen for and/or to identify a TLR8 modulators. In some embodiments, the kits further comprise a TLR8 agonist. In some embodiments, the kits further comprise a TLR8 antagonist.

Candidate Agents

[0104] Suitable candidate agents to screen for TLR8 modulatory activity include, but are not limited to, polynucleotides (*e.g.*, single or double stranded nucleic acids), polypeptides (*e.g.*, antibodies or antibody fragments), antisense oligonucleotides, and small molecules (*e.g.*, organic compounds having a molecular weight of less than 2000, 1600, 800, or 400 daltons).

[0105] In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulatory activity is TLR8 agonism (*e.g.*, stimulation). In other embodiments, the TLR8 modulatory activity is TLR8 antagonism (*e.g.*, inhibition). Suitable agonist molecules include polynucleotides comprising a TLR8 immunostimulatory sequence (ISS), agonist antibodies or antibody fragments, fragments or amino acid sequence variants of native polypeptides, peptides, and small molecules. Suitable antagonist molecules include polynucleotides comprising a TLR8 immunoregulatory sequence (IRS), antagonist antibodies or antibody fragments, fragments or amino acid sequence variants of native polypeptides, peptides, antisense oligonucleotides, and small molecules.

Antibodies

[0106] In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is an anti-TLR8 antibody. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is an antibody, which can reduce and/or inhibit a TLR8-induced cellular activity disclosed herein. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator comprises an antibody, which can cause and/or enhance a TLR is an agonist antibody. In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody is an antagonist antibody.

[0107] In some embodiments, the TLR8 antibody directly binds to TLR8. Alternatively, an antibody may combine with TLR8 indirectly by, for example, (a) forming a complex with another molecule that directly binds to TLR8, or (b) otherwise causing the modification of another compound so that the other compound directly binds to TLR8. In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody specifically binds TLR8, for example, specifically binds TLR8, but not TLR7 and/or TLR9. In some embodiments, the binding of the receptor is measured in a cell-free assay.

[0108] An antibody “which binds” TLR8 is one that binds TLR8 with sufficient affinity such that the antibody is useful as a diagnostic and/or therapeutic agent, *e.g.*, in targeting a cell expressing TLR8, and does not significantly cross-react with other proteins. In such embodiments, the extent of binding of the antibody to a “non-target” protein will be less than about 10% of the binding of the antibody to its particular TLR8 protein as determined by fluorescence activated cell sorting (FACS) analysis or radioimmunoprecipitation (RIA). An antibody that “specifically binds to” or is “specific for” TLR8 polypeptide or an epitope on TLR8 is one that binds to that TLR8 polypeptide or epitope on TLR8 without substantially binding to any other polypeptide or polypeptide epitope.

[0109] In some embodiments the anti-TLR8 antibody is a monoclonal antibody, a polyclonal antibody, a chimeric antibody, a humanized antibody, a human antibody, an intact antibody, a single chain antibody, or an antibody fragment. In some embodiments, the antibody fragment is Fab, Fab', F(ab')₂, Fv fragments; diabodies; or linear antibody. In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody or fragment thereof is isolated (*e.g.*, identified and separated and/or recovered from a component of its natural environment).

[0110] The anti-TLR8 antibody may be from any of the five classes of immunoglobulins: IgA, IgD, IgE, IgG, and IgM, having heavy chains designated α , δ , ϵ , γ , and μ , respectively. The γ and α classes are further divided into subclasses on the basis of relatively minor differences in CH sequence and function, *e.g.*, humans express the following subclasses: IgG1, IgG2, IgG3, IgG4, IgA1, and IgA2.

[0111] In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody suppresses and/or reduces TLR8-mediated cytokine production. In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody suppresses and/or reduces extent and/or levels of TLR8-mediated cytokine production as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of cytokine produced during untreated conditions (*e.g.*, media alone or buffer alone). In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody causes and/or enhances TLR8-mediated cytokine production. In some embodiments, the anti-TLR8 antibody causes and/or enhances extent and/or levels of TLR8-mediated cytokine production as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of cytokine produced during untreated conditions (*e.g.*, media alone or buffer alone).

Small Molecules

[0112] In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a TLR8 modulating chemical compound (*e.g.*, small molecule). In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a TLR8 modulating chemical compound (*e.g.*, small molecule), which can reduce and/or inhibit a TLR8-induced cellular activity disclosed herein. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a TLR8 modulating chemical compound (*e.g.*, small molecule), which can cause and/or enhance a TLR8-induced cellular activity

disclosed herein. A TLR8 modulating (*e.g.*, small molecule) may be a ligand that directly binds to TLR8. Alternatively, a compound may combine with TLR8 indirectly by, for example, (a) forming a complex with another molecule that directly binds to TLR8, or (b) otherwise causing the modification of another compound so that the other compound directly binds to TLR8.

[0113] In some embodiments, the compound suppresses and/or reduces TLR8 induced-cytokine production. In some embodiments, the compound suppresses and/or reduces extent and/or levels of cytokine production as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of cytokine produced during untreated conditions (*e.g.*, media alone or buffer alone). In some embodiments, the compound causes and/or enhances TLR8 induced-cytokine production. In some embodiments, the compound causes and/or enhances extent and/or levels of cytokine production as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of cytokine produced during untreated conditions (*e.g.*, media alone or buffer alone).

Polynucleotides

[0114] In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a TLR8 modulating polynucleotide (*e.g.*, polynucleotide).

[0115] In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulating polynucleotide is a TLR8 polynucleotide agonist. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist causes and/or enhances a TLR8-induced cellular activity. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist further comprises a motif, which causes and/or enhances a TLR9-induced cellular activity such as an unmethylated CG or unmethylated TCG. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist further comprises a motif, which causes and/or enhances a TLR7-induced cellular activity. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist further causes and/or enhances a TLR7 and TLR9 induced cellular activity. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist does not cause and/or enhance a TLR7 and/or TLR9 induced cellular activity. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist causes and/or enhances TLR8 induced-cytokine production. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist causes and/or enhances extent and/or levels of cytokine production as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of cytokine produced during untreated conditions (*e.g.*, media alone or buffer alone). In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist causes and/or enhances TLR8 induced-immune response. In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide agonist causes and/or enhances extent and/or levels of immune response as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of immune response produced during untreated conditions (*e.g.*, media alone or buffer alone).

[0116] In some embodiments, the TLR8 polynucleotide antagonist comprises a TLR8 IRS. In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS reduces and/or inhibits a TLR8-induced cellular activity. In some

embodiments, the TLR8 IRS further comprises a motif which reduces and/or inhibits a TLR7 and/or TLR9-induced cellular function. In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS does not comprise (*i.e.*, lacks) a motif which reduces and/or inhibits a TLR7 and/or TLR9-induced cellular function. In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS does not comprise an immunostimulatory sequences such as unmethylated CG or unmethylated TCG. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is not (*i.e.*, excludes) an antisense oligonucleotide and/or does not operate by a RNAi pathway. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is an antisense oligonucleotide. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is not a microRNA or siRNA. In some embodiments, the TLR8 modulator is a microRNA or siRNA.

[0117] In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS suppresses and/or reduces TLR8 induced-cytokine production. In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS suppresses and/or reduces extent and/or levels of cytokine production as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of cytokine produced during untreated conditions (e.g., media alone or buffer alone). In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS suppresses and/or reduces TLR8 induced-immune response. In some embodiments, the TLR8 IRS suppresses and/or reduces extent and/or levels of TLR8 induced -immune response as compared to, for example, extent and/or levels of immune response produced during untreated conditions (e.g., media alone or buffer alone).

[0118] In some embodiments, a TLR8 modulating polynucleotide comprises an IRS, as described herein, which inhibits and/or suppresses a measurable immune response as measured *in vitro*, *in vivo*, and/or *ex vivo*. In some embodiments, the TLR8 immune response is an innate TLR8 immune response. In some embodiments, the immune response is an adaptive TLR8 immune response.

General Techniques

[0119] The practice of the present application employs, unless otherwise indicated, conventional techniques of molecular biology (including recombinant techniques), microbiology, cell biology, chemistry, biochemistry and immunology, which are within the skill of the art. Such techniques are explained fully in the literature, such as, *Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual*, second edition (Sambrook *et al.*, 1989); *Oligonucleotide Synthesis* (Gait, ed., 1984); *Animal Cell Culture* (Freshney, ed., 1987); *Handbook of Experimental Immunology* (Weir & Blackwell, eds.); *Gene Transfer Vectors for Mammalian Cells* (Miller & Calos, eds., 1987); *Current Protocols in Molecular Biology* (Ausubel *et al.*, eds., 1987); *PCR: The Polymerase Chain Reaction* (Mullis *et al.*, eds., 1994); *Current Protocols in Immunology* (Coligan *et al.*, eds., 1991); *The Immunoassay Handbook* (Wild, ed., Stockton Press NY, 1994); *Bioconjugate Techniques* (Hermanson, ed., Academic Press, 1996); and

Methods of Immunological Analysis (Masseyeff, Albert, and Staines, eds., Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1993).

EXAMPLES

[0120] Abbreviations: BAC (bacterial artificial chromosome); BM (bone marrow); CT (threshold cycle); CTRL (control); FACS (fluorescence activated cell sorter); hTLR8Tg (human Toll-like receptor 8 transgenic); IRS (immunoregulatory sequence); KO (knock out); MDC (myeloid dendritic cells); PBMC (peripheral blood mononuclear cells); PDC (plasmacytoid dendritic cells); PN (polynucleotides); TLR (Toll-like receptor); and WT (wild type).

Example 1 - TLR8 Expression

[0121] *TLR8* expression was analyzed in human cellular subsets (Figure 1). Plasmacytoid dendritic cells (PDC), monocytes, myeloid dendritic cells (MDC), CD4+ T-cells, CD8+ T-cells, and neutrophils were purified by means of magnetic beads (Miltenyi Biotech) according to manufacturer's instructions. RNA was purified with a micro RNA KIT (Qiagen) according to manufacturer's instructions. cDNA from RNA was generated with SuperScript First-Strand Synthesis System (Invitrogen). Threshold cycle (CT) values for each gene were normalized to the housekeeping gene Ubiquitin using the formula: $\text{relative CT} = 1.8^{(\text{Avg CT Ubi} - \text{CT Gene})} * 100,000$ where Avg CT Ubi is the mean CT of triplicate housekeeping gene runs, Avg CT Gene is the mean CT of duplicate runs of the gene of interest, and 100,000 is arbitrarily chosen as a factor to bring all values above one. Neutrophils showed the highest level of expression. *TLR8* was also expressed in monocytes, mDCs and CD4+ T-cells (Figure 1).

Example 2 - Activity of TLR7 and TLR8 RNA Polynucleotides (PN) in Human and Mouse Cells

[0122] PN-based *TLR8* ligand stabilized immunomodulatory RNA (5'-M2UGCUGCUUGUG-/glycerol/-GUGUUCGUCGUM2-5' (M2=C6-linker); SEQ ID NO:3) and PN-based *TLR7* ligand stabilized immunomodulatory RNA (5'-URCURCUUCUR-/glycerol/-RUCUUCRUCRU-5' (R=7-deazaguanosine); SEQ ID NO:2) were previously identified (Lan et al., *PNAS* 104:13750-13755, 2007). The effect of these *TLR7*- and *TLR8*-stimulating RNA PN was evaluated by measuring production of IL-6 and TNF- α in human peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) and human monocytes (Figure 2). 5×10^5 PBMCs or 2×10^5 monocytes from healthy human donors were stimulated with 20 $\mu\text{g/mL}$, 100 $\mu\text{g/mL}$, or 200 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of either *TLR8* agonist or *TLR7* agonist as indicated in Figure 2. Twenty-four hours later supernatants were assessed for presence of

inflammatory cytokines IL-6 and TNF- α by standard ELISA procedure. TLR7 and TLR8 RNA PN stimulated production of IL-6 and TNF- α in PBMCs and, to a lesser extent, in monocytes (Figure 2).

[0123] The effect of TLR7 and TLR8-stimulating RNA PN were also evaluated in human pDCs by measuring production of IL-6, TNF- α , and IFN- α . As shown in Figure 1, human pDCs were negative for the expression of *TLR8*. 1×10^5 pDCs from healthy human donors were stimulated with 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ of either TLR8 agonist or TLR7 agonist (Lan et al., *PNAS* 104:13750-13755, 2007) or medium alone as indicated in Figure 3. Twenty-four hours later supernatants were assessed for presence of inflammatory cytokines IL-6, TNF- α and IFN- α by standard ELISA procedure. The TLR8 agonist did not stimulate the pDCs proving its specificity for TLR8 (Figure 3)

[0124] The effect of TLR7 and TLR8-stimulating RNA PNs was further evaluated in mouse cells by measuring IL-12 and TNF- α production (Figure 4). Mouse splenocytes and PBMCs were prepared from 129 wt mice and TLR7KO mice, and 5×10^5 cells were stimulated with 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ of either TLR8 or TLR7 agonist as indicated in Figure 4. IL-12 and TNF- α were measured by ELISA using standard techniques. The TLR8 agonist did not stimulate mouse splenocytes and PBMCs (Figure 4).

Example 3 - Generation of Human TLR8 (TLR8) Transgenic Mice

[0125] Transgenic *TLR8* mice were generated using BAC/ES technologies (Sparwasser et al., *Immunology* 121:308-313, 2007). Briefly, the human BAC carrying *TLR8* gene was obtained from the RPCIB-753 BAC library. The human BAC contains both human *TLR7* and *TLR8* genes in a cluster. The BAC was modified to knock out *TLR7* gene to retain the chromosomal region at the 5' UTR of mouse *TLR8* that likely contains the promoter. Human *TLR7* gene was knocked out by inserting a neomycin cassette (FRT-PGK-gb2-neo-FRT). The FRT-PGK-gb2-neo-FRT template encoded the neomycin/kanamycin resistance gene, which combined a prokaryotic promoter (gb2) for expression of kanamycin resistance in *E. coli* with a eukaryotic promoter (murine phosphoglucokinase gene (PGK)) for expression of neomycin resistance in mammalian cells. A synthetic polyadenylation signal inhibited the kanamycin/neomycin expression. The cassette was flanked by FRT sites for later excision by Flp-recombinase. The appropriate modification was introduced into the BAC using bacterial recombination procedures. After purification of the modified BAC, its quality was checked using pulse-field gel electrophoresis and Southern blot analysis. Important regions of the gene of interest (such as exons or proximal promoter), as well as the introduced modification were confirmed by sequencing. The sequence of construct BAC_RP11-1137P1_TLR7-KO: is provided as SEQ ID NO:1.

[0126] The modified BAC construct, BAC_RP11-1137P1_TLR7-KO (Figure 5), was transfected into an ES cell line, C57BL/6NTac ES cell line. The C57BL/6NTac ES cell line was grown on a mitotically inactivated feeder layer comprised of mouse embryonic fibroblasts (MEF) in DMEM High Glucose medium containing 20% FBS (PAN) and 1200 U/mL Leukemia Inhibitory Factor (Millipore ESG 1107). For manipulation 1.5×10^5 ES cells were plated on 3.5 cm dishes and transfected one day later with purified BAC_RP11-1137P1_TLR7-KO DNA and Lipofectamine™ 2000 Reagent from Invitrogen (Catalog No. 11668-027) according to manufacturer's protocol. From day 2 onwards the medium was replaced daily with medium containing 200 µg/mL G418 (Geneticin; Invitrogen; Catalog No. 10131-019). Seven days later single clones were isolated, expanded and analyzed by Southern Blot.

[0127] The ES clones generated were validated for presence of the TLR8 gene integrated on the genome by using southern blot techniques. Five ES clones were chosen: Clone 8 and clone 6 with about 1-2 copies of *TLR8* integrated in the genome, Clone 12 with 2-4 copies of *TLR8* integrated in the genome, clone 16 with about 5 copies of *TLR8* integrated in the genome and Clone 23 with about 15 copies of *TLR8* integrated in the genome, respectively.

[0128] ES cells were injected into the blastocoel of 3.5 day old mouse blastocysts from BALB/c females. Subsequently, the injected embryos were transferred to the uterine horns of appropriately timed pseudopregnant recipient BALB/c females. Embryos gestated for about 18 days and the resulting pups were chimeras, whose tissues have developed from both the ES cells carrying TLR8 gene and the recipient blastocyst cells of BALB/c background. This mix of starter cells was visible in the mouse's coat, which exhibited patches of coat color from the host embryo and patches from the injected ES clone. Chimeras with 50-75% ES contribution (based on fur color) were then put to breed with C57BL/6 animals to pass germline transmission.

Example 4 - Analysis of TLR8 Chimeric Mice

[0129] The clones described above were evaluated in more detail. Chimeric ratio was about 30% *TLR8* transgene and 70% wild-type. Chimeric mice of four out of five clones (clones 6, 12, 16 and 23) died before germline transmission. Only chimeric mice of clone 8 were able to breed and pass germline transmission. Clones 6, 12, 16, and 23 resulted in chimera lethality.

[0130] To determine *TLR8* expression 200 µl of blood was harvested from mice and RNA and cDNA were prepared according to standard procedures. TAQMAN assay was used to evaluate TLR8 gene expression. TLR8 expression correlated with survival time (Figure 6A-B). The highest

expressing clones (6, 12, and 23) caused lethality of the chimeric mice. Only Clone 8 with about 1-2 copies of TLR8 integrated in the genome survived (Figure 6A-B) and passed germline transmission (TLR8TGCL8 mice). Additionally, increased inflammatory cytokine levels were detected in the serum of TLR8Tg mice (n=15) as compared to control WT C57BL/6 mice (Figure 6C).

Example 5 - Gross and Histopathological Analysis of TLR8 Chimeras with High TLR8 Expression

[0131] To further evaluate the phenotype of the chimeras with high expression of TLR8, biopsy specimens from chimeric mice of clone 12, 23, and 6 were harvested from mice that showed evident sign of distress and needed to be euthanized. Organs were fixed in formalin and embedded in paraffin. Organs from wild type C57BL/6 (CTRL B6) mice were also harvested as controls. Sections were stained with hematoxylin-eosin. Blinded evaluation of the liver, kidney, intestine, lung, brain, heart and pancreas was conducted by a pathologist during the course of the study. Inflammation was scored 1 to 4 as follow: 1= Minimal; 2=Mild; 3=Moderate; 4=Marked. Statistical significance among groups was calculated with a Mann-Whitney U-test with P values comparing chimeric mice to CTRL B6 animals. P values were considered statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$.

[0132] As shown in Table 5-1, histopathology of the TLR8 chimera's organs revealed multi-organ inflammation with massive autoimmune pancreatitis. Inflammation was found in liver, kidney, and pancreas of human *TLR8* expressing mice. Pancreas histological data revealed abundant lymphocytes and macrophages/neutrophils infiltration, while acinar cells were intact. Kidney histological data revealed interstitial inflammation, glomerular changes with segmental hypercellularity, and pyelitis renal pelvis.

Table 5-1 - Histopathology of the TLR8 Chimeric Mice Organs

ID Name	Pancreas Pancreatitis	Kidney Glomerulonephritis	Kidney Pyelitis	Liver Cholangiohepatitis
CL#12 1-1	3	2	0	1
CL#12 2-2	3	3	0	3
CL#23 138800	4	3	3	2
CL#23 3-1	4	-	-	3
CL#23 4-1	4	3	2	4
CL#23 T4720	4	3	0	2
CL#23 136833	4	3	3	0
CL#23 138782	4	3	2	1
CL#23 138785	4	3	3	2
CL#23 3-2	4	3	3	4
CL#23 5-4	4	3	3	3
CL#23 T4715	4	3	3	1
Average	3.7	2.4	1.8	2.0
SEM	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.3
P value	<0.001	<0.001	N.S.	<0.001
CTRL B6 #1	0	0	0	0
CTRL B6 #2	0	0	0	0
CTRL B6 #3	0	2	3	0
CTRL B6 #4	0	2	0	0
Average	0	1.0	0.6	0
SEM	0	0.3	0.4	0

Example 6 - Pathological Characterization of Chimeric Mice with High TLR8 Expression

[0133] To further analyze the phenotype observed in chimeric mice with high expression of TLR8, pancreatic cytokine production was determined (Figure 7). Pancreases from *TLR8* chimeric mice of Clone 12, 6, or 23 (total number of mice=6) or CTRL WT C57BL/6 mice (total number of mice=6) were harvested and RNA was extracted with fibrous tissue RNA extraction kit (Qiagen) according to manufacturer’s instructions. cDNA from RNA was generated with SuperScript First-Strand Synthesis System (Invitrogen). Relative CT values for each gene were normalized to the housekeeping gene Ubiquitin using the formula: Gene expression = $1.8^{(Avg\ CT\ Ubi - CT\ Gene)}$ *100,000 where Avg CT Ubi is the mean CT of triplicate housekeeping gene runs, Avg CT Gene is the mean CT of duplicate runs of the gene of interest, and 100,000 is arbitrarily chosen as a factor to bring all values above one. Results show a strong up-regulation of a number of inflammatory cytokines such as IFN-gamma, TNF- α , IL12, IP-10, IL-1 α , and IL-1 β in the chimeric mice compared to the C57BL/6 control mice. (Figure 7A-F).

[0134] Aberrant recognition of self RNA and DNA has been implicated in the development of pathogenic autoantibodies in human lupus patients and in mouse models of this disease. The presence

of nucleic acid-specific autoantibodies in the serum of the *TLR8* chimeric mice was assessed using commercially available kits from Alpha Diagnostic. Sera was collected from *TLR8* chimeric mice of clone 12 when the mice became moribund. Significantly increased levels of anti-ANA Ig, anti-dsDNA Ig and anti-RNP Ig were detected in the serum from the *TLR8* chimeric mice (Figure 7G-I). Thus, over-expression of hTLR8 is associated with development of anti-self nucleic acid antibodies. [0135] In addition, myeloid dendritic cells (MDCs) were analyzed in chimeric TLR8TGCL23 and wild type B57BL/WT mice (Figure 8A-D). Chimeric and wild-type mice were sacrificed and spleens were harvested. Flow cytometric analyses were performed using fluorochrome-conjugated monoclonal antibodies to mouse CD11c, and costimulatory molecules CD80, GITRL, OX40L and CD40 (BD bioscience). These data show that MDCs were highly activated in TLR8TGCL23 chimeric mice (Figure 8).

Example 7 - Analysis of Mice Receiving Bone Marrow from TLR8 Chimeras

[0136] To examine whether epithelial cells or leukocytes are responsible for the phenotype observed in chimeric mice with high levels of TLR8 expression, bone marrow (BM) from TLR8 chimeras of Clone 6, 12 and 23 was transferred to recipient C57/BL6 (SJL) mice and animals were monitored for BM uptake and pathology. Recipient mice (C57/BL6 (SJL)) were irradiated with 900 rad using a cobalt irradiator. Four hours later, 2×10^6 BM cells extracted from the femurs of TLR8 chimeras were transferred intravenously. Reconstitution of the BM of the recipient mice with the BM of TLR8 chimeras was verified using flow cytometry on blood samples. 25 mice were obtained of which the BM was reconstituted with 80% of TLR8 BM.

[0137] Mice that were transplanted with TLR8 transgenic mice bone marrow cells (TLR8TG>C57BL/6SJL mice) were monitored daily. Mice died very quickly within 30-60 days after introduction of the TLR8 BM or were euthanized when moribund (Figure 9). Wild-type mice reconstituted with bone marrow from huTLR8 chimeras developed a spontaneous inflammatory disease remarkably similar to that in the original ES chimeras. In contrast, wild type mice reconstituted with WT BM (C57BL/6>C57BL/6SJL mice) did not show any signs of illness. These data suggest that high level TLR8 expression in the hematopoietic compartment is sufficient to cause the phenotype observe in chimeric TLR8 mice.

Table 7-1 – Histopathology of the TLR8TG> C57BL/6SJL Bone Marrow Transplanted Mice*

Clone BM	Pancreas	Kidney D1	Kidney D2	Liver	Salivary Gland	Small Intestine
CL 23	4	1	0	1.5	3	NT
CL 23	3.5	0	2	3	NT	NT
CL23	3.5	0	1	2.5	3.5	NT
CL 6	NT	0	0	1.5	2	NT
CL 6	4	0	0	2	2.5	NT
CL 6	4	0	0	3.5	2	NT
CL 12	4	0	0	1.5	3.5	0
CL 12	4	0	0	2	2.5	2.5
CL 12	4	0	0	1.5	3.5	2.5
CL 12	4	0	1	2.5	4	1
CL 12	4	0	0	2.5	3.5	0
CL 12	4	0	1	1.5	3.5	1
CL 12	4	0	0	2	1.5	1
CL 12	4	0	0	2.5	3	0
CL 12	4	0	0	1.5	3	1
CL 12	4	0	0	1.5	2	1
CL 12	4	1	1	2	4	2.5
CL 12	4	0	0	2	1.5	3
CL 12	4	0	0	3	1.5	0
CL 12	4	0	NT	1.5	3.5	1
CL 12	4	0	0	2.5	3.5	3.5
CL 12	4	0	IS	1.5	2	2
CL 12	4	0	NT	2	3.5	2
CL 12	4	0	0	2.5	2.5	2.5
CL 12	3.5	0	0	0	0.5	1
Average	3.9	0.1	0.3	2.1	2.7	1.4
SEM	0.03	0.06	0.11	0.14	0.19	0.25
P value	<0.001	<0.001	0.61	<0.001	<0.001	0.23
B6 CTRL	0	0	0	1	0	1
B6 CTRL	0	1	0	1	0	0
B6 CTRL	0	1	0	1	0	1
B6 CTRL	0	1	0.5	1	0	1
Average	0.0	0.8	0.1	1.0	0.0	0.8
SEM	0.00	0.25	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.25

*Gross Pathology: pancreas pancreatitis, kidney D1 glomerulonephritis, kidney D2 pyelitis, liver cholangiohepatitis, salivary gland inflammation, and small intestine inflammation.

[0138] To evaluate the histopathology of TLR8TG> C57BL/6SJL mice, biopsy specimens were harvested from mice that showed evident signs of distress and needed to be euthanized. Organs were fixed in formalin and embedded in paraffin. Organs from C57BL/6SJL (CTRL B6) mice were also harvested as controls. Sections were stained with hematoxylin-eosin. Blinded evaluation of the liver,

kidney, intestine, lung, brain, heart and pancreas were conducted by a pathologist. Inflammation was scored 1 to 4 as follow: 1= Minimal; 2=Mild; 3=Moderate; 4=Marked. Statistical significance among groups was calculated with a Mann-Whitney U-test. P values compare chimeric mice to CTRL B6 animals. P values are considered statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$. As shown in Table 7-1 histopathology of the TLR8TG> C57BL/6SJL bone marrow transplanted mice revealed multi-organ inflammation with massive autoimmune pancreatitis.

[0139] Flow cytometric analyses of T cells of TLR8TGCL12>C57BL/6SJL and wild-type C57BL/6SJL mice were performed using fluorochrome-conjugated monoclonal antibodies to mouse CD4, CD8, CD44, CD62L (BD bioscience) (Figure 10A-B). 30-40 days after bone marrow transplantation, TLR8TG>C57BL/6SJL mice (n=19) were sacrificed and blood and spleens were harvested. C57BL/6SJL WT mice (n=9) were used as controls. Dot blot analysis (Figure 10) and cumulative data (Figure 11) show that naive cells were CD44 low and CD62L high, effector cells were CD44 high and CD62L high, and effector memory cells were CD44 high and CD62L negative. P values were calculated with a Mann-Whitney U-test and were considered statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$. The presence of effector and effector memory cells shows that T cells were highly activated in TLR8TG>C57BL/6SJL mice.

[0140] In addition, flow cytometric analyses of MDC of TLR8TG>C57BL/6SJL and wild-type C57BL/6SJL mice were performed using fluorochrome-conjugated monoclonal antibodies to mouse CD11c, and costimulatory molecules CD80, GITRL, OX40L, PDL-1, and MHC CLASS II (BD bioscience) (Figure 12). TLR8TG>C57BL/6SJL mice were sacrificed and spleens were harvested. C57BL/6SJL wild-type mice were used as controls.

[0141] These data suggest that high level TLR8 expression in leukocytes and not epithelial cells is responsible for the phenotype observed in chimeric TLR8 mice. In these mice, the bone-marrow originated from the TLR8-transgenic animal while the hosts are wild-type. Therefore, this means that the entire hematopoietic compartment carries the transgene but the tissues (and thus all epithelial cell) are wild-type.

Example 8 - Transgenically Expressed TLR8 Is Functional

[0142] PN-based TLR8 ligand stabilized immunomodulatory RNA (5'-M2UGCUGCUUGUG-/glycerol-/GUGUUCGUCGUM2-5' (M2=C6-linker); SEQ ID NO:3) and PN-based TLR7 ligand stabilized immunomodulatory RNA (5'-URCURCUUCUR-/glycerol-/RUCUUCRUCRU-5' (R=7-deazaguanosine); SEQ ID NO:2) were previously identified (Lan et al., *PNAS* 104:13750-13755, 2007). To confirm that human TLR8 expressed from the transgene in TLR8TGCL8 mice is

functional and sensitive to stimulation, the effect of TLR8-stimulating RNA PN (SEQ ID NO:3) on cytokine production was assessed. 5×10^5 blood cells from TLR8TGCL8 transgenic mice or C57BL/6 WT animals were stimulated with TLR8 agonist at different concentrations as shown in Figure 13. 24 hours later supernatants were harvested and assayed for mouse IL-12, TNF- α and IL-6 using standard ELISA procedures. In addition, 5×10^5 bone marrow cells from TLR8TGCL8 transgenic mice or C57BL/6 WT animals were stimulated with TLR8 agonist (SEQ ID NO:3) at different concentrations as shown in Figure 14. Mouse TNF- α and IL-6 production was assayed in supernatants harvested after 24 hours. Only cells from transgenic animals responded to the TLR8 agonist demonstrating that human TLR8 is functional in these mice (Figures 13 and 14).

Example 9 - TLR8 Mediated Diseases

[0143] The role of TLR8 in disease and/or disease susceptibility was evaluated by using the TLR8 over-expressing mice and/or bone marrow from the TLR8 over-expressing mice as described below.

Spontaneous Arthritis.

[0144] hTLR8Tg chimeric mice from clone 12 (n=6) and C57BL/6 CTLR animals (n=6) were euthanized 90 days after the birth. Paws and joints were fixed, sectioned and stained with toluidine blue. Representative sections of joints from WT mice (Figure 15A) and hTLR8Tg mice (Figure 15B) were examined. All of the hTLR8Tg mice showed signs of swelling in fore limbs and hind limbs. The histological changes, degree of inflammation and cartilage damage were evaluated by a pathologist in a blinded fashion and scored 1 to 5 as followed: 1=minimal, 2=mild, 3=moderate, 4=marked, 5=severe. Two paws and two ankles were evaluated for each animal and the scores were summed to obtain the histological disease score (Figure 15C).

Rheumatoid Arthritis

[0145] To investigate whether TLR8 had a role in rheumatoid arthritis, wild-type (C57BL/6) and TLR8 transgenic mice (TLR8TGCL8) were immunized per a published immunization schedule and protocol (Campbell, *Eur J Immunol* 30:1568-1575, 2000). On day 0 of collagen immunization, collagen (Chicken Type II Collagen from Chondrex; 2 mg/mL) was emulsified with Complete Freund's Adjuvant (CFA from Chondrex; 5 mg/mL concentration of Mycobacterium tuberculosis H37Ra) as follows:

- (i) one volume of CFA was mixed with an equal amount of the collagen solution;
- (ii) mixing was continued until a stable, stiff emulsion resulted;
- (iii) to ascertain the desired stability of the emulsion, 1 drop of emulsion was added into a

water-filled beaker (the emulsion was considered stable if it remained in the water as a solid); and

(iv) 100 μ l was injected subcutaneously at the base of the tail.

[0146] A second injection was performed at day 21. Animals were assessed for redness and swelling of the 4 limbs and the cumulative score of each mouse was the sum of the score obtained for each limb. The *Clinical Score Guidelines* were as follows: 0-Normal; 1-Mild, but definite redness and swelling of the ankle or wrist, or apparent redness and swelling limited to individual digits, regardless of the number of affected digits; 2-Moderate redness and swelling of ankle or wrist; 3-Severe redness and swelling of the entire paw including digits; and 4-Maximally inflamed limb with involvement of multiple joints and a clinical score allocated.

[0147] Animals were sacrificed 80 days after CIA induction. The two front joints of each animal were used to prepare RNA to measure expression of various genes using TAQMAN assays (46 joints per group). The data shown are cumulative of two independent experiments. The TLR8 transgenic mice had a higher cumulative clinical score and a significant increase in the incidence of symptoms with a clinical score 4 or greater over time than wild-type mice (Figure 16A-B). Based on this data, expression of TLR8 was confirmed to play a role in the development of rheumatoid arthritis. Figure 16C-E shows significantly elevated expression of hTLR8, F4/80 and TNF in the joints of TLR8 transgenic mice (TLR8TGCL8) as compared to wild-type mice (C57BL/6). In addition, the level of expression of hTLR8 was found to correlate with the clinical score (Figure 16F). Moreover, expression of F4/80 and TNF correlated with levels of hTLR8 expression (Figure 16G-H). Likewise, expression of various pro-inflammatory cytokines (e.g., IL-1B, IL1A, IL-6, IL-18, IP-10, MMP-9) was found to correlate with hTLR8 levels (data not shown).

Diabetes

[0148] To investigate whether TLR8 had a role in diabetes, C57BL/6-SJL WT Mice were transplanted with WT C57BL/6 bone marrow cells or with TLR8TGCL12 bone marrow cells as described Example 7. Mice were monitored daily. Blood was collected from moribund mice, and glucose levels in the blood were assayed. Blood glucose levels in mice reconstituted with TLR8 BM were significantly elevated as shown in Figure 17. 62% of the mice showed a level equal or exceeding 200 mg/dL and were therefore considered diabetic (*See Lee et al., Nutrition Research* 26:474-479, 2006; Serrano et al., *Proc. Intl. Soc. Mag. Reson. Med.* 15 2463, 2007; and Tanquilut et al., *J. of Med. Plants Research* 3: 1066-1071, 2009, which are incorporated by reference in their entirety).

Blood Disorders

[0149] Cellular subsets were isolated from spleens of B6.SJL mice transplanted with bone marrow from TLR8TgCL12 mice. Expression of hTLR8 was evaluated by TAQMAN. Cumulative data from at least three independent experiments is shown (n=5-10, mean \pm SEM). Human TLR8 is expressed in monocytes, neutrophils and dendritic cells of the hTLR8Tg mice (Figure 18A). The expression pattern huTLR8 in leukocyte subsets from these mice is very similar to its expression in human leukocytes.

[0150] Approximately 5×10^5 PBMC from TLR8Tg chimeras or C57BL/6 WT animals were stimulated with a TLR8 agonist and 24 hr later supernatants were harvest and assayed for cytokine levels by ELISA (n=4 mice, mean \pm SEM). The RNA-based TLR8 agonist ORN-8L (300 μ g) induced secretion of IL-12 and TNF by PBMC from hTLR8Tg mice (Figure 18B-C).

[0151] Mice from TLR8Tg Clone 8 line were injected intravenously with a TLR8 agonist. Serum was collected 6 hr later and assayed for cytokine levels (n=3 mice, mean \pm SEM). The RNA-based TLR8 agonist ORN8-L (300 μ g) or the small molecule-based TLR8 agonist CL075 (5 μ g) induced secretion of IL-12 in vivo in hTLR8Tg mice. Thus human TLR8 is functional in these mice

[0152] The number of various white blood cells was assessed in peripheral blood and in spleens of TLR8Tg chimeras or age-matched C57BL/6 controls (Figure 19A-B). TLR8Tg mice develop lymphopenia (decrease in number of circulating lymphocytes), granulocytosis (increase in number of granulocytes, which are primarily neutrophils) and monocytosis (increase in number of monocytes). As shown in Figure 19C there is a significant decrease in circulating lymphocytes paralleled by an increase in granulocytes and monocytes in the blood of the TLR8 expressing mice as compared to WT controls.

[0153] Cells from spleens from TLR8Tg clone 12 chimeric mice and from WT mice were stimulated in vitro for 2hr with PMA (5 ng/ml) and ionomycin (500ng/ml). The percentage of CD4 and CD8 T cells producing TNF and IFN-gamma was increased in TLR8Tg chimeric mice as compared to CD4 and CD8 T cells from wild type control mice (Figure 20A-C).

Example 10 - Screening for and/or Identifying TLR8 Antagonists and Agonists

[0154] TLR8 antagonists and agonist can be screened for and/or identified using the transgenic mice expressing human TLR8 described above.

In Vitro Assays

[0155] Human primary monocytes and splenocytes from TLR8TGCL8 mice are used to screen for human TLR8 antagonists and agonists. Cells are stimulated with TLR8-specific ligands and the

activation or inhibition of TLR8-related immune responses are measured by standard in vitro assays described herein (*e.g.*, cytokine production, cell proliferation, marker gene expression, and/or cell surface markers).

In Vivo Assays

[0156] Clone 8 *TLR8* transgenic mice either with germline transmission or *TLR8* chimeras or without germline transmission are used to screen for TLR8 antagonists and agonists. Furthermore, new chimeras can be generated using *TLR8* transgenic mice with high copy number *TLR8* ES expressing clones. Mice are injected with either TLR8 agonist or antagonist candidates. TLR8 agonists activate, while TLR8 antagonists inhibit the TLR8-dependent signal transduction pathway and TLR8-associated immune responses. Mice are injected with TLR8 agonist known in the art prior to injection of TLR8 antagonist candidate. Alternatively, TLR8 antagonist candidates can be assessed in spontaneous disease mouse models in the absence of administration of a TLR8 agonist

[0157] Autoimmune mouse models employing the *TLR8* transgenic mice of the present disclosure include, for example, models for rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, pancreatitis, glomerulonephritis, pyelitis, cholangiohepatitis, and reproductive disorders.

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A transgenic animal comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding human Toll-like receptor 8 (TLR8), wherein said human TLR8 is expressed in the transgenic animal.
2. The transgenic animal of claim 1, wherein both germ cells and somatic cells of said transgenic animal comprise said nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8.
3. The transgenic animal of claim 1 or claim 2, wherein said nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is stably integrated into the genome of said transgenic animal.
4. The transgenic animal of any one of claims 1-3, wherein said nucleotide sequence encoding human TLR8 is present at a copy number of from 1 to 15.
5. The transgenic animal of any one of claims 1-4, wherein said transgenic animal is predisposed to development of inflammation in one or more organs.
6. The transgenic animal of any one of claims 1-5, wherein said transgenic animal is a mouse.
7. A cell obtained from the transgenic animal of any one of claims 1-6, wherein said human TLR8 is expressed in the cell.
8. A method of screening candidate agents, the method comprising: administering a candidate agent to the transgenic animal of any one of claims 1-6; and determining the effect of said candidate agent on a TLR8-mediated response of said animal.
9. A method of screening candidate agents, the method comprising: contacting the cell of claim 7 with a candidate agent; and determining the effect of said candidate agent on a TLR8-mediated response of said cell.
10. The method of claim 8 or 9, wherein the effect comprises inhibition of said TLR8-mediated response.
11. The method of claim 8 or 9, wherein the effect comprises stimulation of said TLR8-mediated response.
12. The method of any one of claims 8-11, wherein the TLR8-mediated response is evidenced by a change in TLR8-mediated cytokine production, cell proliferation, and/or cell surface marker expression.
13. The method of claim 12, wherein said TLR8-mediated cytokine production comprises production of one or more of the group consisting of TNF, IL-12, IL-6, MIP-1 α , IFN γ , IP-10, IL-1 α , and IL-1 β .
14. The method of any one of claims 8-13, wherein the candidate agent is an antibody.

15. The method of any one of claims 8-13, wherein the candidate agent is a small molecule.

16. The method of any one of claims 8-13, wherein the candidate agent is a polynucleotide.

Figure 1
Human TLR8

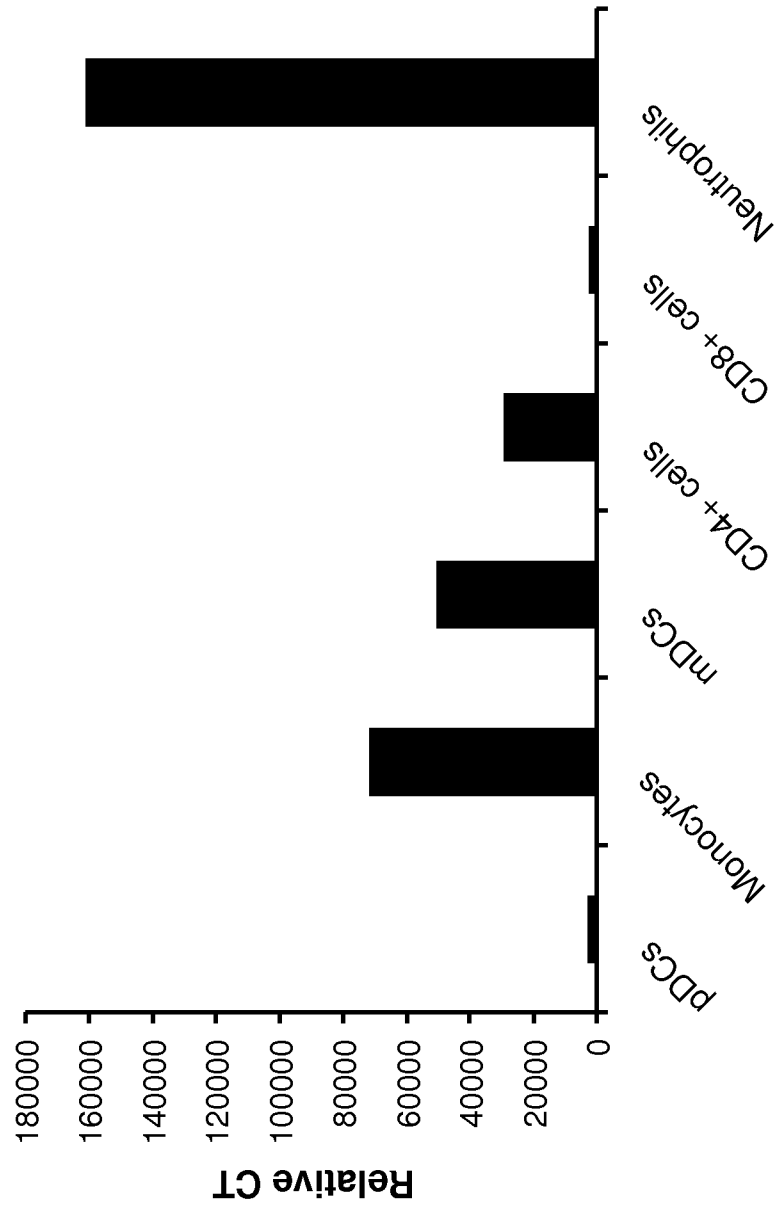


Figure 2

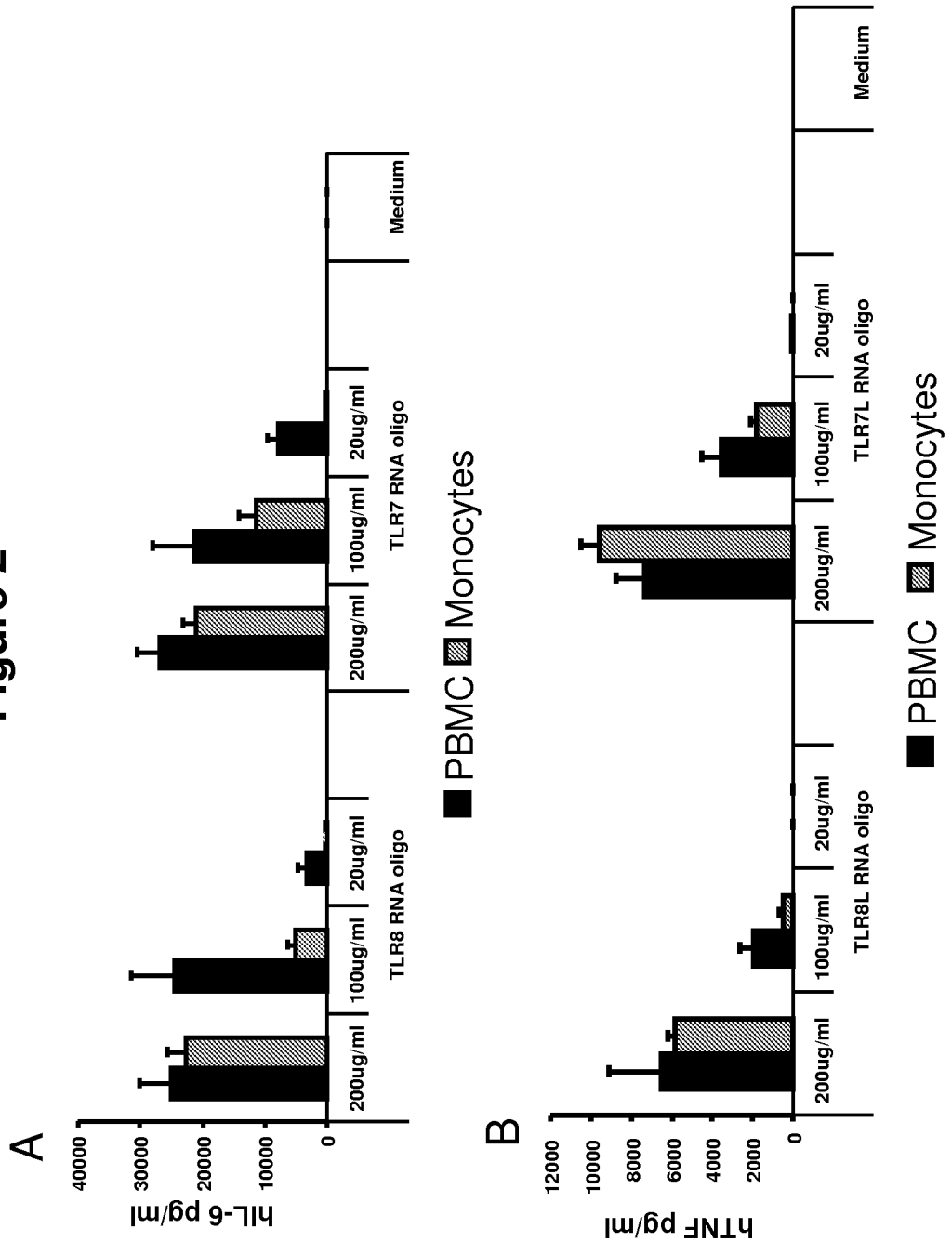
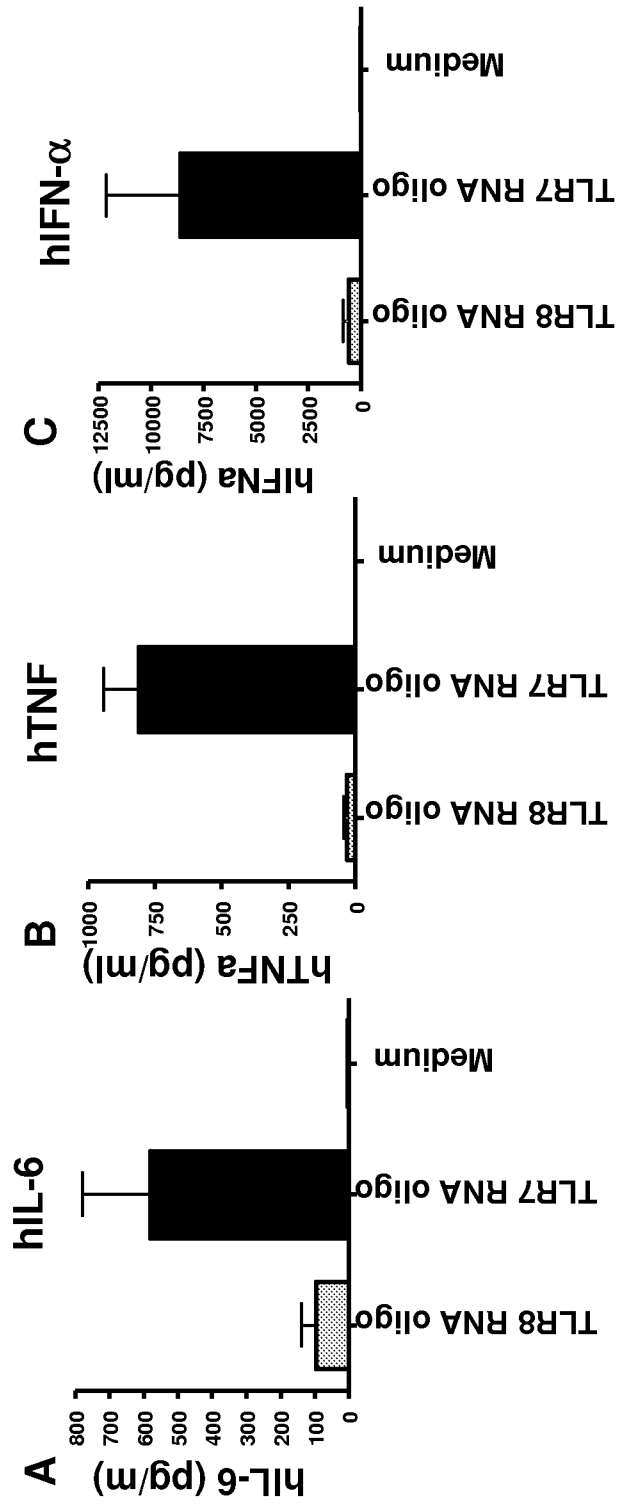


Figure 3



[Conc]: 100ug/ml

Figure 4

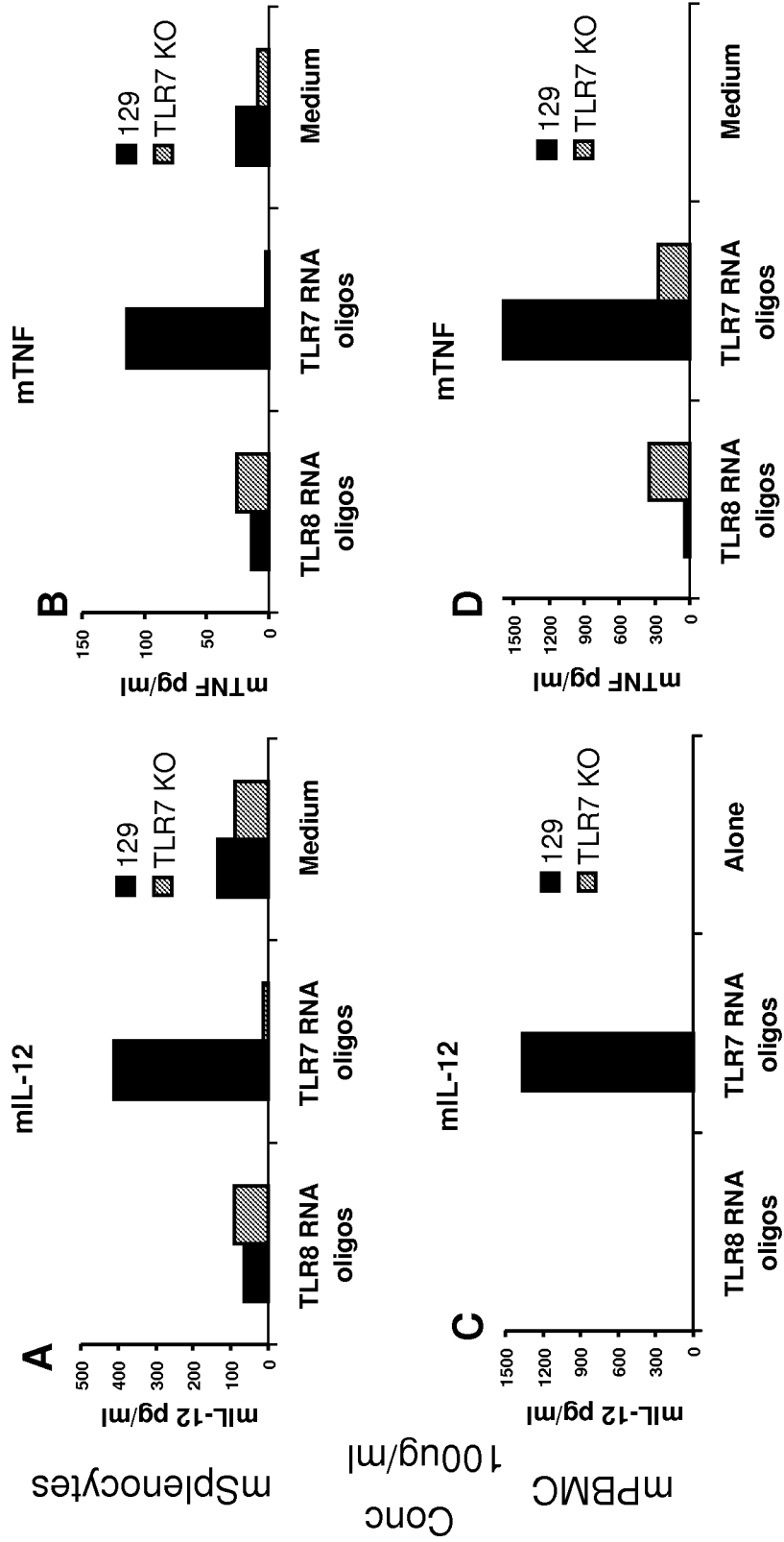


Figure 5

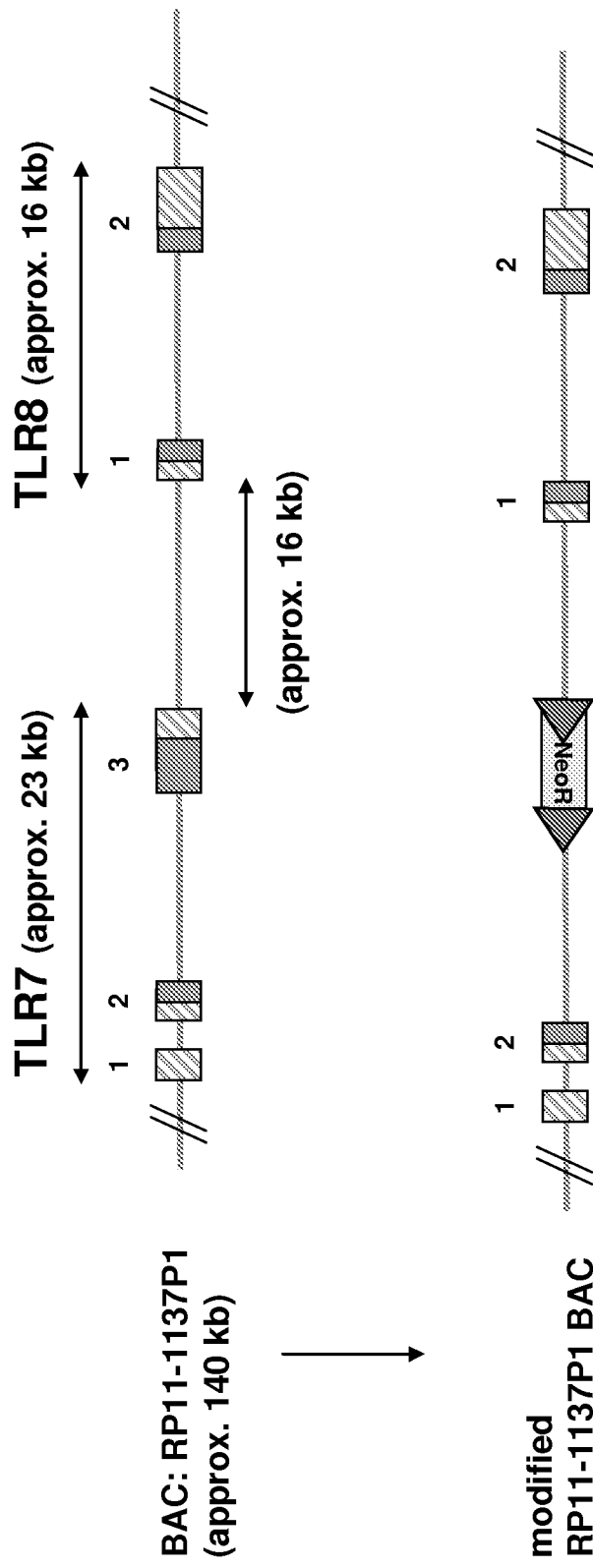


Figure 6

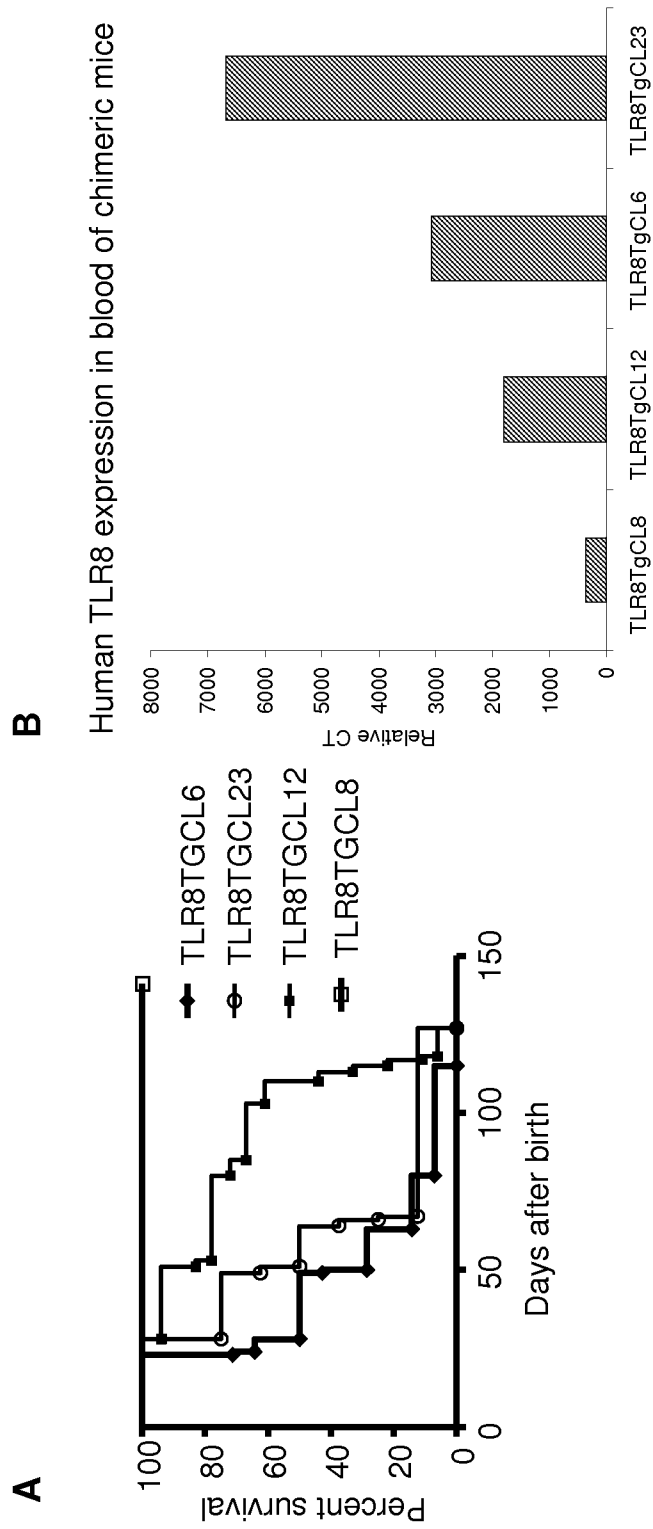


Figure 6

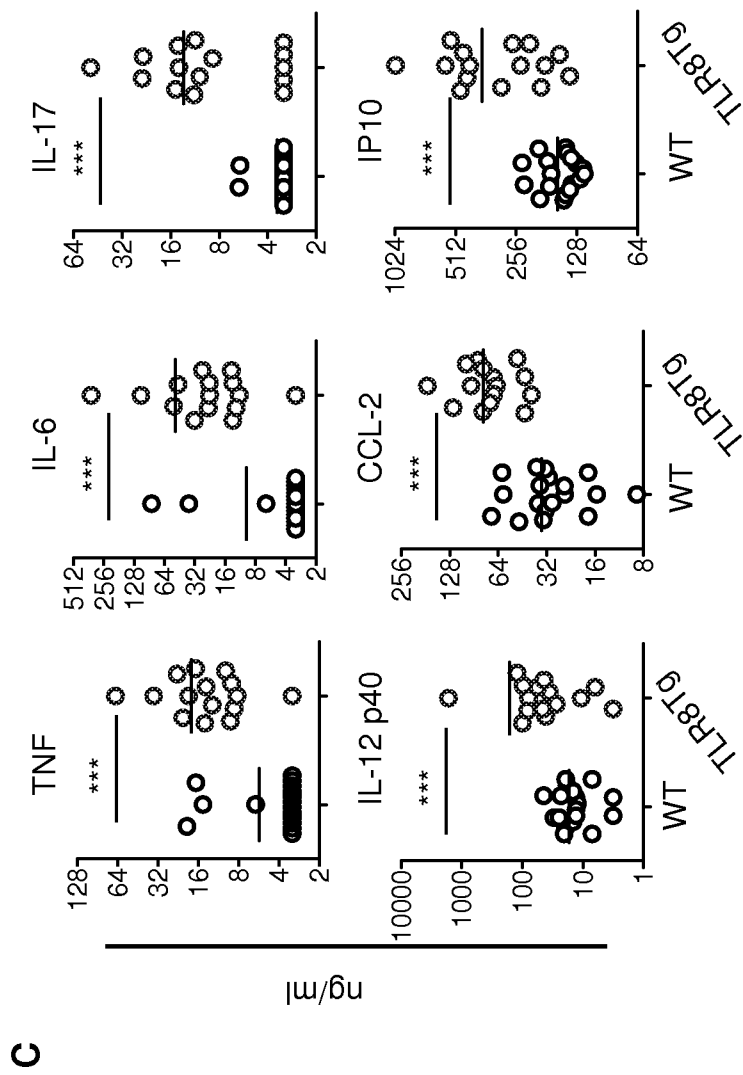


Figure 7

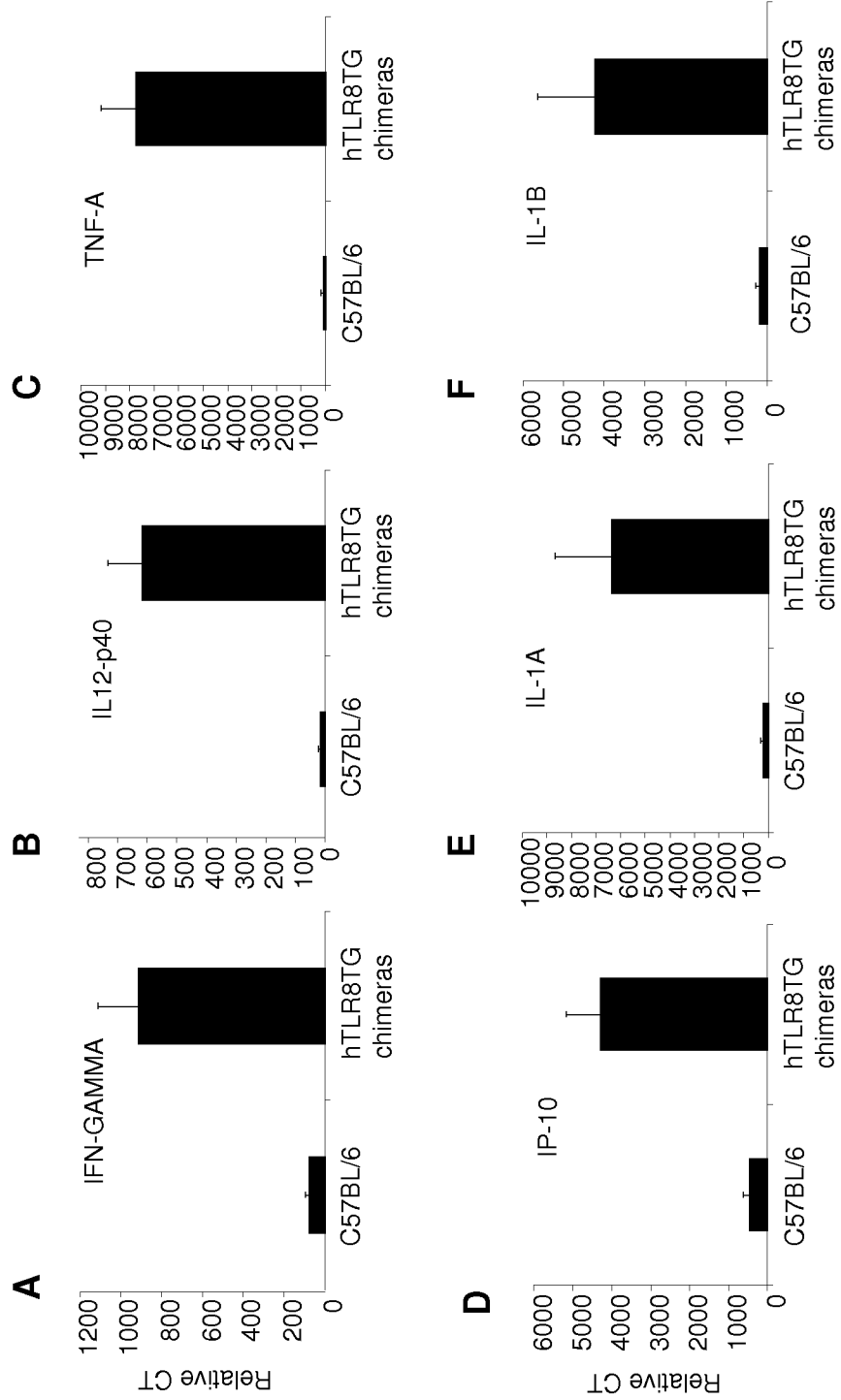


Figure 7

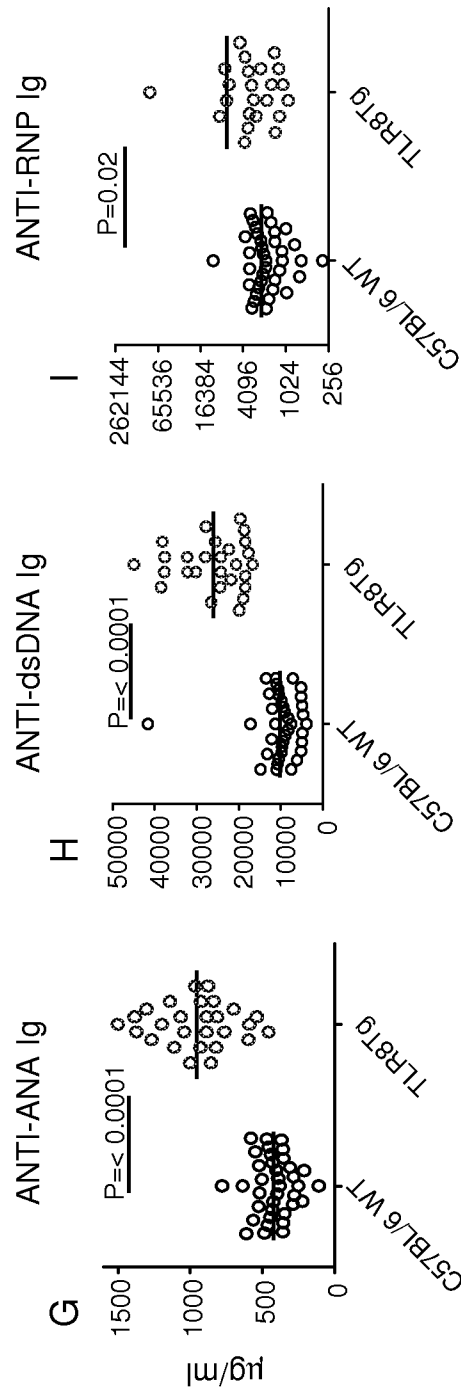


Figure 8

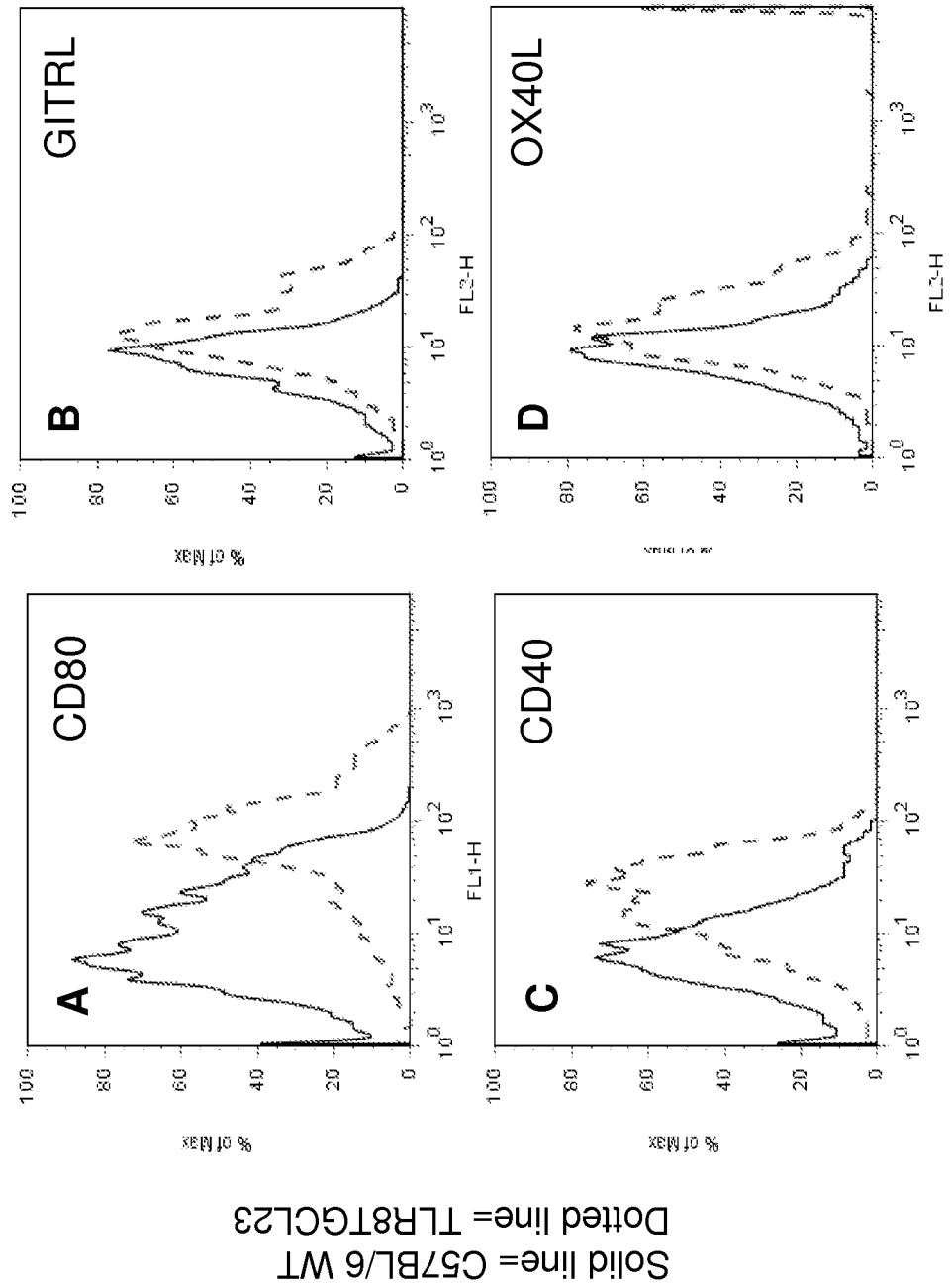


Figure 9

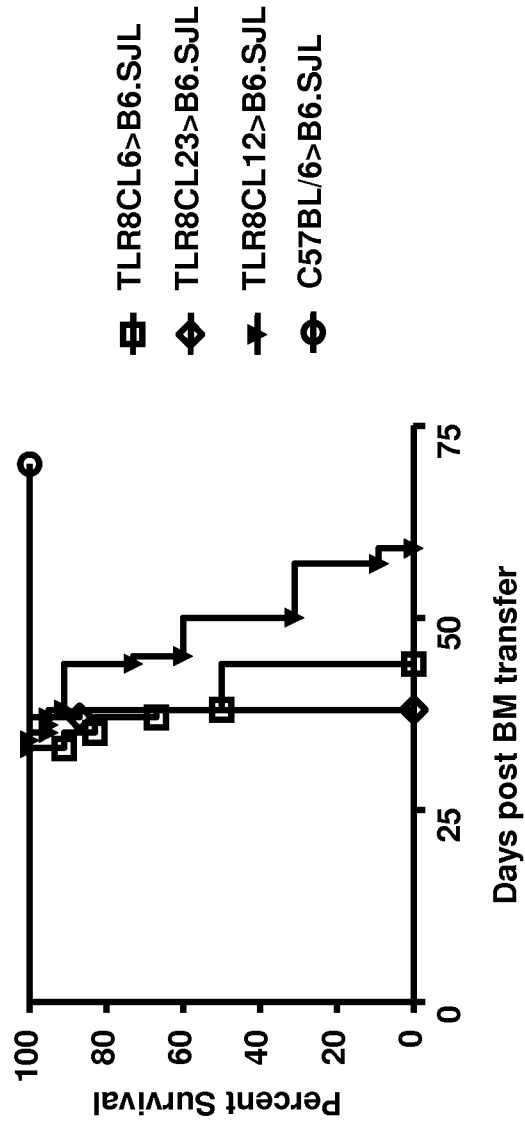


Figure 10

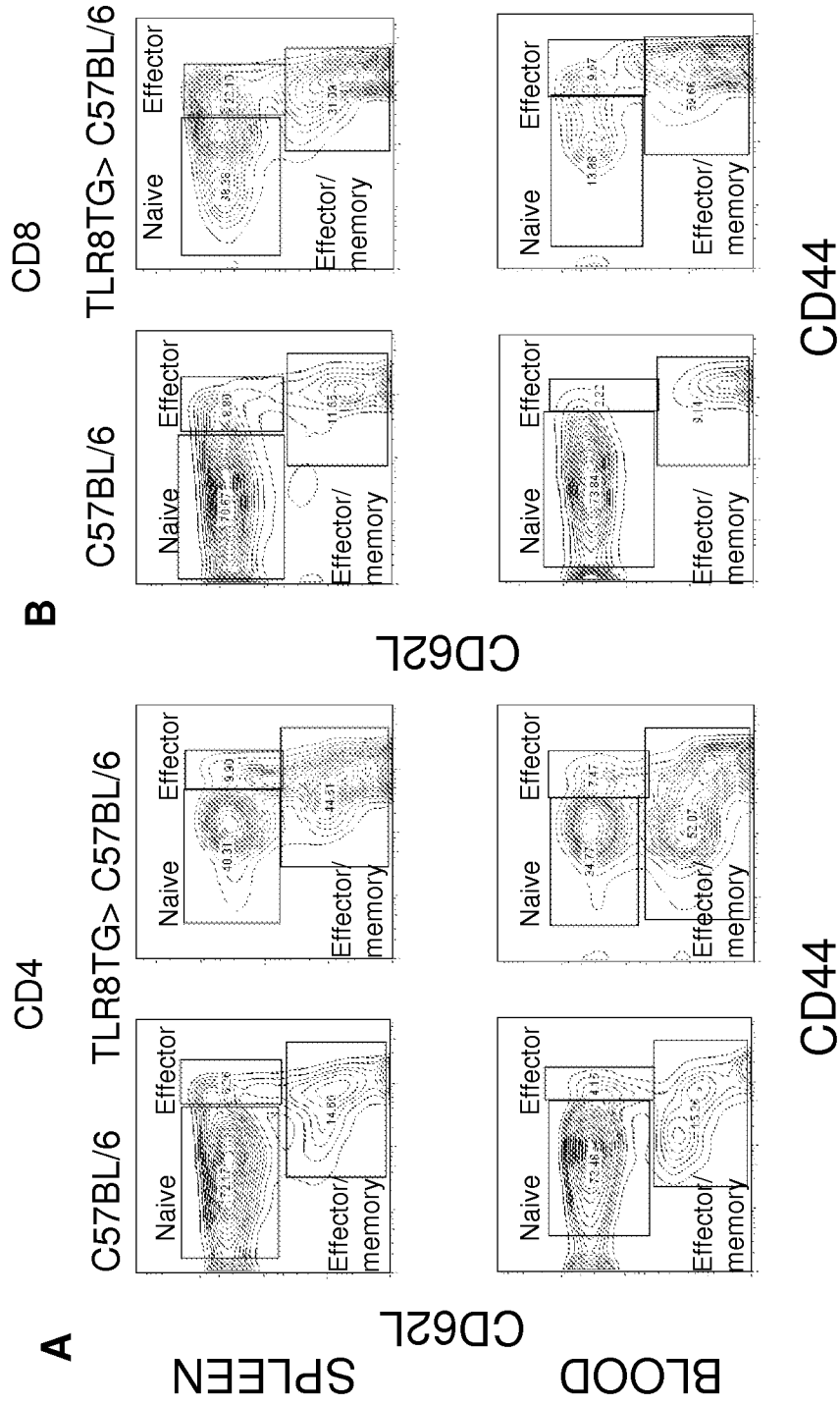


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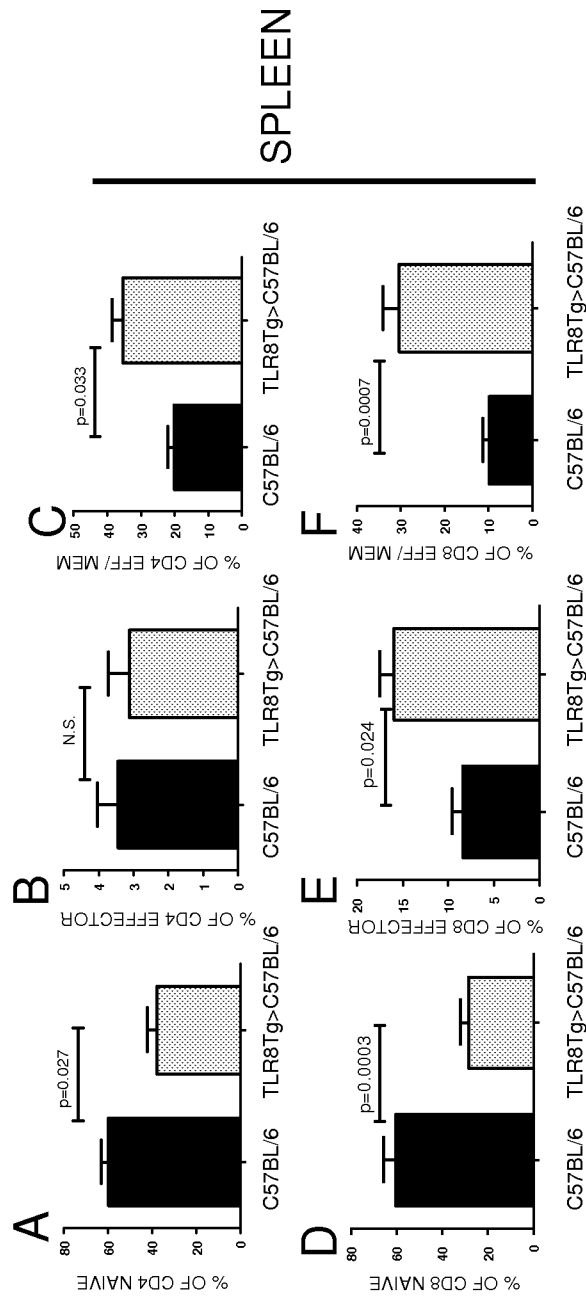


Figure 11

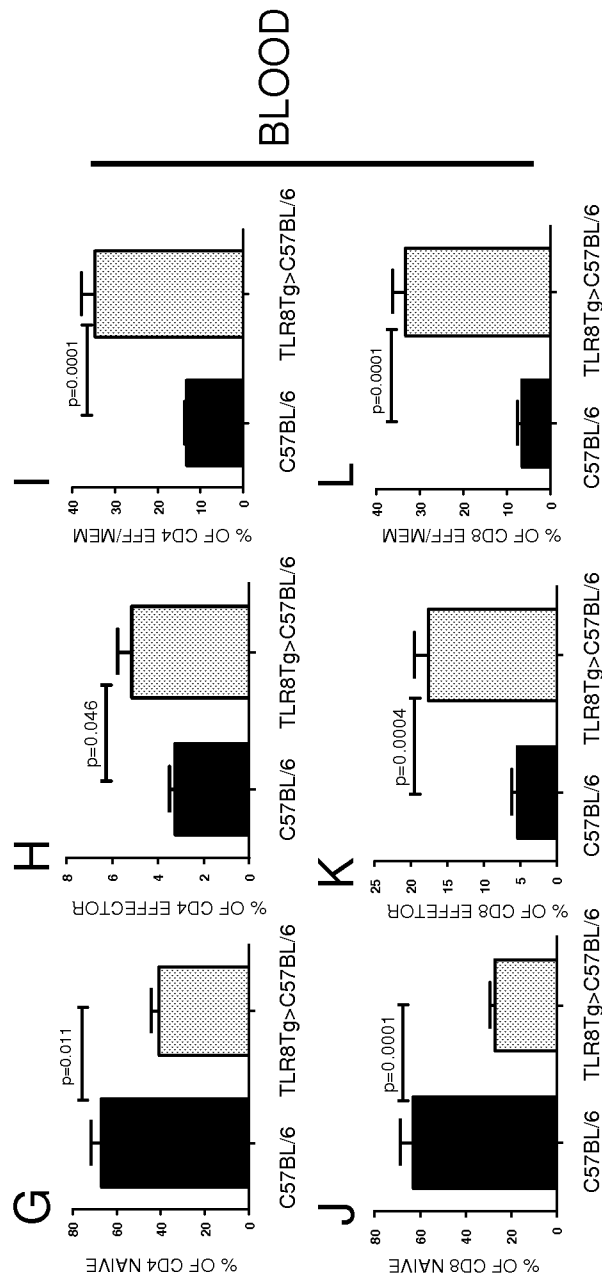
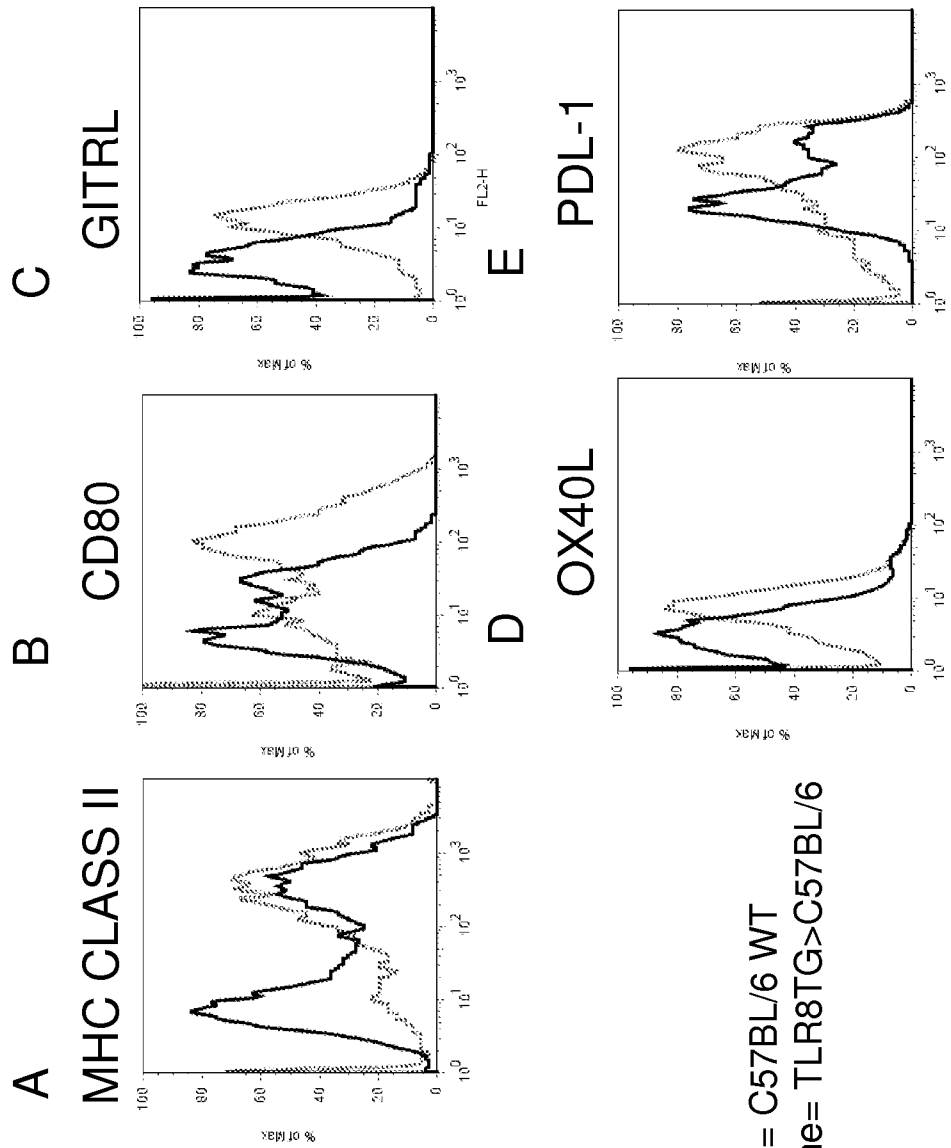


Figure 12



Solid line= C57BL/6 WT
Dotted line= TLR8TG>C57BL/6

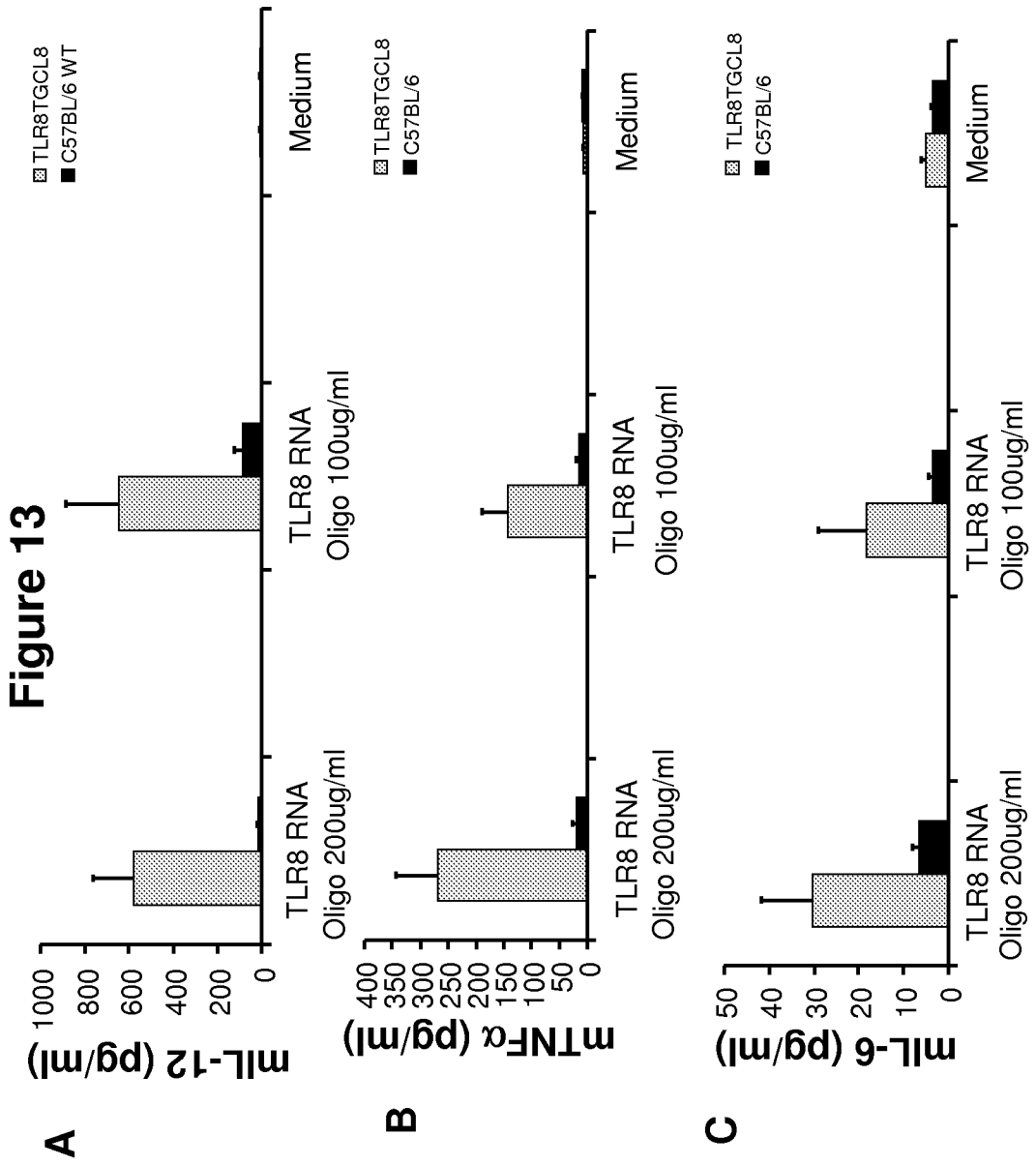


Figure 14

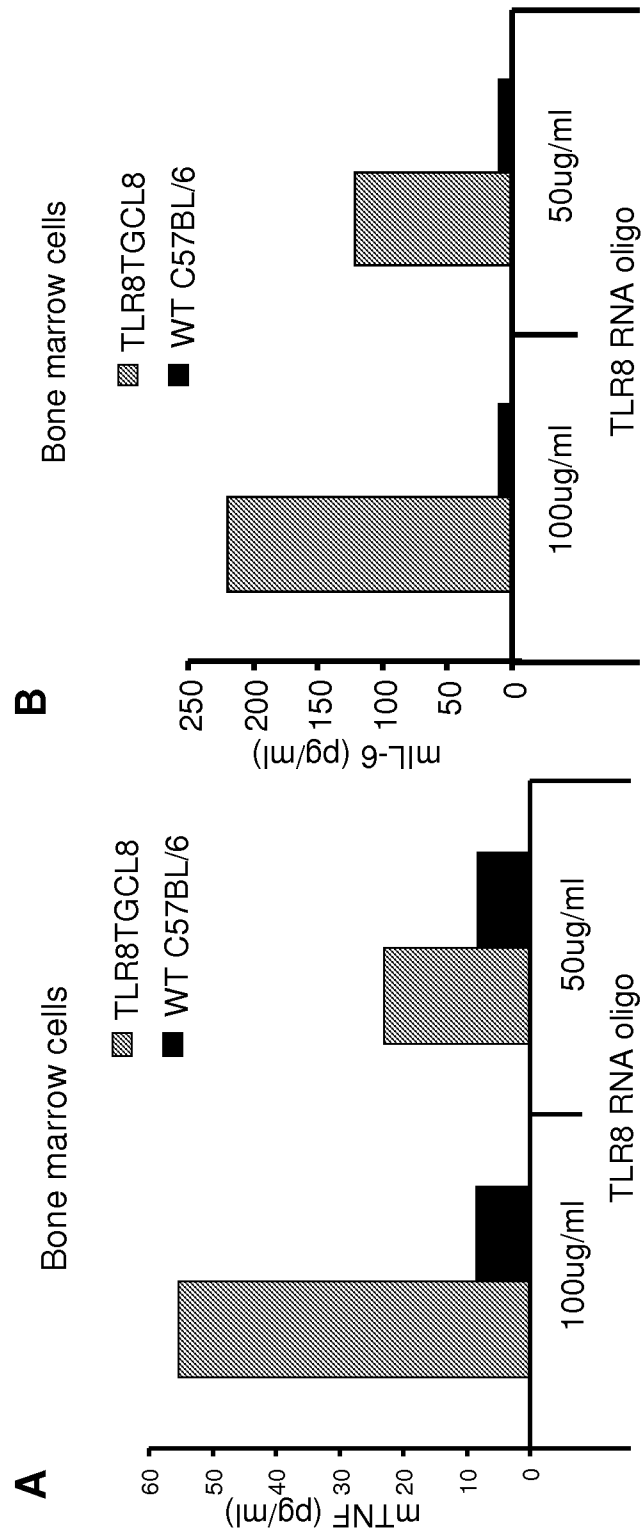


Figure 15

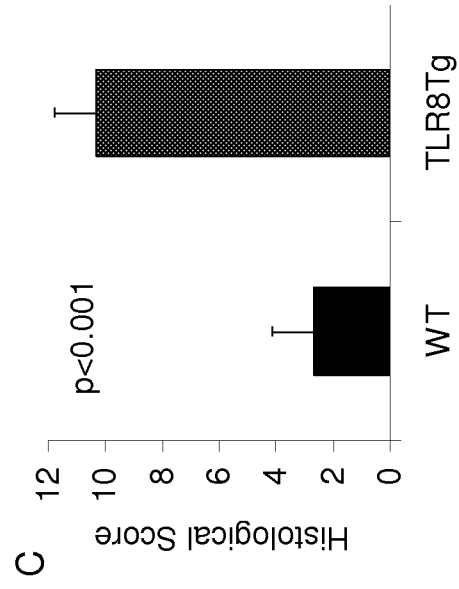
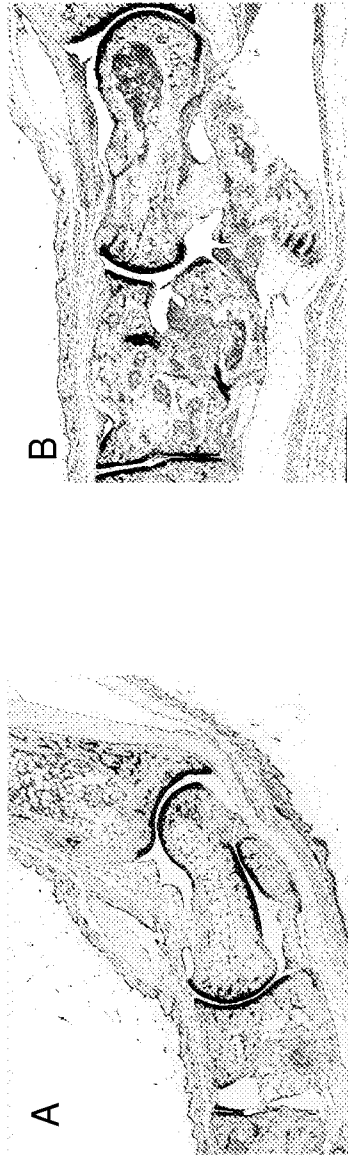


Figure 16

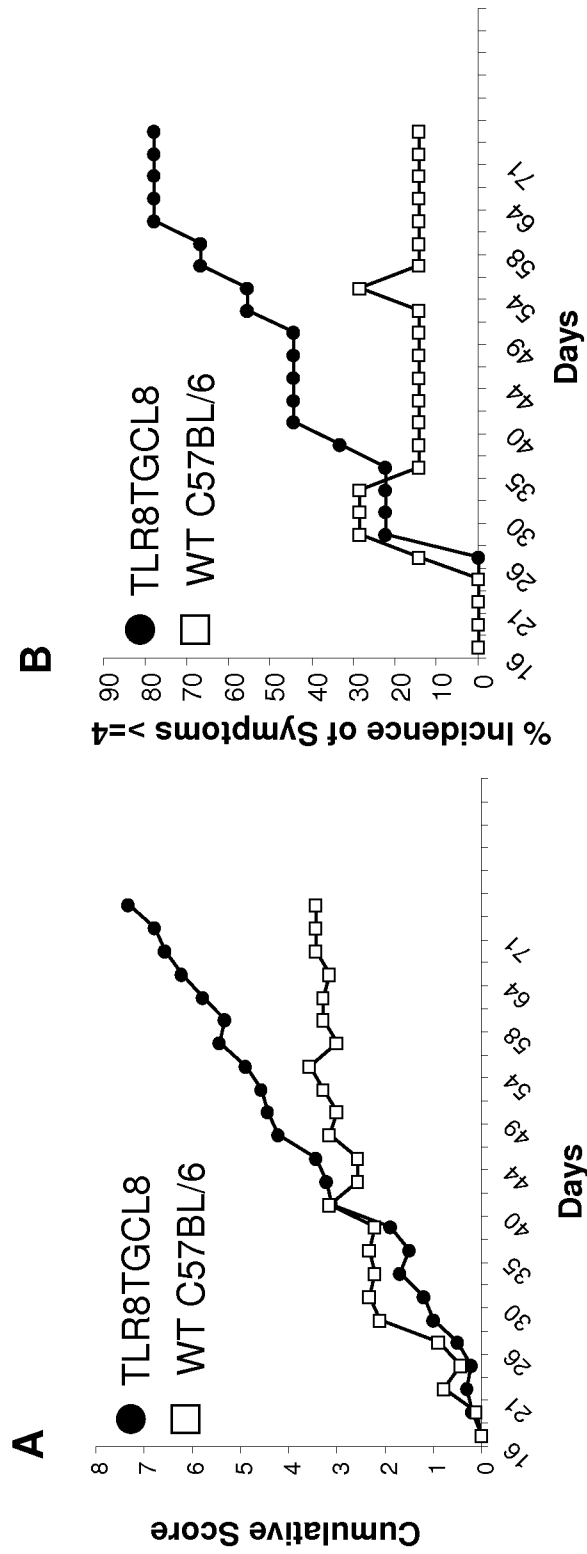


Figure 16

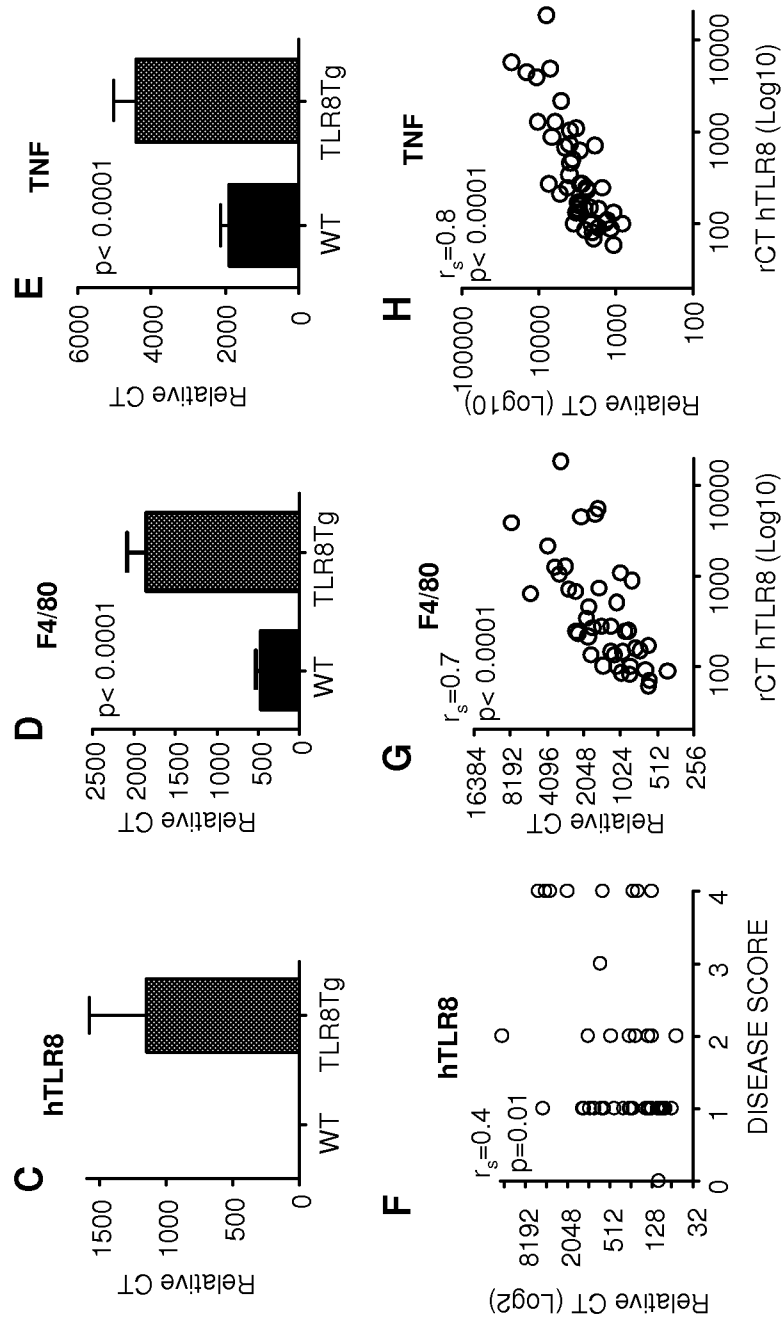


Figure 18

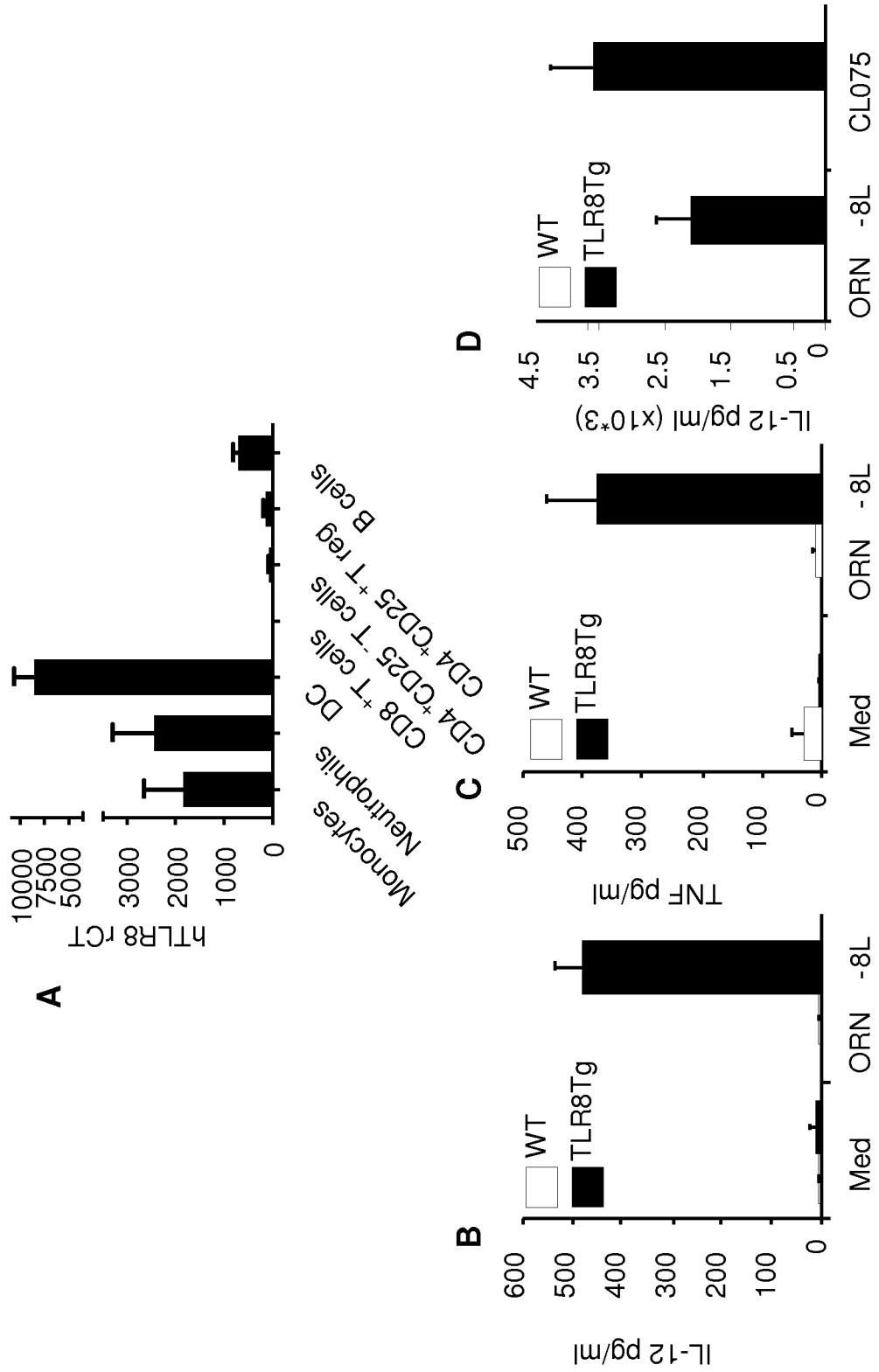


Figure 20

