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(71) **Demandeur/Applicant:**
PROBIOGEN AG, DE
(72) **Inventeurs/Inventors:**
JORDAN, INGO, DE;
SANDIG, VOLKER, DE
(74) **Agent:** GOWLING WLG (CANADA) LLP

(54) **Titre : NOUVEAUX VECTEURS DU VIRUS DE LA VACCINE APPARENTES AU MVA PRESENTANT DES SYMETRIES GENOMIQUES ETENDUES**
(54) **Title: NOVEL VACCINIA VIRUS VECTORS RELATED TO MVA WITH EXTENSIVE GENOMIC SYMMETRIES**

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

The present invention relates to a novel Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus. The present invention also relates to a method for culturing said MVA related virus and to a method for producing said MVA related virus. Further, the present invention relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising said MVA related virus and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s). Furthermore, the present invention relates to a vaccine comprising said MVA related virus. In addition, the present invention relates to said MVA related virus for use in medicine.

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- (71) **Applicant:** PROBIOGEN AG [DE/DE]; Goethestr. 54, 13086 Berlin (DE).
- (72) **Inventors:** JORDAN, Ingo; Stille Strasse 4, 13156 Berlin (DE). SANDIG, Volker; Buchhorster Strasse 5, 13158 Berlin (DE).
- (74) **Agent:** GELING, Andrea; ZSP Patentanwälte PartG mbB, Hansastrasse 32, 80686 München (DE).

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(54) **Title:** NOVEL VACCINIA VIRUS VECTORS RELATED TO MVA WITH EXTENSIVE GENOMIC SYMMETRIES

(57) **Abstract:** The present invention relates to a novel Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus. The present invention also relates to a method for culturing said MVA related virus and to a method for producing said MVA related virus. Further, the present invention relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising said MVA related virus and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s). Furthermore, the present invention relates to a vaccine comprising said MVA related virus. In addition, the present invention relates to said MVA related virus for use in medicine.



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NOVEL VACCINIA VIRUS VECTORS RELATED TO MVA WITH EXTENSIVE GENOMIC SYMMETRIES

The present invention relates to a novel Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus. The present invention also relates to a method for culturing said MVA related virus and to a method for producing said MVA related virus. Further, the present invention relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising said MVA related virus and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s). Furthermore, the present invention relates to a vaccine comprising said MVA related virus. In addition, the present invention relates to said MVA related virus for use in medicine.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Vaccinia virus (VACV) belongs to the genus *Orthopoxvirus* of the *Poxviridae* family and has been used as a live vaccine in the successful eradication of variola. However, vaccinia virus can productively infect humans and its use as expression vector in laboratories has been affected by safety concerns and regulations. Concerns with the safety of standard strains of VACV have been addressed by the development of vaccinia vectors from highly attenuated virus strains which are characterized by their restricted replicative capacity *in vitro* and absence of virulence *in vivo*.

Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) virus is a strain of vaccinia virus that has been obtained by adaptation of a strain of VACV to replication in cultures of primary chicken embryo fibroblasts (Mayr and Munz, 1964). It belongs to the highly attenuated poxviruses that can be used as a vaccine vector for safe and reactogenic expression of large transgenes to elicit a robust T-cell mediated immune response (Drillien et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2008; Sutter and Moss, 1992; Sutter et al., 1994). It is not inhibited by pre-existing immunity and investigated for protective and therapeutic treatment also of immunocompromised human patients (Cebere et al., 2006; McShane et al., 2002; Milligan et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2005).

Productive replication of MVA is restricted to avian cells and very few mammalian cells such as BHK and cell lines derived from the Egyptian fruit bat (Carroll and Moss, 1997; Drexler et al., 1998; Jordan et al., 2009a). The molecular basis for the narrow host range of MVA compared to the parental virus appears to be due to six deletions (deletion site I through VI, with the numerals increasing with the size of the deletion, not with position in the genome) and

a number of more confined mutations that may have been caused by the adaptation to the avian cells (Blanchard et al., 1998; Meisinger-Henschel et al., 2007; Meyer et al., 1991).

The provision of adequate supply of the MVA virus is challenging. MVA has to be given at high doses of 10^8 infectious units because it does not replicate and is therefore not amplified in the recipient (Wyatt et al., 2004). However, the MVA virus production systems which are presently available are time-consuming and expensive and cannot satisfy the needs of the pharmaceutical industry.

Here, for the first time, the present inventors isolated and characterized a novel MVA related virus. The present inventors found that the novel MVA related virus fundamentally differs in the genome structure from the (wild-type) MVA virus. The structural differences result in a virus having advantageous properties over the (wild-type) MVA virus. In particular, the novel MVA related virus releases a higher number of infectious units into the supernatant of infected cultures compared to those infected with the (wild-type) MVA virus. Further, the novel MVA related virus replicates to very high titers compared to the (wild-type) MVA virus. Furthermore, the novel MVA related virus induces fewer syncytia in adherent cultures.

The above described beneficial properties of the novel MVA related virus improve its industrial production. Particularly, they allow the production of the novel MVA related virus in high yields and, thus, also the production of heterologous proteins, e.g. antigens, which may be comprised therein. In addition, the novel MVA related virus can be isolated directly from the cell-free supernatant which facilitates purification and, thus, the logistic and the operation of bioreactors producing said MVA related virus. This, in turn, reduces the costs of its production.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a first aspect, the present invention relates to a Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus comprising one or more of the following features:

- (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
- (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
- (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
- (iv) no deletion site I,
- (v) two deletion sites IV,

- (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
- (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and/or
- (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product.

In a second aspect, the present invention relates to a genome of the MVA related virus according to the first aspect.

In a third aspect, the present invention relates to a cell comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect.

In a fourth aspect, the present invention relates to a method for culturing a MVA related virus according to the first aspect comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a cell according to the third aspect,
- (b) culturing the cell, and
- (c) isolating the MVA related virus.

In a fifth aspect, the present invention relates to a method for producing a MVA related virus according to the first aspect comprising the steps of:

- (a) infecting a cell with a MVA virus,
- (b) culturing the cell,
- (c) isolating the MVA virus, and
- (d) repeating steps (a) to (c) with the MVA virus isolated in step (c) until a MVA related virus comprising one or more of the following features:
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
 - (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
 - (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
 - (iv) no deletion site I,
 - (v) two deletion sites IV,

- (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
 - (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and/or
 - (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product
- is detected.

In a sixth aspect, the present invention relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s).

In a seventh aspect, the present invention relates to a vaccine comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect.

In an eighth aspect, the present invention relates to a MVA related virus according to the first aspect or a genome according to the second aspect for use in medicine.

This summary of the invention does not describe all features of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Before the present invention is described in detail below, it is to be understood that this invention is not limited to the particular methodology, protocols and reagents described herein as these may vary. It is also to be understood that the terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only, and is not intended to limit the scope of the present invention which will be limited only by the appended claims. Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meanings as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art.

Preferably, the terms used herein are defined as described in “A multilingual glossary of biotechnological terms: (IUPAC Recommendations)”, Leuenberger, H.G.W, Nagel, B. and Kölbl, H. eds. (1995), Helvetica Chimica Acta, CH-4010 Basel, Switzerland).

Several documents are cited throughout the text of this specification. Each of the documents cited herein (including all patents, patent applications, scientific publications, manufacturer's specifications, instructions, GenBank Accession Number sequence submissions

etc.), whether supra or infra, is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. Nothing herein is to be construed as an admission that the invention is not entitled to antedate such disclosure by virtue of prior invention.

In the following, the elements of the present invention will be described. These elements are listed with specific embodiments, however, it should be understood that they may be combined in any manner and in any number to create additional embodiments. The variously described examples and preferred embodiments should not be construed to limit the present invention to only the explicitly described embodiments. This description should be understood to support and encompass embodiments which combine the explicitly described embodiments with any number of the disclosed and/or preferred elements. Furthermore, any permutations and combinations of all described elements in this application should be considered disclosed by the description of the present application unless the context indicates otherwise.

Throughout this specification and the claims which follow, unless the context requires otherwise, the word “comprise”, and variations such as “comprises” and “comprising”, will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or step or group of integers or steps but not the exclusion of any other integer or step or group of integer or step. As used in this specification and the appended claims, the singular forms “a”, “an”, and “the” include plural referents, unless the content clearly dictates otherwise.

The term “attenuated virus”, as used herein, refers to a virus with compromised virulence in the intended recipient, e.g. human or animal recipient. Such a property can be achieved by adaptation of a virus to narrow temperature ranges or narrow host ranges and to other artificial replication environments, including chemically defined media. Replication of such a virus is restricted in cells derived from the intended recipient, e.g. human or animal recipient, or in cells removed from the tissue environment. It may replicate to high titers outside of the intended recipient (e.g. in a permissive cell culture or laboratory animal). An example of an attenuated virus strain is the Ender’s attenuated measles virus Edmonston strain given to protect against serious measles disease or the vaccinia virus strain used in the pox eradication campaign of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the 1970s.

The term “highly attenuated virus”, as used herein, refers to a virus with blocked virulence in the intended recipient, e.g. human or animal recipient. Such a property can be achieved by adaptation of a virus to narrow temperature ranges or narrow host ranges and to other artificial replication environments, including chemically defined media. Replication of such a virus is blocked in cells derived from the intended recipient, e.g. human or animal recipient, or in cells removed from the tissue environment. It may replicate to high titers outside

of the intended recipient (e.g. in a permissive cell/cell culture or laboratory animal). The MVA virus of the present invention is a highly attenuated virus. It does not replicate in human or non-human primate cells.

The term “host-restricted virus”, as used herein, refers to a virus which (only or mainly) replicates in a specific host organism, e.g. in a cell such as an avian cell or in an animal such as a laboratory animal. It does not replicate or only replicates at very low levels in other organisms, e.g. in other cells than avian cells. A host-restricted virus may be achieved by (serial) virus passaging of a virus in a host organism, e.g. in avian cells. The MVA related virus of the present invention is restricted to avian cells. It does not replicate in human cells.

The term “virus passaging”, as used herein, refers to a process which involves infecting a series of host organisms, e.g. cells or animals such as laboratory animals, with a virus. Each time the virus is given some time to incubate, and then the next host organism is infected with the incubated virus. This process can also be designated as “serial virus passaging”. For example, serial virus passaging allows the generation of (highly) attenuated and/or host-restricted viruses. The MVA related virus of the present invention is a highly attenuated virus. It is restricted to avian cells. It does not replicate in human or non-human primate cells.

When a host organism, e.g. a cell such as an avian cell or an animal such as a laboratory animal, is defined by the term “permissive”, it refers to the fact that the virus is able to circumvent defenses of said organism and is able to invade a cell, replicate in said cell, and escape from said cell. Usually this occurs when the virus has modulated one or several of the cellular intrinsic defenses of said organism and/or the immune system of said organism.

The term “recipient”, as used herein, refers to a subject which may receive a virus, e.g. which may be vaccinated with a virus. The subject may be a human or an animal. Said animal may be a member of the mammalian species such as a canine, feline, lupine, mustela, rodent (e.g. a mouse, rat or hamster), an equine, a bovine, an ovine, a caprine, pig, bat (e.g. a megabat or microbat), or a non-human primate (e.g. a monkey such as a great ape). Particularly, the MVA related virus of the present invention does not replicate in human or non-human primate recipients.

The term “host organism”, as used herein, refers to an organism which may be used for virus production and/or adaptation. The host organism may be a cell or an animal such as a laboratory animal. The cell may be an avian cell (e.g. a chicken, quail, goose, or duck cell such as a duck retina (CR) cell). The animal, particularly laboratory animal, may be a bird (e.g. a chicken, quail, goose, or duck), canine, mustela, rodent (e.g. a mouse, rat or hamster), an ovine, a caprine, pig, bat (e.g. a megabat or microbat) or a non-human primate (e.g. a monkey such as

a great ape). Particularly, the MVA related virus of the present invention replicates in an avian cell (e.g. in a chicken, quail, goose, or duck cell) or in a bird (e.g. in a chicken, quail, goose, or duck).

The term “infectious”, as used herein, refers to the ability of a virus to replicate in a cell and to produce viral particles. Infectivity can be evaluated either by detecting the virus load or by observing disease progression in a human or in an animal.

The term “vaccine”, as used herein, refers to an agent that can be used to elicit protective immunity in a recipient, e.g. human or animal recipient. To be effective, a vaccine can elicit immunity in a portion of the immunized population, as some individuals may fail to mount a robust or protective immune response or, in some cases, any immune response. This inability may stem from the genetic background of the recipient or because of an immunodeficiency condition (either acquired or congenital) or immunosuppression (e.g., due to treatment with chemotherapy or use of immunosuppressive drugs). Vaccine efficacy can be established in animal models. The vaccine of the present invention comprises the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect. In this respect, it should be noted that the MVA related virus itself may be the vaccine. It confers protection against pox. However, said virus may further comprise a heterologous nucleic acid sequence, e.g. a sequence coding for an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen, against which an additional protective immunity in the recipient may be elicited. A MVA related virus comprising a heterologous nucleic acid sequence can also be designated as recombinant MVA related virus.

The term “vaccination”, as used herein, means that a recipient, e.g. human or animal recipient, is challenged with an infectious virus, e.g. in an attenuated or inactivated form of said infectious virus, to induce a specific immunity. In the present invention, the recipient is challenged with the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or with the genome according to the second aspect to induce immunity against pox. However, in the context of the present invention, the term “vaccination” also covers the challenge of a recipient with a MVA related virus which further comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence. The heterologous sequence is a sequence against which an additional protective immunity should be elicited. It may code for an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen. A MVA related virus comprising a heterologous nucleic acid sequence can also be designated as recombinant MVA related virus. Examples of such epitopes which are heterologous to said virus cover, e.g. epitopes from proteins of other viruses such as the Influenza virus, Hepatitis virus, e.g. Hepatitis C virus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Flavivirus, Paramyxovirus, Hantavirus or Filovirus, or

epitopes derived from proteins that are associated with the development of tumours and cancer. After the administration of the vaccine into the body of the recipient, the epitopes are expressed and are presented to the immune system and a specific immune response against these epitopes may be induced. The recipient is, thus, immunized against the protein containing the epitope.

The term “heterologous nucleic acid sequence”, as used herein, refers to a nucleic acid sequence that is not normally found intimately associated with the virus, particularly with the MVA related virus according to the present invention, in nature. A MVA related virus comprising a heterologous nucleic acid sequence may also be designated as recombinant MVA related virus. The heterologous nucleic acid sequence is preferably selected from a sequence coding for (i) an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen, (ii) a diagnostic compound, and (iii) a therapeutic compound.

The term “epitope (also known as antigenic determinant)”, as used herein, refers to the part of an antigen that is recognized by the immune system, specifically by antibodies, B cells, or T cells.

The term “protect”, as used herein, means to prevent or treat, or both, as appropriate, the development or continuance of a disease (e.g. pox) in a recipient, e.g. human.

The term “protective immunity”, as used herein, comprises a humoral (antibody) immunity or cellular immunity, or both, effective to, e.g. eliminate or reduce the load of a pathogen (e.g. virus, such as pox virus) or infected cell or produce any other measurable alleviation of the infection in an immunized (vaccinated) subject.

The term “excipient”, as used herein, is intended to indicate all substances in a pharmaceutical composition which are not active ingredients such as binders, lubricants, thickeners, surface active agents, preservatives, emulsifiers, buffers, flavoring agents, or colorants.

The term “diluent”, as used herein, relates to a diluting and/or thinning agent. Moreover, the term “diluent” includes a solution, suspension (e.g. liquid or solid suspension) and/or media.

The term “carrier”, as used herein, relates to one or more compatible solid or liquid fillers, which are suitable for an administration, e.g. to a human. The term “carrier” relates to a natural or synthetic organic or inorganic component which is combined with an active component in order to facilitate the application of the active component. Preferably, carrier components are sterile liquids such as water or oils, including those which are derived from mineral oil, animals, or plants, such as peanut oil, soy bean oil, sesame oil, sunflower oil, etc. Salt solutions and aqueous dextrose and glycerin solutions may also be used as aqueous carrier compounds.

Pharmaceutically acceptable carriers or diluents for therapeutic use are well known in the pharmaceutical art, and are described, for example, in Remington's Pharmaceutical Sciences, Mack Publishing Co. (A. R. Gennaro edit. 1985). Examples of suitable carriers include, for example, magnesium carbonate, magnesium stearate, talc, sugar, lactose, pectin, dextrin, starch, gelatin, tragacanth, methylcellulose, sodium carboxymethylcellulose, a low melting wax, cocoa butter, and the like. Examples of suitable diluents include ethanol, glycerol, and water.

Pharmaceutical carriers, diluents, and/or excipients can be selected with regard to the intended route of administration and standard pharmaceutical practice. The pharmaceutical compositions of the present invention may comprise as, or in addition to, the carrier(s), excipient(s) or diluent(s) any suitable binder(s), lubricant(s), suspending agent(s), coating agent(s), and/or solubilising agent(s). Examples of suitable binders include starch, gelatin, natural sugars such as glucose, anhydrous lactose, free-flow lactose, beta-lactose, corn sweeteners, natural and synthetic gums, such as acacia, tragacanth or sodium alginate, carboxymethyl cellulose, and polyethylene glycol. Examples of suitable lubricants include sodium oleate, sodium stearate, magnesium stearate, sodium benzoate, sodium acetate, sodium chloride, and the like. Preservatives, stabilizers, dyes, and even flavoring agents may be provided in the pharmaceutical composition. Examples of preservatives include sodium benzoate, sorbic acid, and esters of p-hydroxybenzoic acid. Antioxidants and suspending agents may be also used.

The terms "primary cell" or "primary cell culture", as used herein, refer to a cell or culture which usually cannot be passaged beyond 50 population doublings before suffering senescence, culture arrest, or cell death. The terms a "secondary cell" or "secondary cell culture", as used herein, refer to a cell or culture which is directly derived from a primary cell or primary cell culture. The population doubling limit still applies. The terms an "immortalized cell" or "immortalized cell culture", as used herein, refer to a cell or culture and its progeny that is not limited by the number of potential cell doublings. A cell culture may consist of primary cells, secondary cells, or immortalized cells (i.e. cells of a cell line). In preferred embodiments of the present invention, the cells are from a CR or CR.pIX cell line. The CR and CR.pIX cell lines are derived from immortalized Muscovy duck retina cells (Jordan, et al. 2009 in Vaccine 27, 748-756), designed for vaccine production. The CR.pIX cell line has further stably integrated into its genome a gene encoding the Adenovirus pIX protein and expresses said gene. In other preferred embodiments of the present invention, the cells are chicken embryo fibroblast (CEF) cells. Said cells are primary cells.

The term "isolated cell", as used herein, refers to a cell that is removed from its native or culturing environment. Thus, an isolated cell may be free of some or all native or culture

components, i.e. components of the organism in which the cell naturally occurs (e.g. organ particularly tissue) or in which it is cultured (e.g. culture medium or culture-related impurities such as culture remnants). The cell may be infected with a MVA related virus according to the first aspect or transfected with a genome according the second aspect. Techniques how to infect or transfect a cell are known to the skilled person.

The terms “non-adherent cell” and “suspension cell” are used interchangeable herein. In the context of the present invention, the terms “non-adherent cell” and “suspension cell” refer to a cell that is able to survive in a suspension culture without being attached to a surface (e.g. tissue culture plastic carrier or micro-carrier). Said cell may be a cell which can naturally live in suspension without being attached to a surface. Said cell may also be a cell which has been modified or adapted to be able to survive in a suspension culture without being attached to a surface (e.g. tissue culture plastic carrier or micro-carrier). Most cells are in their original, non-modified or non-adapted form, adherent cells. A non-adherent cell can usually be grown to a higher density than adherent conditions would allow. It is, thus, more suited for culturing in an industrial scale, e.g. in a bioreactor setting or in an agitated culture. Cells have usually to be adapted to a non-adherent cell culture. Because the original cells would undergo apoptosis under serum-free conditions and/or in the absence of a suitable surface, this adaptation is a prolonged process requiring passaging with diminishing amounts of serum (e.g. dilution rows from 10% to 0% Fetal Calve Serum (FCS)), thereby selecting an irreversibly modified cell population. Adapted non-adherent cells are known in the art. The skilled person is aware of protocols for transferring a cell from an adherent state into a non-adherent state (see, for example, Appl Microbiol Biotechnol. 2008 Mar;78(3):391-9. Epub 2008 Jan 9).

In contrast thereto, the term “adherent cell”, as used herein, refers to a cell which requires a surface, such as tissue culture plastic carrier or micro-carrier. Said surface may be coated with extracellular matrix components to increase adhesion properties and provide other signals needed for growth and differentiation. Said cells require periodic passaging, but allow easy visual inspection under inverted microscope. Said cells have to be dissociated enzymatically (e.g. with trypsin). In addition, the growth of adherent cells is limited by surface area, which may limit product yields.

The term “serum-free conditions”, as used herein, refers to conditions, wherein cells grow in medium which is devoid of animal serum. Instead, cells grow in medium devoid of any animal derived components and preferably in a medium without any complex mixtures of biologic components, a so called “chemically defined medium”.

The term “cell proliferation medium”, as used herein, refers to a medium that supports cell division for at least 10 cell doublings so that, for example, a seed of 8×10^5 cells by passage in that medium can be brought to approximately 4×10^8 cells, e.g. sufficient for a 200 Litre bioreactor. The term “proliferating cells”, as used herein, refers to dividing cells, i.e. cells that can divide for another at least 10 cell doublings with a doubling rate of at least once in 48 hours or less.

The term “virus production medium”, as used herein, refers to a medium that enhances production of a virus in a culture of proliferating cells. With the addition of a virus production medium, cell aggregates are induced and cell proliferation in the culture decreases by a factor of at least 2 or is stopped completely. It is preferred that the virus production medium comprises CaCl_2 , MgSO_4 and/or NaCl . Preferably, the CaCl_2 content is in a range of between 150 and 250 mg/l, more preferably between 180 and 250 mg/l, and most preferably between 200 and 220 mg/l, e.g. 150, 155, 160, 165, 170, 175, 180, 185, 190, 195, 200, 205, 210, 215, 220, 225, 230, 235, 240, 245, or 250 mg/l, the MgSO_4 content is in a range of between 50 and 150 mg/l, more preferably between 70 and 150 mg/l, and most preferably between 90 and 120 mg/l, e.g. 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85, 90, 95, 100, 105, 110, 115, 120, 125, 130, 135, 140, 145, or 150 mg/l, and/or the NaCl content is in a range of between 5000 and 7500 mg/l, more preferably between 6000 and 7000 mg/l, and most preferably between 6500 and 6800 mg/l, e.g. 5000, 5500, 6000, 6500, 7000, or 7500 mg/l. For example, the virus production medium may include a salt content of 205 mg/l CaCl_2 , 100 mg/l MgSO_4 and/or 6500 mg/l NaCl .

The term “productive replication”, as used herein, means that more virus can be recovered at least once from an infected culture than virus that has been added to infect the culture. The virus may cause a cytopathic effect and replicates to levels that eventually result in massive cell death in the infected culture. As opposed to productive replication, reproductive replication can occur at very low levels without accompanying cytopathic effect and may eventually lead to loss of virus in a surviving culture.

The term “Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) virus”, as used herein, refers to a highly attenuated strain of vaccinia derived from the Ankara strain and developed for use as a vaccine and vaccine adjuvant. The original MVA virus was isolated from the wild-type Ankara strain by successive passage through chicken embryonic cells. Treated thus, it lost about 15% of the genome of wild-type vaccinia including its ability to replicate efficiently in primate (including human) cells.

The MVA virus contains a single copy of a double-stranded DNA genome, approximately 178 kb in length. The viral genomic DNA comprises a core region flanked by viral telomeres. In

particular, the viral telomeres are located at the left and right site of the viral genomic DNA. Said telomeres further comprise Inverted Terminal Repeats (ITRs). The virus commonly accepted to be a MVA virus contains six characteristic deletion sites, called deletion sites I, II, III, IV, V, and VI. The numerals increase with the size of the deletion, not with position in the genome. The deletion site I is located in the left viral telomere, the deletion sites II, III, V, and VI are located in the core region. The deletion site IV is located in the right telomere. Only those viruses that contain all six deletion sites are considered *bona fides* MVA. The virus commonly accepted to be a MVA virus further comprises an (one) open reading frame for the (functional) gene products selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, D7L, A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R. The method to describe such authentic/genuine MVAs has been published by Kremer et al. ((Kremer et al., 2012)). The MVA virus may have a sequence according to accession number U94848 (version U94848.1 and GI: 2772662).

The term “Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus”, as used herein, refers to a virus which structurally differs from the (above described or wild-type) MVA virus. It can, thus, not be considered to constitute a typical MVA virus anymore. It is rather a virus related to MVA. Said MVA related virus may, for example, not comprise a specific deletion site anymore, e.g. deletion site I, and/or comprise a specific deletion site in duplicate, e.g. deletion site IV. Alternatively or additionally, said MVA related virus may, for example, not comprise the open reading frame for a specific gene product anymore, e.g. the gene product C11, and/or comprise the open reading frame for a specific gene product in duplicate, e.g. gene product B1. The MVA related virus of the present invention is specifically described in the first aspect. The MVA related virus may have/comprise a sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (MVA-CR19.GFP).

The term “isolated MVA related virus”, as used herein, refers to a virus that is removed from its native or culturing environment. Thus, an isolated MVA related virus may be free of some or all cellular components, i.e. components of the cells in which the virus naturally occurs or in which it is cultured (e.g. cytoplasmic or membrane components). It may also be free of some or all culturing components (e.g. culture medium or culture-related impurities such as culture-remnants).

The term “purified MVA related virus”, as used herein, refers to a virus that has been isolated under conditions that reduce or eliminate the presence of unrelated materials, i.e. contaminants, including native materials, e.g. cellular debris, cellular remnants, cellular proteins, cellular DNA molecules, and/or cellular RNA molecules, from which the virus is

obtained. The purified MVA related virus is preferably substantially free of cell and/or culture components. As used herein, the term “substantially free” is used operationally, in the context of analytical testing of the material. A purified MVA related virus which is substantially free of contaminants is preferably at least 50% pure, more preferably at least 90% pure, and even more preferably at least 99% or 100% pure. Purity can be evaluated by chromatography, gel electrophoresis, immunoassay, composition analysis, biological assay, and other methods known in the art.

The term “viral telomeres”, as used herein, refers to sequences at the left and right site of the viral genomic DNA, e.g. of the MVA virus or MVA related virus. The sequence at the left site of the viral genomic DNA is designated as left viral telomere and the sequence at the right site of the viral genomic DNA is designated as right viral telomere. The viral telomeres contain inverted terminal repeats (ITRs) that comprise or consist of regions of complementarity between the left and right sides of the genomic DNA. The viral telomeres also comprise functional and disrupted (not functional) genes that may be duplicated at both ends of the genomic DNA or that may be unique for the left or right side of the genomic DNA. Thus, viral telomeres extend beyond the mere region of the ITRs and can comprise 30 000 bp (30 kbp) or more.

The term “Inverted Terminal Repeats (ITRs)”, as used herein, refers to sequences comprising or consisting of regions of complementarity between the left and right sides of the viral genomic DNA, e.g. of the MVA virus or MVA related virus. The ITR at the left side of the genomic DNA is designated as “left ITR” and the ITR at the right side of the genomic DNA is designated as “right ITR”. The ITRs are part of the viral telomeres, in particular the left ITR is comprised in the left viral telomere and the right ITR is comprised in the right viral telomere. ITRs can form hairpin structures and appear to provide the origin for replication of the viral genomic DNA that presumably occurs by strand displacement of a leading strand and Okazaki-fragments in the lagging strand.

The term “terminus”, as used herein, refers to the left and right end of the viral genomic DNA, e.g. of the MVA virus or MVA related virus.

The term “core region”, as used herein, refers to a region of the viral genomic DNA, e.g. of the MVA virus or MVA related virus, comprising deletion sites V and III. In particular, the term “core region”, as used herein, refers to a region extending from deletion site V to deletion site III, wherein deletion sites V and III are included.

An “amino acid replacement” may also be designated herein as an “amino acid substitution”. The term “amino acid insertion”, as used herein, refers to an amino acid

modification which takes place within the amino acid sequence of the L3L, A3L, A34R, and/or A9L gene product(s), while the term “amino acid addition”, as used herein, refers to an amino acid modification which takes place at the N- or C-terminus of the L3L, A3L, A34R, and/or A9L gene product(s).

In the context of the present invention, amino acid residues in two or more gene products are said to “correspond” to each other if the residues occupy an analogous position in the gene product structures. As is well known in the art, analogous positions in two or more gene products can be determined by aligning the gene product sequences based on amino acid sequence or structural similarities. Such alignment tools are well known to the person skilled in the art and can be, for example, obtained on the World Wide Web, e.g., ClustalW (www.ebi.ac.uk/clustalw) or Align (<http://www.ebi.ac.uk/emboss/align/index.html>) using standard settings, preferably for Align EMBOSS::needle, Matrix: Blosom62, Gap Open 10.0, Gap Extend 0.5. Those skilled in the art understand that it may be necessary to introduce gaps in either sequence to produce a satisfactory alignment. Amino acid residues in two or more gene products are said to “correspond” if the residues are aligned in the best sequence alignment. The “best sequence alignment” between two gene products is defined as the alignment that produces the largest number of aligned identical residues. The “region of best sequence alignment” ends and, thus, determines the metes and bounds of the length of the comparison sequence for the purpose of the determination of the similarity score, if the sequence similarity, preferably identity, between two aligned sequences drops to less than 30%, preferably less than 20%, more preferably less than 10% over a length of 10, 20 or 30 amino acids. The same applies to nucleic acid sequence. That means that nucleic acid sequences are said to “correspond” to each other in the context of the present invention if the residues occupy an analogous position in the nucleic acid structures.

Here, for the first time, the present inventors isolated and characterized a novel MVA related virus. The present inventors found that the novel MVA related virus structurally differs from the (wild-type) MVA virus. It has a hitherto undescribed genotype. The structural differences result in a virus having advantageous properties over the (wild-type) MVA virus. In particular, the novel MVA related virus releases a higher number of infectious units into the supernatant of infected cultures compared to those infected with the (wild-type) MVA virus. Further, the novel MVA related virus replicates to very high titers compared to the (wild-type) MVA virus. Furthermore, the novel MVA related virus induces fewer syncytia in adherent cultures.

The above described beneficial properties of the novel MVA related virus improve its industrial production. Particularly, they allow the production of the novel MVA related virus in high yields and, thus, also the production of heterologous proteins, e.g. antigens, which may be comprised therein. In addition, the novel MVA related virus can be isolated directly from the cell-free supernatant which facilitates purification and, thus, the logistic and the operation of bioreactors producing said MVA related virus. This, in turn, reduces the costs of its production.

Accordingly, the first aspect of the present invention relates to a Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus comprising (which differs from (wild-type) MVA by) one or more, e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8, of the following features:

- (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
- (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
- (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
- (iv) no deletion site I,
- (v) two deletion sites IV,
- (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
- (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and/or
- (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product.

The skilled person will understand that the nucleic acid sequences mentioned above are part of/comprised in the viral genomic DNA of the MVA related virus or are part of/comprised in the genome of the MVA related virus.

The MVA related virus may comprise the feature according to (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), or (viii). The MVA related virus may also comprise the features according to (ii) and (iii); (ii), (iii), and (viii); (ii) and (iv); (ii), (iv), and (vi); (ii), (iv), and (viii); (ii), (iv), (vi), and (viii); (iii) and (v); (iii), (v), and (vii); (iii), (v), and (viii); (iii), (v), (vii), and (viii); (iv) and (v); (iv), (v), and (viii); (vi) and (vii); or (vi), (vii), and (viii).

In one embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V (feature (i)).

Particularly, the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III comprises deletion site IV and/or an open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R.

Particularly, the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V comprises deletion site I and/or at least one open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L.

More particularly, the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III comprises deletion site IV and/or an open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V comprises deletion site I and/or at least one open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L.

Thus, in one preferred embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises no deletion site I, two deletion sites IV, no open frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L, and/or two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R.

Preferably, the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a MVA region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence of MVA that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V.

The MVA related virus may also comprise a nucleic acid sequence that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to the unique sequence next to the right ITR but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to the unique sequence next to the left ITR but excludes deletion site V. In this respect, the unique sequence is a sequence that does not comprise complementary regions. It may be untranscribed and untranslated, may contain

pseudogenes (previously coding regions that have lost their function), or may contain genes that are being expressed.

Alternatively, the MVA related virus may comprise a nucleic acid sequence that starts with and includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that starts with and includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (iii) and extends but excludes deletion site V.

In one embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR (feature (ii)).

Particularly, the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR further comprises an open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R.

Thus, in one preferred embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises two deletion sites IV, two right ITRs and two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R.

In one embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR (feature (iii)).

Particularly, the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR further comprises an open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L.

Thus, in one preferred embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises no deletion site I, no left ITR, and no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L.

Preferably

- (i) the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 162221 to 190549 or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95% or 100%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said nucleic acid sequence,
- (ii) the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 1 to 31261 or a nucleotide

- position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95% or 100%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said nucleic acid sequence, and/or
- (iii) the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 179272 to 190549 or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95% or 100%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said nucleic acid sequence.

It is preferred that the above variants are functionally active variants. This means that the variation(s) does/do not negatively affect the beneficial properties of the MVA related virus according to the present invention compared to (wild-type) MVA viruses such as an increased infectious activity and/or a greater number of infectious units in the extracellular space during culturing. Said beneficial properties allow, for example, the production of the MVA related virus according to the present invention in high yields. Experiments to test whether said beneficial properties are still present in the above variants are described in the experimental section.

Said variants may also comprise nucleic acid changes due to the degeneracy of the genetic code which code for the same or a functionally equivalent amino acid as the nucleic acid sequence mentioned above.

In one embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product (feature (viii)). In one alternative embodiment, the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and/or an A34R gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product(s). It should be noted that the nucleic acid sequence encoding the above gene product(s) comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid sequence modification(s)) of said gene product(s). Said amino acid sequence modification(s) may be (an) amino acid deletion(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid deletion(s)), amino acid insertion(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid insertion(s)), amino acid addition(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid addition(s)) and/or amino acid replacement(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid replacements(s)).

Preferably, the nucleic acid sequence further encodes an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene product. Said amino acid sequence modification(s) may be (an) amino acid deletion(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid deletion(s)), amino acid insertion(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid insertion(s)), amino acid addition(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid addition(s)) and/or amino acid replacement(s) (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid replacements(s)). The present inventors surprisingly found that the above mutation(s) further positively affected the virus yield.

More preferably,

- (i) the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said A3L gene product and said A9L gene product),
- (ii) the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said A34R gene product and said A9L gene product),
- (iii) the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product, an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said A3L gene product, said A34R gene product and said A9L gene product),
- (iv) the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product and an A3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said L3L gene product and said A3L gene product),
- (v) the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product and an A34R gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence

modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said 3L3 gene product and said A34R gene product), or

- (vi) the MVA related virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, an A3L gene product, an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said L3L gene product, said A3L gene product, said A34R gene product and said A9L gene product).

It is preferred that

- (i) the amino acid sequence modification is in a region spanning amino acid positions 634 to 644 of the A3L gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 1, or amino acid positions corresponding thereto,
- (ii) the amino acid sequence modification is in a region spanning amino acid positions 81 to 91 of the A34R gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 2, or amino acid positions corresponding thereto,
- (iii) the amino acid sequence modification is in a region spanning amino acid positions 70 to 80 of the A9L gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 3, or amino acid positions corresponding thereto, and/or
- (iv) the amino acid sequence modification is in a region spanning amino acid positions 105 to 115 of the L3L gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 13, or amino acid positions corresponding thereto.

Thus, the amino acid sequence modification (e.g. amino acid deletion or amino acid replacement) may be (i) at amino acid position 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, or 644 of the A3L gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 1, or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto, (ii) at amino acid position 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, or 91 of the A34R gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 2, or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto, (iii) at amino acid position 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, or 80 of the A9L gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 3, or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto, and/or (iv) at amino acid position 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, or 115 of the L3L gene product according to SEQ ID NO: 13, or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto.

It is further preferred that

- (i) the amino acid sequence modification is at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto,

- (ii) the amino acid sequence modification is at amino acid position 638 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto,
- (iii) the amino acid sequence modification is at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto,
- (iv) the amino acid sequence modification is at amino acid position 75 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto,
- (v) the amino acid sequence modification is at amino acid position 74 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto, and/or
- (vi) the amino acid sequence modification is at amino acid position 110 of the L3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto.

It is more preferred that the amino acid sequence modification is an amino acid deletion or amino acid replacement, wherein

- (i) H at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto is deleted or replaced by a hydrophobic amino acid, preferably A, V, I, L, M, F, Y or W, a negative amino acid, preferably D or E, or a polar uncharged amino acid, preferably S, T, N or Q,
- (ii) R at amino acid position 638 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto is deleted or replaced by a hydrophobic amino acid, preferably A, V, I, L, M, F, Y or W, a negative amino acid, preferably D or E, or a polar uncharged amino acid, preferably S, T, N or Q,
- (iii) D at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto is deleted or replaced by a hydrophobic amino acid, preferably A, V, I, L, M, F, Y or W, a positive amino acid, preferably R, H or K, or a polar uncharged amino acid, preferably S, T, N or Q,
- (iv) K at amino acid position 75 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto which is deleted or replaced by a hydrophobic amino acid, preferably A, V, I, L, M, F, Y or W, a negative amino acid, preferably D or E, or a polar uncharged amino acid, preferably S, T, N or Q,
- (v) K at amino acid position 74 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto which is deleted or replaced by a hydrophobic amino acid, preferably A, V, I, L, M, F, Y or W, a negative amino acid, preferably D or E, or a polar uncharged amino acid, preferably S, T, N or Q, and/or
- (vi) V at amino acid position 110 of the L3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto which is deleted or replaced by a hydrophobic amino acid,

preferably A, V, I, L, M, F, Y or W, a negative amino acid, preferably D or E, or a polar uncharged amino acid, preferably S, T, N or Q.

It is even more preferred that the amino acid replacement is an amino acid replacement of

- (i) H at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y (H639Y A3L gene product mutant),
- (ii) R at amino acid position 638 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y (R638Y A3L gene product mutant),
- (iii) D at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y (D86Y A34R gene product mutant),
- (iv) K at amino acid position 75 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by E (K75E A9L gene product mutant),
- (v) K at amino acid position 74 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by E (K74E A9L gene product mutant), and/or
- (vi) V at amino acid position 110 of the L3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by A (V110A L3L gene product mutant).

It is further even more preferred that the amino acid replacement is an amino acid replacement of

- (i) H at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y and D at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y (H639Y A3L/D86Y A34R gene product mutant),
- (ii) H at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y and K at amino acid position 75 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by E (H639Y A3L/K75E A9L gene product mutant),
- (iii) D at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y and K at amino acid position 75 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by E (D86Y A34R/K75E A9L gene product mutant),
- (iv) H at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y, D at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y, and K at amino acid position 75

of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by E (H639Y A3L/D86Y A34R/K75E A9L gene product mutant), and/or

- (v) H at amino acid position 639 of the A3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y, D at amino acid position 86 of the A34R gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by Y, K at amino acid position 75 of the A9L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by E, and V at amino acid position 110 of the L3L gene product or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto by A (H639Y A3L/D86Y A34R/K75E A9L/V110A L3L gene product mutant).

It is most preferred that

- (i) the A3L gene product with the H639Y mutation has an amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 4 or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, preferably at least 90%, more preferably at least 95%, and most preferably at least 99% or 100%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said amino acid sequence, wherein said variant (still) comprises the amino acid Y at amino acid position 639 or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto,
- (ii) the A34R gene product with the D86Y mutation has an amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 5 or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, preferably at least 90%, more preferably at least 95%, and most preferably at least 99% or 100%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said amino acid sequence, wherein said variant (still) comprises the amino acid Y at amino acid position 86 or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto,
- (iii) the A9L gene product with the K75E mutation has an amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 6 or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, preferably at least 90%, more preferably at least 95%, and most preferably at least 99%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said amino acid sequence, wherein said variant (still) comprises the amino acid E at amino acid position 75 or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto, and/or
- (iv) the L3L gene product with the V110A mutation has an amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 14 or is a variant thereof which is at least 85%, preferably at least 90%, more preferably at least 95%, and most preferably at least 99% or 100%, e.g. at least 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99% or 100%, identical to said amino acid sequence, wherein said variant comprises the amino acid A at amino acid position 110 or at an amino acid position corresponding thereto.

It is particularly preferred that the sequence identity is (i) at least 85%, 90%, 95%, or 99% over a continuous stretch of at least 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 120, 150, 180, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, or more amino acids of the respective reference amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 4, (ii) at least 85%, 90%, 95%, or 99% over a continuous stretch of at least 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, or more amino acids of the respective reference amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 5, (iii) at least 85%, 90%, 95%, or 99% over a continuous stretch of at least 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, or more amino acids of the respective reference amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 6, or (iv) at least 85%, 90%, 95%, or 99% over a continuous stretch of at least 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, or more amino acids of the respective reference amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 14. It is further particularly preferred that the sequence identity is at least 85% over the whole length, is at least 90% over the whole length, is at least 95% over the whole length, or is at least 99% over the whole length of the respective reference amino acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 4, SEQ ID NO: 5, SEQ ID NO: 6, or SEQ ID NO: 14.

Preferably, the above variants are functionally active variants. This means that the (additional) variation(s) in the amino acid sequence does/do not negatively affect the beneficial properties of the MVA related virus according to the present invention compared to known (wild-type) MVA viruses such as an increased infectious activity and/or a greater number of infectious units in the extracellular space during culturing. Said beneficial properties allow, for example, the production of the MVA related virus according to the present invention in high yields. Experiments to test that said beneficial properties are still present in the above variants are described in the experimental section.

The above mentioned A3L gene product (also designated as P4b protein) of MVA is one of three major core proteins and is processed by the I7L-encoded viral protease during the maturation of the spherical and non-infectious immature virion (IV) to the intracellular mature virion (IMV). The A3L gene product of MVA contributes to virion morphogenesis at a very early step to allow correct condensation and membrane rearrangements in the transition towards the infectious IMV. Further, the above mentioned A34R gene product of MVA destabilizes the outer membrane of the extracellular enveloped virus (EEV) and is, thus, extremely important for infectious activity in the extracellular space and for virus spread. The EEV has evolved as a vehicle to allow virus to spread to distant sites. The additional membrane of the EEV is not equipped to mediate fusion with the target cell and must be disrupted to release the IMV, the actual virus infectious unit. In addition, the A34R gene product of MVA modulates the rate at which the cell-associated enveloped virus (CEV) detaches from the producing cell.

Furthermore, the A9L gene product of MVA is, like the A3L gene product, involved in the early steps of MVA maturation. It is a factor important for correct condensation of the core of the IMV. In addition, the L3L gene product of MVA is essential for very early steps immediately following entry of the virus into the host cell. L3L is a loosely packaged component of the virus particles and appears to be responsible for events that allow nascent mRNAs to leave the viral core and to appear in the cytoplasm of the newly infected host cell.

Preferably, the MVA related virus is an isolated MVA related virus. The isolated MVA virus may further be purified. Thus, more preferably, the MVA related virus is a purified MVA related virus.

It is preferred that the MVA related virus further comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence. The expression of the heterologous nucleic acid sequence may be under the transcriptional control of a MVA virus promoter. The heterologous nucleic acid sequence is inserted into the nucleic acid sequence of the MVA related virus. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the insertion of the heterologous nucleic acid sequence is into a non-essential region of the MVA related virus nucleic acid sequence/genome. In a more preferred embodiment of the present invention, the heterologous nucleic acid sequence is inserted at a naturally occurring deletion site (e.g. deletion site III) of the viral genomic DNA/genome. Methods how to insert heterologous nucleic acid sequences into the MVA related virus genome are known to a skilled person.

It is more preferred that the heterologous nucleic acid sequence is selected from a sequence coding for

- (i) an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen,
- (ii) a diagnostic compound, and
- (iii) a therapeutic compound.

The antigen or epitope may be useful as a vaccine to induce an immune response against said antigen or epitope. Examples of such antigens which are heterologous to said virus cover, e.g. proteins of other viruses such as the Influenza virus, Hepatitis virus, e.g. Hepatitis C virus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Flavivirus, Paramyxovirus, Hantavirus or Filovirus, or proteins that are associated with the development of tumours and cancer such as Her2/neu or MUC-1. Examples of such epitopes which are heterologous to said virus cover, e.g. epitopes from proteins derived from other viruses such as the Influenza virus, Hepatitis virus, e.g. Hepatitis C virus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Flavivirus, Paramyxovirus, Hantavirus or Filovirus, or epitopes derived from proteins that are associated with the development of tumours and cancer such as extracellular peptides of Her2/neu or MUC-1.

The antigen may also be a vaccine antigen, e.g. a vaccine antigen derived from a viral, fungal, eukaryotic or bacterial pathogen, or derived from a tumor.

The therapeutic compound may be any compound with a therapeutic effect. For example, the therapeutic compound can be a compound that affects or participates in tissue growth, cell growth, cell differentiation, a compound that is able to invoke a biological action such as an immune response, or a compound that can play any other role in one or more biological processes. Particularly, said compound may be an anti-microbial compound, an anti-viral compound, an anti-fungal compound, an immunosuppressive compound, a growth factor, an enzyme, an anti-inflammatory compound, or an anti-allergic compound. The therapeutic compound may also be an antisense nucleic acid.

The diagnostic compound may be any compound with a diagnostic effect. For example, the diagnostic compound can be a marker/reporter protein such as an antibody, GFP, EGFP, β -galactosidase, luciferase or an antibiotic resistance conferring protein such as bla (beta-lactamase) against ampicillin or npt (neomycin phosphotransferase) against neomycin or G418. Said marker/reporter protein may be used to identify or isolate the virus, e.g. by using hybridization technology, fluorescence microscopy, or ELISA assays. In addition, the antibiotic resistance conferring protein comprised in the virus confers resistance against antibiotic selection to the infected cell.

As already mentioned above, the MVA related virus is a highly attenuated virus.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the MVA related virus is capable of productive replication in avian cells. Said avian cells are preferably chicken, quail, goose, or duck cells (e.g. duck somite or duck retina cells). Said avian cells (e.g. chicken, quail, goose, or duck cells such as duck somite or duck retina cells) may be primary cells (or cells from a primary cell culture), secondary cells (or cells from a secondary cell culture), or immortalized cells (or cells from a cell line).

In another embodiment of the present invention, the MVA related virus is not capable of productive replication in mammalian cells, wherein said mammalian cells are not Baby Hamster Kidney (BHK) cells, Fruit bat R05T cells, Fruit bat R05R cells, or Fruit bat R06E cells. R05T, R05R, and R06E cells are cells obtained by immortalization of primary cells from the *Egyptian roussette*. These are one of the very few mammalian cell lines permissive for MVA (Jordan et al. 2009 in Virus Res 145, 54-62). In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the MVA virus is not capable of productive replication in primate cells, more preferably human cells.

The MVA virus according to the present invention may comprise a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product having an amino acid sequence prior to amino acid modification according to SEQ ID NO: 13, an A3L gene product having an amino acid sequence prior to amino acid modification according to SEQ ID NO: 1, and/or an A34R gene product having an amino acid sequence prior to amino acid modification according to SEQ ID NO: 2. Said nucleic acid sequence may further encode an A9L gene product having an amino acid sequence prior to amino acid modification according to SEQ ID NO: 3.

The V110A L3L gene product mutant has a sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 14, the H639Y A3L gene product mutant has a sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 4, the D86Y A34R gene product mutant has a sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 5, and/or the K75E A9L gene product mutant has a sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 6.

Further, the respective L3L gene may have a nucleic acid sequence prior to mutation according to SEQ ID NO: 15, the A3L gene may have a nucleic acid sequence prior to mutation according to SEQ ID NO: 7, the respective A34R gene may have a nucleic acid sequence prior to mutation according to SEQ ID NO: 8, and/or the respective A9L gene may have a nucleic acid sequence prior to mutation according to SEQ ID NO: 9.

Furthermore, the mutated L3L gene may have a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 16, the mutated A3L gene may have a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 10, the mutated A34R gene may have a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 11, and/or the mutated A9L gene may have a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 12.

In addition, the MVA virus from which the MVA related virus (structurally) differs may comprise a nucleic acid sequence (prior to mutation/rearrangement) according to accession number AY603355 (version AY603355.1 and GI: 47088326).

In a second aspect, the present invention relates to a genome of the MVA related virus according to the first aspect.

In a third aspect, the present invention relates to a cell comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect. The cell comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect may also be designated as a host cell.

Said cell may be for culturing the MVA related virus according to the first aspect. Said cell may be any cell in which the MVA related virus according to the first aspect is capable to replicate. It is preferred that said cell is not a primate cell, particularly a human cell. It is further preferred that said cell is an avian cell. Said avian cell is preferably a chicken, quail, goose, or duck cell (e.g. a duck somite or duck retina cell). Said avian cell (e.g. chicken, quail, goose, or

duck cell such as duck somite or duck retina cell) may be a primary cell (or a cell from a primary cell culture), a secondary cell (or a cell from a secondary cell culture), or an immortalized cell (or a cell from a cell line). In preferred embodiments of the present invention, the cell is from a CR or CR.pIX cell line. The CR and CR.pIX cell lines are derived from immortalized Muscovy duck retina cells (Jordan, et al. 2009 in Vaccine 27, 748-756), designed for vaccine production. The CR.pIX cell line has further stably integrated into its genome a gene encoding the Adenovirus pIX protein and expresses said gene. In other preferred embodiments of the invention, the cells are chicken embryo fibroblast (CEF) cells. Said cells are primary cells. Preferably, the cell is an isolated cell.

Said cell may be infected with the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or transfected with the genome according to the second aspect. Techniques how to infect or transfect a cell are known to the skilled person.

It is further preferred that the cell is a non-adherent/suspension cell. Generally, cells can be grown in suspension or adherent cultures. Some cells naturally live in suspension, without being attached to a surface, such as cells that exist in the bloodstream (e.g. hematopoietic cells). Adherent cells (e.g. primary cells) require a surface, such as tissue culture plastic carrier or micro-carrier, which may be coated with extracellular matrix components to increase adhesion properties and provide other signals needed for growth and differentiation.

In preferred embodiments of the present invention, the non-adherent/suspension cell grows under serum-free conditions.

In a fourth aspect, the present invention relates to a method for culturing a MVA related virus according to the first aspect comprising the steps of:

- (i) providing a cell according to the third aspect,
- (ii) culturing the cell, and
- (iii) isolating the MVA related virus.

The cell according to the third aspect comprises the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect.

The cell may be cultured in step (ii) in cell proliferation medium and subsequently in virus production medium, or the cell may be (solely) cultured in step (ii) in cell proliferation medium. Preferably, the cell is (solely) cultured in step (ii) in cell proliferation medium. The use of a single medium has the advantage that it facilitates the virus culturing process, particularly the industrial virus culturing process. For example, it facilitates the logistic and the operation of bioreactors producing said MVA related virus. It is preferred that the cell proliferation medium is serum-free. A serum-free medium is particularly devoid of animal

serum. Instead, cells grow in medium devoid of any animal derived components and preferably in a medium without any complex mixtures of biologic components, a so called chemically defined medium. It is further preferred that the cell proliferation medium has a low protein content and/or a low salt content.

Preferably, the cell is cultured in step (ii) in an agitated culture or in a bioreactor.

In step (iii), the MVA related virus is preferably isolated from the cell-free supernatant and/or cell lysate. The isolation of the MVA related virus in step (iii) may be performed according to standard procedures readily available to the skilled person. Preferably, the MVA related virus is isolated from the cell-free supernatant. This facilitates the virus isolation process, particularly the industrial virus isolation process. This, in turn, reduces the costs of virus production. For example, cell lyses for virus isolation is not required anymore. In this way, the contamination of the virus isolate with cellular material, particularly cellular DNA, can be reduced. As a consequence, the DNA-limit values of the World Health Organisation for virus preparations can easier be obtained.

Various isolation procedures for viruses are known in the art. An isolation procedure which is useful according to the invention does not interfere with the virus to be isolated. For example, extended exposure to impeller shear forces and other factors that occur during isolation should be avoided. It is preferred that the isolation in step (iii) is achieved by separating the virus from the cells via centrifugation, sedimentation and/or filtration. The person skilled in the art is able to easily adapt/adjust the appropriate separation parameters, e.g. the acceleration-force/G-force and/or time using centrifugation for separation, filter size using filtration for separation, and/or sedimentation time using sedimentation for separation, in order to isolate the virus cultured in said cells.

In a fifth aspect, the present invention relates to a method for producing a MVA related virus according to the first aspect comprising the steps of:

- (a) infecting a cell with a MVA virus,
- (b) culturing the cell,
- (c) isolating the MVA virus, and
- (d) repeating steps (a) to (c) with the MVA virus isolated in step (c) until a MVA related virus comprising one or more of the following features:
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,

- (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
- (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
- (iv) no deletion site I,
- (v) two deletion sites IV,
- (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
- (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and/or
- (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product is detected.

Steps (a) to (c) may be repeated until a MVA related virus comprising the feature according to (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii), or (viii) is detected. Steps (a) to (c) may also be repeated until a MVA related virus comprising the features according to (ii) and (iii); (ii), (iii), and (viii); (ii) and (iv); (ii), (iv), and (vi); (ii), (iv), and (viii); (ii), (iv), (vi), and (viii); (iii) and (v); (iii), (v), and (vii); (iii), (v), and (viii); (iii), (v), (vii), and (viii); (iv) and (v); (iv), (v), and (viii); (vi) and (vii); or (vi), (vii), and (viii) is detected.

In one embodiment, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V is detected (feature (i)).

Preferably, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a MVA region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence of MVA that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V is detected.

Steps (a) to (c) may also be repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to the unique sequence next to the right ITR but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to the unique

sequence next to the left ITR but excludes deletion site V is detected. In this respect, the unique sequence is a sequence that does not comprise complementary regions. It may be untranscribed and untranslated, may contain pseudogenes (previously coding regions that have lost their function), or may contain genes that are being expressed.

Alternatively, steps (a) to (c) may be repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence that starts with and includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that starts with and includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (iii) and extends but excludes deletion site V is detected.

In one embodiment, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR is detected (feature (ii)).

In one embodiment, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR is detected (feature (iii)).

In one embodiment, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product, is detected. In one alternative embodiment, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and/or an A34R gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product(s), is detected.

Preferably, steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence further encoding an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product, is detected.

It should be noted that the nucleic acid sequence encoding the above gene products comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid modification (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid sequence modification(s)) of each of said gene products. Said amino acid sequence modification(s) (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid modification(s)) may be (an) amino acid deletion(s) (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid deletion(s)), amino acid insertion(s) (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid insertion(s)), amino acid addition(s) (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid additions(s)) and/or amino acid replacement(s) (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino acid replacement(s)).

Further preferred embodiments are described in the context of the first aspect of the present invention.

More preferably,

- (i) a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said A3L gene product and said A9L gene product), is detected,
- (ii) a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said A34R gene product and said A9L gene product), is detected,
- (iii) a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product, an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said A3L gene product, said A34R gene product and said A9L gene product), is detected,
- (iv) a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product and an A3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said L3L gene product and said A3L gene product), is detected,
- (v) a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product and an A34R gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, or 3 amino acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said L3L gene product and said A34R gene product), is detected, or
- (vi) a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, an A3L gene product, an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 mutation(s)) resulting in an/at least one amino acid sequence modification (e.g. 1, 2, 3, or 4 amino

acid modification(s)) of said gene products (i.e. said 3L3 gene product, said A3L gene product, said A34R gene product and said A9L gene product), is detected.

As to the preferred embodiments of the amino acid modifications, it is referred to the first aspect of the present invention.

The MVA virus in step (a) may comprise a nucleic acid sequence according to accession number U94848 (version U94848.1 and GI: 2772662).

It is preferred that steps (a) to (c) are repeated at least 2 times, preferably at least 7 times, more preferably at least 14 times, most preferably at least 20 times, e.g. at least 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, or 20 times.

It is further preferred that the cell is cultivated in virus production medium. The virus may be cultured in step (b) in virus production medium between 1 to 10 days, e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10 days.

The cell in step (a) may be any cell in which the MVA virus is capable to replicate. It is preferred that said cell is not a primate cell, particularly a human cell. It is further preferred that said cell is an avian cell. Said avian cell is preferably a chicken, quail, goose, or duck cell (e.g. a duck somite or duck retina cell). Said avian cell (e.g. chicken, quail, goose, or duck cell such as duck somite or duck retina cell) may be a primary cell (or a cell from a primary cell culture), a secondary cell (or a cell from a secondary cell culture), or an immortalized cell (or a cell from a cell line). In preferred embodiments of the present invention, the cell is from a CR or CR.pIX cell line. The CR and CR.pIX cell lines are derived from immortalized Muscovy duck retina cells (Jordan, et al. 2009 in Vaccine 27, 748-756). The CR.pIX cell line has further stably integrated into its genome a gene encoding the Adenovirus pIX protein and expresses said gene. In other preferred embodiments of the invention, the cells are chicken embryo fibroblast (CEF) cells. Said cells are primary cells.

In a sixth aspect, the present invention relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s).

As mentioned above, the MVA related virus according to the first aspect is highly host-restricted and, thus, highly attenuated. It is, therefore, ideal to treat a wide range of recipients. Preferably the recipients are primates, more preferably humans.

The pharmaceutical composition contemplated by the present invention may be formulated and/or administered in various ways well known to the skilled person. Preferably, the pharmaceutical composition of the present invention is in liquid form, e.g. in form of a

solution such as an injection solution. Said solution may be injected, e.g. intramuscular or parenteral. The mode of administration, the dose, and the number of administrations of the pharmaceutical composition can be optimized by the skilled person in a known manner.

In a seventh aspect, the present invention relates to a vaccine comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect.

As mentioned above, the MVA related virus according to the first aspect is highly host-restricted and, thus, highly attenuated. It is, therefore, an ideal vaccine to treat a wide range of recipients.

Preferably the recipients are primates, more preferably humans. In this respect, it should be noted that the MVA related virus itself may be the vaccine. It confers protection against pox. However, said virus or said genome may further comprise a heterologous nucleic acid sequence, e.g. a sequence coding for an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen, against which a protective immunity, particularly an additional protective immunity, in the recipient may be elicited. Examples of such antigens cover, e.g. proteins of other viruses such as the Influenza virus, Hepatitis virus, e.g. Hepatitis C virus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Flavivirus, Paramyxovirus, Hantavirus or Filovirus, or proteins that are associated with the development of tumours and cancer such as Her2/neu or MUC-1. Examples of such epitopes cover, e.g. epitopes from proteins derived from other viruses such as the Influenza virus, Hepatitis virus, e.g. Hepatitis C virus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Flavivirus, Paramyxovirus, Hantavirus or Filovirus, or epitopes derived from proteins that are associated with the development of tumours and cancer such as extracellular peptides of Her2/neu or MUC-1. A MVA related virus comprising a heterologous nucleic acid sequence can also be designated as recombinant MVA related virus. After the administration of the vaccine into the body of the recipient, the antigens, particularly epitopes, are expressed and are presented to the immune system and a specific immune response against said antigens, particularly epitopes, may be induced. The recipient is, thus, immunized against said antigens, particularly epitopes.

Preferably, the vaccine comprising the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect is a pox virus, an Influenza virus, a Hepatitis virus, e.g. a Hepatitis C virus, a Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), a Flavivirus, a Paramyxovirus, a Hantavirus, and/or a Filovirus vaccine. It may also be used in vaccination against breast cancer, melanoma, pancreatic cancer or prostate cancer.

The vaccine contemplated by the present invention may be formulated and administered in various ways well known to the skilled person. Preferably, the vaccine of the present invention is in liquid form, e.g. in form of a solution such as an injection solution. Said solution

may be injected, e.g. intramuscular or parenteral. The mode of administration, the dose, and the number of administrations of the vaccine can be optimized by the skilled person in a known manner. For the formulation or preparation of the vaccine, the MVA virus, particularly the recombinant MVA virus, according to the first aspect is converted into a physiologically acceptable form. This can be done based on the experience in the preparation of poxvirus vaccines used for vaccination against pox (as described by (Stickl et al. 1974 in Dtsch Med Wochenschr 99, 2386-2392)). Said vaccine is particularly useful to induce immune responses in immuno-compromised recipients such as primates including humans. Immuno-compromised describes the status of the immune system of a recipient, which shows only incomplete immune responses or has a reduced efficiency in the defence against infectious agents.

In an eighth aspect, the present invention relates to a MVA related virus according to the first aspect or a genome according to the second aspect for use in medicine. Preferably, the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect is for use in vaccination and/or therapy. Particularly, the recipient is challenged with the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or with the genome according to the second aspect to induce a specific immunity. Preferably the recipients are primates, more preferably humans. Said primates such as humans may be immuno-compromised. In this respect, it should be noted that the MVA related virus itself may be the vaccine. It confers protection against pox. However, said virus or said genome may further comprise a heterologous nucleic acid sequence, e.g. a sequence coding for an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen, against which a protective immunity, particularly an additional protective immunity, in the recipient may be elicited. Preferred antigens, particularly epitopes, are described in the first and seventh aspect of the present invention. Preferably, said MVA related virus or genome is for use in vaccination against pox virus, Influenza virus, Hepatitis virus, e.g. Hepatitis C virus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Flavivirus, Paramyxovirus, Hantavirus, Filovirus, tumours and/or cancer such as breast cancer, melanoma, pancreatic cancer or prostate cancer.

Alternatively or additionally, the recipient is challenged with the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or with the genome according to the second aspect to elicit a therapeutic effect. As mentioned above, the heterologous sequence comprised in said virus or genome may code for a therapeutic compound. For example, the therapeutic compound can be a compound that affects or participates in tissue growth, cell growth, cell differentiation, a compound that is able to invoke a biological action such as an immune response, or a compound that can play any other role in one or more biological processes. Particularly, said compound may be an anti-microbial compound, an anti-viral compound, an anti-fungal compound, an

immunosuppressive compound, a growth factor, an enzyme, an anti-inflammatory compound, or an anti-allergic compound. The therapeutic compound may also be an antisense nucleic acid.

The mode of vaccination, the vaccination dose, and the vaccination number can be optimized by the skilled person in a known manner. The vaccine may be formulated and administered in various ways well known to the skilled person. Preferably, the vaccine is administered in liquid form. Preferably, the vaccine is injected, e.g. intramuscular or parenteral. It is preferred that the MVA related virus according to the first aspect or the genome according to the second aspect is administered at a pharmaceutically effective amount to the recipient. An amount of a MVA related virus or genome is effective in a particular route of administration when it elicits an immune response in the recipient.

The invention is summarized as follows:

1. A Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus comprising one or more of the following features:
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
 - (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
 - (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
 - (iv) no deletion site I,
 - (v) two deletion sites IV,
 - (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
 - (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and/or
 - (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product.
2. The MVA related virus of item 1, wherein the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III comprises deletion site IV.
3. The MVA related virus of items 1 or 2, wherein the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III comprises an open reading frame for at least

one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R.

4. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 3, wherein the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V comprises deletion site I.
5. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 4, wherein the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V comprises at least one open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L.
6. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 5, wherein the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR further comprises an open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R.
7. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 6, wherein the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR further comprises an open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L.
8. The MVA related virus of any one items 1 to 7, wherein
 - (i) the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 162221 to 190549 or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 95% identical to said nucleic acid sequence,
 - (ii) the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 1 to 31261 or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 95% identical to said nucleic acid sequence, and/or
 - (iii) the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 179272 to 190549 or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 95% identical to said nucleic acid sequence.

9. The MVA related virus of any one items 1 to 8, wherein said virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and/or an A34R gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product(s).
10. The MVA related virus of item 9, wherein the nucleic acid sequence further encodes an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product.
11. The MVA related virus of item 10, wherein
 - (i) the virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene products, or
 - (ii) the virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene products.
12. The MVA related virus of item 10, wherein the virus comprises a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product, an A34R gene product and an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprise at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene products.
13. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 12, wherein the virus further comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence.
14. The MVA related virus of item 13, wherein the heterologous nucleic acid sequence is selected from a sequence coding for
 - (i) an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen,
 - (i) a diagnostic compound, and
 - (iii) a therapeutic compound.
15. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 14, wherein the virus is capable of productive replication in avian cells.
16. The MVA related virus of any one of items 1 to 15, wherein the virus is not capable of productive replication in primate cells, more preferably human cells.
17. A genome of the MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16.
18. A cell comprising the MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16 or the genome according to item 17.

19. The cell of item 18, wherein the cell is a non-adherent/suspension cell.
20. The cell of items 18 or 19, wherein the cell is an avian cell.
21. A method for culturing a MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16 comprising the steps of:
 - (a) providing a cell according to any one of items 18 to 20,
 - (b) culturing the cell, and
 - (c) isolating the MVA related virus.
22. The method of item 21, wherein the cell is cultured in cell proliferation medium and subsequently in virus production medium or the cell is solely cultured in cell proliferation medium.
23. The method of items 21 or 22, wherein the MVA related virus is isolated from the cell-free supernatant and/or cell lysate.
24. A method for producing a MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16 comprising the steps of:
 - (a) infecting a cell with a MVA virus,
 - (b) culturing the cell,
 - (c) isolating the MVA virus, and
 - (d) repeating steps (a) to (c) with the MVA virus isolated in step (c) until a MVA related virus comprising one or more of the following features:
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of (replacing) a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
 - (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
 - (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
 - (iv) no deletion site I,
 - (v) two deletion sites IV,
 - (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
 - (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R,

B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R,
and/or

(viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product

is detected.

25. The method of item 24, wherein steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence encoding an A3L gene product and/or an A34R gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product(s), is detected.
26. The method of item 25, wherein steps (a) to (c) are repeated until a MVA related virus comprising a nucleic acid sequence further encoding an A9L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product, is detected.
27. The method of any one of items 24 to 26, wherein the cell is cultivated in virus production medium.
28. A pharmaceutical composition comprising the MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16 or the genome according to item 17 and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s).
29. A vaccine comprising the MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16 or the genome according to item 17.
30. A MVA related virus according to any one of items 1 to 16 or a genome according to item 17 for use in medicine.
31. The MVA related virus or the genome of item 30 for use in vaccination.

Various modifications and variations of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art without departing from the scope of invention. Although the invention has been described in connection with specific preferred embodiments, it should be understood that the invention as claimed should not be unduly limited to such specific embodiments. Indeed, various modifications of the described modes for carrying out the invention which are obvious to those skilled in the art in the relevant fields are intended to be covered by the present invention.

The following Figures and Examples are merely illustrative of the present invention and should not be construed to limit the scope of the invention as indicated by the appended claims in any way.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

FIGURE 1: CR-associated Mutations were inserted individually or in various combinations into the backbone of wildtype virus together with GFP to allow visualization of plaques without fixation and immunostaining. All infections were performed with MOI of 0.01 and plaque phenotype is shown 48 h PI. WT.GFP, wildtype MVA that expresses GFP, WT.A34CR, WT.L3CR and WT.A3A9A34CR denote WT.GFP viruses that contain the respective CR-associated mutations H639Y, K75E and D86Y in the genes A3L, A9L and A34R, CR19.GFP is MVA-CR19 that expresses GFP.

FIGURE 2: Deletion site I is missing in MVA-CR19 but not in wildtype MVA (passage 5 in CR cells, MVA-CR5) or in a MVA obtained by serial passaging on adherent cells of the Egyptian fruit bat (MVA-R18 (Jordan et al., 2013a)).

FIGURE 3: Proposed recombination in MVA-CR19. (a) Schematic of the wildtype genome with inverted terminal repeats (ITRs) and expected amplification products that span the six deletion sites (roman numerals). The bars preceded with "C-" indicate the contigs that were obtained in previous (Jordan et al., 2013a) sequence analysis. The recombined region in addition to the ITRs is shown by the bolded line. (b) Left and (c) right ITRs in greater detail. Open arrows indicate the open reading frames. (d) The proposed left ITR of MVA-CR19 after recombination. (e) Sequence chromatogram of the recombination site, numbering with reference to GenBank U94848. (a-d) Dark grey for sequences derived from the right side of the genome, light grey for those of the left side of the genome. The pointed rectangles symbolize the ITR, the recombined region in addition to the ITRs is shown by the bolded line. The filled opposing dark grey and black arrows (◄►) denote strand orientation and mark the recombination site.

FIGURE 4: Confirmation of ITR rearrangement as shown in the previous figure. (a) Proposed structures of a PCR amplification products derived from the left ITR of the GenBank sequence U94848 and of MVA-CR19. Shown are genes (open arrows), deletion sites I and IV (filled boxes), ITRs (pointed grey and dark grey rectangles), recombination site (bold dark grey and black arrows) and target sites for restriction enzymes that were used to confirm the proposed structure of the left ITR. (b) Agarose gel electrophoresis of the long-PCR product shown in (a). Expected sizes for wildtype cut with BclI are 3007, 2518, 1992, 1172, and 671; with NruI are 7998 and 1362; with ApaLI are 8464 and 896; for MVA-CR19 cut with BclI are 13634, 1890, 1498, 1269, 984, 886, 671 and 480; with NruI are 11257, 8693, and 1362; and with ApaLI are 9572, 5646, 4706, 896, and 492 bp.

FIGURE 5: Stability of MVA genotypes in CR.pIX cultures. (a) Plaque-purified recombinant wildtype and CR19 isolates that contain a GFP-expression cassette in deletion site III were passaged 20 times in CR.pIX suspension cultures. Note absence of deletion site I signal in CR19 derivatives and the expected shift in size of the deletion site III amplification product due to the GFP cassette. (b) The viral DNA that was purified in (a) also exhibits a stable pattern of the restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) in the A34R gene for both isolates over the passaging interval. (c) The presence of the RS469 amplification product that replaces deletion site I in CR19 derivatives is found in passages of CR19 but not in those of the wildtype. The samples were applied in the same sequence as in (b). (d) Stable patterns of the deletion sites and the RFLP in recombinant viruses that carry the point mutations of the CR genotype in a wildtype backbone or a GFP and mCherry (RED) dual expression cassette in the CR19 derivative. (e) Infectious titers obtained with MVA-CR19.GFP.RED dual expression vector were determined at the indicated passage levels by determination of PFUs with immunostaining against vaccinia virus proteins, or via determination of the green or red fluorescence signals. The ratios of the infectious units is shown in the chart. A decrease of FFU relative to PFU would indicate loss of the expression cassettes. Titrations based on GFP tend to be higher than those based on mCherry in dual-expression constructs because some excitation of mCherry also occurred under GFP fluorescence conditions. The mean of all ratios is 1.00 ± 0.09 , there is no significant difference between the mean values of the ratios of GFP-FFU:PFU and mCherry-FFU:PFU at a 99 % confidence level (paired *t*-test).

FIGURE 6: Investigation of the L3 mutation. (a) Restriction fragment length polymorphism due to the mutation in L3L in MVA-CR19. The 717-bp amplicon is expected to yield HphI fragments of 649 and 68 bp for MVA-CR19 and 380, 269 and 68 bp for wildtype. (b-d) Two independent preparations of MVA-WT.L3LCR.GFP were used for these experiments. (b) Replication kinetic of the indicated recombinant viruses in single-cell suspension cultures. The dashed line shows replication of the indicated virus in the conventional process where aggregates are being induced. (c, d) Infection of adherent CR.pIX cells with GFP-expressing rMVAs. Depicted are mean and standard deviation of triplicates for MVA-WT.GFP and MVA-CR19.GFP, and of six values (two triplicates) of MVA-WT.L3CR.GFP. The $\log_{10}$ FFU/mL of the MVA preparations used for infection in this experiment were 8.5 (MVA-WT.GFP), 8.3 and 8.8 (MVA-WT.L3CR.GFP), and 9.8 (MVA-CR19.GFP). (**) indicates significant differences between the corresponding 40 h time points of CR19 and wildtype recombinant viruses in a two-tail, independent *t*-test; the differences were not significant in a comparison between L3L-mutant and wildtype.

EXAMPLES

1. Materials and Methods**1.1 Cells and viruses**

CR.pIX cells from the muscovy duck (Jordan et al., 2009b) and MVA-CR19 (Jordan et al., 2013a) have been described previously. CR.pIX cells were maintained in adherent format in DMEM:F12 medium supplemented with 5 % bovine serum (γ -irradiated, Gibco 26140-079), or in suspension cultures in CD-U4 medium (GE Healthcare #G3321 or Biochrom #F9185) supplemented with 10 ng/mL LONG-R3IGF (Sigma, USA). Both media were also supplemented with 2 mM GlutaMAX I (Life Technology, USA). Infection and propagation of MVA was performed in 1:1 mixtures of CD-U4 and CD-VP4 (Merck-Millipore #F9127) as described previously, usually with 2×10^6 cells/mL, MOI of 0.01 to 0.1, and harvest 48 or 72 h post infection (Jordan et al., 2011). Suspension cultures were maintained in a shaking incubator (HT Multitron Cell, Infors AG, Switzerland) on a rotating platform with amplitude of 5 cm and rotation speed of 180 min⁻¹. The CO₂ atmosphere was set to 8 % and temperature to 37 °C. All culture vessels, shake tubes (Tubespin 50, TPP Techno Plastic Products AG, Switzerland) or baffled shake flasks (Corning, USA), were equipped with 0.2 μ m filtered lids to allow gas exchange. Suspension culture volumes were maintained at 20-40 % of the vessel size.

Infectious titers of MVA were determined in PFU/mL (plaque forming units) or FFU/mL (fluorescence forming units) as described previously (Jordan et al., 2013a) on Vero cells. Viruses were visualized in the non-permissive indicator cells by immunostaining or, where applicable, with help of the fluorescing reporters in deletion site III.

1.2 Generation of recombinant MVA

Recombinant MVA was generated by homologous recombination in adherent CR.pIX cells by adaptation of published methods (Kremer et al., 2012). Briefly, 1×10^6 CR.pIX cells were seeded per well of a 6 well-plate. The culture monolayers were infected with receiving MVA with a MOI of 0.01 on the following day and transfected with 2.0 μ g of shuttle plasmid for insertion into deletion site III.

Point mutations were introduced by homologous recombination with a synthetic fragment that also contained silent diagnostic sites for restriction enzymes to confirm successful insertion and maintenance (Table 1). The recombination events were promoted by framing the region of interest by flanks of 600 to 1000 bp on each side. The receiving viruses usually

expressed a reporter gene from within deletion site III. A concurrent recombination was performed with a second shuttle plasmid designed to exchange this preexisting reporter gene for a different reporter gene (for example, blue fluorescence against green or red) to further facilitate recovery of recombined viruses. This marker plasmid was transfected at lower molar ratios compared to the main shuttle plasmid (1.8 µg of the shuttle plasmid with the point mutation and 0.2 µg of the reporter shuttle plasmid).

Transfections were performed with effectene (Qiagen, Germany) according to the manufacturer's instructions 90 min after infection, and the medium was replaced 24 h post transfection. The infected/transfected culture was harvested after 48 h to 72 h, sonicated, and used to infect cell monolayers in a 6-well plate at dilutions of 1000 to 10000-fold in PBS. The medium of this next generation infection was exchanged against medium containing 1 % methylcellulose after 4 h to 16 h. Plaques of the appropriate fluorescent phenotype were picked usually after another 24 h to 48 h and total DNA was isolated from aliquots of individual plaques using QuickExtract DNA Extraction Solution 1.0 (Epicentre, USA). Another round of plaque purification was initiated with the candidate recombinant virus preparations that passed the PCR analysis. The material for infection was obtained by sonication of cell harvests using a Vial Tweeter (set to 20 s of 100 % cycle and 90 % amplitude) that allows handling of closed sample caps to avoid cross-contamination (Hielscher, Germany). Viruses with parental genotype or incomplete recombination were not detectable within 3 to 8 rounds of plaque purification.

Virus passages to assay genomic stability was performed in CR.pIX suspension cultures in a volume of 5 mL with 1:1 mixtures of CD-U4 and CD-VP4. Cell density was 2×10^6 cells/mL and MOI 0.01 (in blind passages a titer of 108 PFU/mL was assumed in the previous passage). The infected culture was sonicated 48 or 72 h post infection to harvest virus.

1.3 PCR Analysis of rMVA

80 µL of complete cell lysate was mixed with 20 µL of QuickExtract DNA Extraction Solution 1.0 (Epicentre, USA) and heated to 65 °C for 10 min and to 98 °C for 5 min. 4 µL of this preparation was subjected to PCR in a final volume of 25 µL with 0.15 µL Taq polymerase (Qiagen, Germany), 200 nM each primer, and 125 µM each nucleotide. The sequence of the primer pairs that span deletion sites I to VI of the viral genome were obtained from the literature (Kremer et al., 2012). The expected sizes of the amplification products are 291, 354, 447, 502, 603, and 702 bp for wildtype virus deletion sites I to VI (Kremer et al., 2012), and 1285 for deletion site III in MVA-CR19.GFP. Thermocycling was initiated with 94 °C for 80 s, followed

by 35 cycles of 94 °C for 20 s, 55 °C for 20 s and 72 °C for 90 s, and terminated with 72 °C for 5 min. Amplicons were separated by electrophoreses in 1.5 % agarose gels.

1.4 Cloning of shuttle plasmids

The shuttle plasmid for deletion site III was cloned stepwise via insertion of the left and right flanks into pEGFP-N1 (Clontech, USA). The flanks were amplified from the genomic DNA of wildtype MVA with the primers "LeftF" AGG ACA TGT-TTG GTG GTC GCC ATG GAT GGT (SEQ ID NO: 17) and "LeftR" TAC CGC TAG C-T ACC AGC CAC CGA AAG AG (SEQ IDNO: 18), and with primers "RightF" TGG GCG GCC GC- TTT GGA AAG TTT TAT AGG (SEQ IDNO: 19) and "RightR" TGG CAC GTA GTG - CCG GAG TCT CGT CTG TTG (SEQ IDNO: 20), respectively. The left flank was cut with NheI (all restriction enzymes used in this study were obtained from New England Biolabs or Roche) and PciI, the right flank with DraIII and NotI for sequential insertion into the same sites of pEGFP-N1 while maintaining the EGFP open reading frame. The artificial EL promoter (Chakrabarti et al., 1997) was generated by annealing two complementary 72 bp-oligonucleotides (TIP MolBiol, Germany) with the sequence "PromEL" ATC TGC TAG CAC GTG GAC TAG TAA AAA TTG AAA TTT TAT TTT TTT TTT TTG GAA TAT AAA TAA GAT CTT ACC (SEQ ID NO: 21) on the coding strand. The annealing was performed after denaturation at 95 °C for 2 min followed by a ramp down to 56 °C with -0.1 °C per second. This fragment was cut with BglII and NheI, precipitated with 300 mM sodium acetate in two volumes of ethanol, purified by polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis, and inserted into the same sites of the pEGFP-N1 plasmid already containing the deletion site III flanks. Sequencing confirmed integrity of the shuttle plasmid but revealed a transition from ttG aaa ttt to ttA aaa ttt in the EL promoter that was not corrected and maintained as GFP expression was strong in rMVAs. A viral transcription terminator signal (T5NT, (Yuen and Moss, 1987)) is contained in the right flank. The DsRed1 derivative mCherry was synthesized with codon-optimization for duck (Eurofins Genomic, Germany) and inserted in antisense orientation to GFP and under control of the late P11 promoter (Bertholet et al., 1985). The resulting dual expression cassette spans 1615 bp from EL to P11 promoter, the amplification product for deletion site III primers is 2087 bp long.

The shuttle plasmids for introduction of the point mutations D86Y in A34R and V110A in L3L into wildtype MVA were cloned only with fragments amplified out of MVA-CR19 genomic DNA. These mutations contain fortuitous diagnostic restriction enzyme sites to confirm successful recombination (Table 1). The A34R shuttle plasmid was cloned by amplification of 1393 bp with primers "A34F" AAT GCT AGC-GCG GAA TCA TCA ACA

CTA CCC (SEQ IDNO: 22) and "A34R" GCT CTA G-ATT GTT CCC GCA ACT ACG GTC (SEQ IDNO: 23). The primers contained additional restriction sites for NheI and XbaI, respectively, at the 5' termini for insertion into pEGFP-N1 (out of dam(-) bacteria) using these sites. The L3L shuttle plasmid was cloned with primers "L3F" CTC TAC GGG CTA TTG TCT C (SEQ IDNO: 24) and "L3R" TGA ATA CCC GTA CCG ATG (SEQ IDNO: 25), the 717-bp fragment was cloned into pCR-Blunt II-Topo ("pTopo") as described in the Zero Blunt TOPO PCR Cloning Kit (Invitrogen, USA).

The shuttle plasmids for the other point mutations, H639Y in A3L and K75E in A9L, were cloned by insertion of synthetic DNA (Eurofins Genomic) that contained the desired point mutation and silent diagnostic mutations (designed using <http://resitefinder.appspot.com/>).

For the generation of the shuttle plasmid for A3L a 2008 bp fragment of A3L was amplified with primers "A3F" GCA GAA GAA CAC CGC TTA GG (SEQ IDNO: 26) and "A3R" ATG GAA GCC GTG GTC AAT AG (SEQ IDNO: 27) and inserted into pTopo. A 274-bp fragment therein from SacI to SwaI was replaced with a synthetic DNA containing H639Y and the silent NcoI site. One flank of this shuttle plasmid had to be extended because first recombination attempts did not include the desired H639Y site: an additional synthetic DNA of 479 bp containing a new (but silent) AuaI site was appended to the NcoI-distal side using SwaI (in MVA) and SpeI (in pTopo).

Recombination of a 415 bp synthetic DNA that also contained a silent diagnostic mutation near to the desired K75E mutation transferred only the diagnostic mutation as well (revealed by sequencing of plaque purified viruses). The flanks were therefore extended and additional diagnostic mutations were inserted so that K75E is framed by markers: a 2905 bp fragment containing A9L and neighboring gene A10L was amplified out of wildtype MVA genomic DNA with primers "A9F" TTG AAA TAG CGC CAG TCC TCC (SEQ IDNO: 28) and "A10R" ACT ACG GCG GCA TTA TGT TCTC (SEQ IDNO: 29). This 2905 bp fragment was cloned into pTopo to yield pTA10L. A synthetic DNA containing the diagnostic sites in A10L was inserted via a three fragment ligation using PmeI (in the vector) to NsiI (in the MVA insert) of pTA10L as new vector backbone, SpeI to NsiI in the synthetic DNA to insert the silent StyI diagnostic marker, and NsiI to PmeI of the pTA10L to restore the initial amplification product. Three-fragment ligation to obtain pTLA10L-StyI was necessary to circumvent an additional SpeI site in the vector backbone. The A9L flank was inserted using a synthetic DNA fragment containing the K75E mutation framed by diagnostic silent mutations on both sides, EcoRI and BseRI. This fragment was inserted via a three-fragment ligation to circumvent a Tth111I site in the vector, using Tth111I in A9L to EcoRV in the multiple cloning site of the

synthetic DNA vector, Tth111I to PmeI in pTA10L and Tth111I to PmeI in pTA10L to restore the vector. The resulting shuttle plasmid contains a MVA-derived fragment of 3620 bp.

1.5 Sequencing and RACE

Genomic DNA of plaque-purified MVA-CR19.GFP was isolated by polyethylene glycol precipitation out of 100 mL of infected CR.pIX cells at 2×10^6 cells/mL as described previously (Jordan et al., 2013a). Sequences were obtained by GATC Biotech AG (Germany) with the PacBio RSII technology and assembled using an unforced (without guide sequence) algorithm.

Because large gaps at the left side of the genome remained after sequence assembly, and because PCR against the deletion sites indicated a loss of deletion site I (that is located near the left terminus of MVA) 5'-end RACE was performed. Primer D2 RII (GGC GGC ATG TGG AGT GTC TTT ATC) (SEQ IDNO: 30) against a 5' terminal region still covered by the genomic sequence assembly was designed using the Clone Manager Professional suite version 9 (Sci-Ed Software, USA). This primer was extended on 500 ng of viral genomic DNA in 100 μ L of $1 \times$ PCR buffer, $1 \times$ Q solution, and 5 U Taq and 0.2 U ProofStart Taq polymerase (all Qiagen, Germany), 0.4 μ M primer D2 RII and 0.05 mM each dNTP. The thermocycler was programmed for 35 cycles of 94 °C for 10 s, 57 °C for 60 s, and 68 °C for 3 min (with 95 °C for 2 min at the start and 72 °C for 10 min at the end of the program). This PCR reaction was purified with the QIAquick PCR Purification Kit, 25 μ L thereof were incubated with terminal transferase (TdT, New England Biolabs #M0315S) in a final volume of 50 μ L of $1 \times$ Tailing Buffer, 0.25 mM CoCl₂ and 0.1 mM dCTP. The tailing reaction was preceded by denaturation at 94 °C for 3 min, followed by addition of 0.5 μ L of the TdT and incubation at 37 °C for 30 min, and termination at 70 °C for 10 min.

A nested PCR was next performed to recover the 5' extended and dC-tailed product using primers D2 (GGT GTA TAG AGT TCA CAG TAG) (SEQ IDNO: 31) and the universal anchored primer AAP (GCC ACG CGT CGA CTA GTA CGG Gnn GGG nnG GGn nG, wherein n stands for I = inosine, GCC ACG CGT CGA CTA GTA CGG GII GGG IIG GGI IG, with I for inosine) (SEQ IDNO: 32) in a final volume of 100 μ L as described above for D2 RII primer extension but with an extension temperature of 59 °C for 60 s (instead of 57 °C).

This first nested PCR was diluted 1:50 and subjected to a second nested PCR in a final volume of 50 μ L, without Q solution, primers GSPD2-R (GGA GGT GGC TCT CGA TGA AC) (SEQ IDNO: 33) and AAP, with the same thermocycler program as in the first nested PCR.

A fragment of approx. 700 bp was isolated and purified by agarose gel electrophoresis with the Qiagen Gel Extraction kit and sequenced with primers AAP and GSPD2-R.

Primers "RS469F" ACG GTC CTG TAG TAT CTG (SEQ IDNO: 34) and "RS469R" CGG CAT GTG GAG TGT CTT TAT C (SEQ IDNO: 35) were designed on this sequence as a diagnostic pair for amplification of 469 bp spanning the newly discovered recombination site (RS469).

The long-PCR for amplification of the presumed left ITR of MVA-CR19 was performed with primers D2 RII and "ITR-M" (CTT GCA CAT GTC TCC GAT ACG) (SEQ IDNO: 36) to obtain 21312 bp on MVA-CR19 and 9360 bp on wildtype MVA (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). The ITR-M primer binds in forward orientation from 533 to 553 and in reverse orientation from 165956 to 165976 in GenBank sequence AY603355 whereas primer D2 RII binds only once, in reverse orientation from 9869 to 9892. The possible amplicons are therefore 9360 bp and 165444 bp (ITR-M single-primer amplification) with wildtype MVA as template, but not 21312 bp. LongRange PCR (Qiagen) was performed in 50 µL final volume with 200 ng of viral genomic DNA according to the manual. The thermocycler program was initiated with 93 °C for 3 min; followed by 10 cycles of 93 °C for 10 s, 57 °C for 30 s and 68 °C for 15 min; followed by 25 cycles of 93 °C for 15 s, 57 °C for 30 s and 68 °C for 21 min with extension by 20 s per cycle. Restriction enzyme analysis with BclI, NruI or ApaLI was performed with 3 µL of PCR product in 20 µL final volume and 0.5 µL of enzyme according to the manufacturer's instructions.

2. Results

2.1 Fusion phenotype

A pronounced shift towards the novel strain in populations with mixtures of wildtype viruses and those that carry the MVA-CR mutations after repeated passage in suspension cultures was previously observed (Jordan et al., 2013a). Such a shift may be caused if a viral genotype replicates faster, is associated with higher specific infectivity or (as hypothesized) reduces the affinity of its progeny viruses for the host cells. The property of MVA to remain associated with host cells is well characterized (Blasco and Moss, 1991; Blasco et al., 1993; Husain et al., 2007; Meiser et al., 2003), with one consequence that syncytia can form if the viral fusion apparatus is activated in particles on the surface of a cell with contacts to neighboring cells (Ward, 2005). A prominent syncytia formation by induction of the fusion apparatus was only observed in cultures of CR.pIX cells infected with wildtype MVA but not with MVA-CR viruses (data not shown and (Jordan et al., 2013b)).

In a next step, the point mutations of MVA-CR (**Table 1**) were introduced into wildtype MVA to investigate the contribution of the mutations to the MVA-CR phenotype. The point mutations were inserted into the wildtype backbone by homologous recombination of synthetic gene segments. These segments were designed to also contain silent mutations for diagnostic restriction enzyme polymorphism to confirm that plaque-purified recombinant viruses were of the intended genotype and without contaminating parental viruses. A GFP reporter gene was inserted under control of a synthetic promoter into deletion site III to facilitate study of life plaques without immunostaining. Adherent monolayers of the CR.pIX cell line were infected with recombinant viruses to a MOI of 0.01 and fluorescence images taken at various time points (48 h PI is shown in Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.). The GFP signals from recombinant viruses that contained the A34RCR mutation were scattered over large areas and the plaques exhibited only negligible spontaneous syncytia formation. Plaques formed by recombinant viruses with the A3LCR, A9LCR and L3LCR mutations resembled those formed by wildtype viruses.

It has been concluded from these experiments that viruses with the CR genotype have a decreased tendency to form spontaneous or pH-induced syncytia.

2.2 Missing deletion site I

Recombinant MVAs can be characterized by a set of PCRs that are designed to amplify across each of the six deletion sites (Kremer et al., 2012). These PCR reactions have been used to confirm insertion of the GFP-expression cassette into the commonly used deletion site III. As part of the recommended routine the other amplification fragments were also tested. Surprisingly, the signal expected for deletion site I was missing in MVA-CR19 derivatives, but not in an earlier passage or an isolate passaged 18 times on the permissive fruit bat cell line (MVA-R18 (Jordan et al., 2013a); Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.). All other deletion sites gave signals of appropriate sizes in all tested viruses.

The deletion site I amplicon is localized at the boundary of the left inverted terminal repeat and partially overlaps with the core region of the genomic DNA. The previously reported sequence of the genomic DNA of MVA-CR11, an ancestor of MVA-CR19, has covered 135 kb of the genomic DNA that stretched downstream of deletion site I beyond deletion site III (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** A, contigs C-2412, C-131534 and C-1549) (Jordan et al., 2013a). The sequences of the core and partial ITR at the right end of the genome, including deletion site IV, were not part of the earlier reports. It was decided to include only sequences obtained by unguided sequence assembly. An additional sequence of 21 kb

covering the right end of the genomic DNA was obtained by sequence assembly with GenBank entry U94848 as guide sequence and extended beyond deletion site IV into part of the ITR without any deviations from wildtype.

An earlier report has linked the absence of deletion site I to presence of ancestral (undeleted) chorioallantois vaccinia Ankara virus (CVA) sequences (Suter et al., 2009). However, a PCR for detection of CVA loci as described in that publication gave no signals with these primers in our preparations (data not shown). It was therefore suspected that a loss of deletion site I has occurred, and that this observation should be associated with genomic changes at the left end of the viral DNA. To elucidate potential mechanisms for the changes primer extension and TdT tailing, using the known sequence of C-2412 as a starting point, were next performed. The obtained PCR fragment from the genomic DNA of MVA-CR19 had a sequence that reads from within the core towards the left telomer but stopped at nucleotide 15322 (using GenBank #AY603355 as reference) and continued with the antisense strand going towards the right telomer and starting with nucleotide 150816 (Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. **B to D**).

A sequence as that obtained in Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. **D** suggests that the left ITR of MVA-CR19 may have formed by recombination with the right ITR. The recombination site (RS) is downstream of deletion site I and upstream of deletion site IV.

Next a PCR has been performed intended to amplify fragments that should be unique for each of the genotypes to confirm that the proposed recombination has indeed occurred in MVA-CR19. One primer binds to a sequence that is found at the ends of both ITRs and faces towards the center independent of whether it annealed to the left or right ITR. The other primer is unique to a sequence in the core of the genome and faces towards the left ITR. The expected amplification products with GenBank AY603355 as template are 9360 bp (containing deletion site I) and 165444 bp, where 165 kb is the region that is spanned by the single primer that binds the termini. A rearrangement of the right ITR to the position of the left ITR increases the amplification product to 21312 bp (Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. **A**). Such different amplicons were indeed obtained for MVA-WT, and MVA-CR19, respectively, and restriction fragment polymorphism with NruI, BclI and ApaLI further confirmed the expected identity of the obtained fragments (Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. **B**).

The lost fragment in the left ITR contains MAV001L to MVA013L (with MVA014L as the first gene not affected by the deletion). Only MVA005R (C11R), MVA006L (C10L) and

MVA008L (D7L) therein appear to be functional genes (Antoine et al., 1998; Meisinger-Henschel et al., 2007). MVA001L, MVA002L and MVA003L are pseudogenes and also found duplicated in the C-21265 contig at the right end of the genome. MVA004L is a fragmented gene of 58 amino acids that are mirrored in a complete open reading frame of 188 amino acids in the right part of the genome (MVA189R, similar to vaccinia Copenhagen B22R according to the annotation of the Genbank entry U94848). MVA007R is a gene of 91 amino acids with homology to a gene of 242 amino acids, the p28 virulence factor of ectromelia (mousepox) virus (Senkevich et al., 1994, 1995). It has been reported to be already disrupted in vaccinia virus strains Copenhagen, Tian-Tan, WR and MVA (Esteban and Buller, 2005). The genes MVA009L to MVA013L appear to be non-functional fragments of host-range determinants with resemblance to D6L of variola virus or CP77 of cowpox virus (Antoine et al., 1998; Meisinger-Henschel et al., 2007).

2.3 Sequencing of MVA-CR19.GFP

With the proposed recombination another guide sequence starting from Genbank entry AY603355 was created, but were again not successful to recover terminal repeats with next generation sequencing. The new sequencing attempt was performed with DNA isolated of a MVA-CR19.GFP preparation and covered a total of 145636 bp (including telltale GFP expression cassette in deletion site III) in three contigs of 15557, 89342 and 40737 bp. The final remaining gap (a formality as there was no sequence overlap between C-2412 and C-131534) was closed by conventional PCR and sequencing.

All previous mutations could be confirmed and only one additional point mutation was discovered, V110A in MVA082L (L3L in vaccinia virus nomenclature). This point mutation is associated with a fortuitous restriction site polymorphism (HphI site is deleted) that allowed a comparison of MVA-CR19 and MVA-CR19.GFP to sequences obtained from wildtype virus or viruses passaged on the fruit bat cell line. The HphI polymorphism confirmed that this point mutation is not a sequencing artefact. The HphI site was detectable in wildtype and bat-cell passaged MVA viruses but not in MVA-CR19 (Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. 6). L3L was sequenced in preparations of passage 2 MVA, passage 11 MVA and the plaque-purified MVA-CR19, and observed two notable differences to the previous three point mutations. First, there appeared to be no visibly mixed population of L3L genotypes in MVA-CR11, and there were no indications of the presence of L3L in the passage 2 preparation. (The A9L mutation of the CR-genotype was already visible in passage 2 of non-plaque purified

MVA, and all CR genotype mutations were overlapping with wildtype sequence in chromatograms of MVA-CR11, see Figure 2 of (Jordan et al., 2013a)).

Table 1. Summary of observed mutations in MVA-CR19 and additionally introduced silent diagnostic mutations in wildtype virus

gene	mutation	diagnostic site	WT (GenBank AY603355)	recombinant
MVA082L (L3L)	V110A	Δ HphI (ggtga)	ttg gTg aga leu VAL arg	ttg gCg aga leu ALA arg
MVA113L ¹		AvaI* (ctcgag) PspXI* (vc/tcgagb)	tgT tcT TCt cys ser ser	tgC tcG AGt cys ser ser
MVA114L (A3L)	H639Y	NcoI* (c/catgg)	tca atg gat ser met asp aga Cat att arg HIS ile	tcc atg gat ser met asp aga Tat att arg TYR ile
MVA120L (A9L)	K75E	EcoRI* (g/aattc) Δ XcmI (ccan9tgg)	aag Aag aat lys LYS asn cca aat tca ttt tgg pro asn ser phe trp	aag Gag aat lys GLU asn ccG aat tca ttt tgg pro asn ser phe trp
MVA121L (A10L) ¹		K554K with StyI (ccwwgg)	cca aaG gtA pro lys val	ccC aaG gtC pro lys val
MVA145R (A34R)	D86Y	AccI* (gt/atac) Δ BsaWI (a/ccgga)	aga ccg Gat act arg pro ASP thr	aga ccg Tat act arg pro TYR thr

¹ The silent mutations in these genes are markers to confirm that recombination includes the complete flanks. Note that GenBank sequence U94848 lists a mutation (cca aGA gta, R554K) in A10L at this site. However, this deviation is corrected in a subsequent analysis so that U94848 and AY603355 are considered identical (Antoine et al., 2006).

2.4 Stability of the different virus species

Maintenance of transgene expression, replication properties and degree of attenuation depend on the genomic stability of viral vectors. Although virus isolates with deletions and rearrangements in the ITR (Moss et al., 1981; Paez et al., 1985; Pickup et al., 1982; Qin et al., 2011) and transient gene amplification in response to selective pressures by the innate immune system (Elde et al., 2012) have been described previously, MVA is also known for high genetic stability (Antoine et al., 2006). Maintenance of genetic markers of wildtype MVA and MVA-CR19 was next investigated by propagation in the anatine continuous suspension cell line in chemically-defined medium (rather than galline primary adherent cultures in the presence of serum, the substrat used in generation of MVA). Plaque purified recombinant viruses that contained GFP or the dual GFP and mCherry expression cassette in deletion site III were passaged 20 times in the CR.pIX suspension cultures (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). Background of the viruses were either wildtype or MVA-CR, or a wildtype virus with point mutations of the CR genotype in the affected structural genes. No changes in

A34R (neither towards the CR genotype nor wildtype), no deletions in deletion site III, no changes at the recombination site in MVA-CR, and no loss of deletion site I in wildtype was observed. A retrospective study of the genomic DNAs of isolates obtained in the first round of plaque purification towards MVA-CR19 (where the point mutation in A34R was used as selection marker) furthermore revealed that the majority of the viruses did not contain deletion site I already, indicating that the rearrangement at the left ITR preceded isolation of MVA-CR19 (data not shown).

2.5 Effects of the L3L mutation

An additional mutation was discovered in MVA-CR19.GFP, in the L3 protein, and its presence confirmed by restriction fragment length polymorphism in the parental MVA-CR19 and conventional sequencing (**Figure 6 a**). The L3 protein is expressed predominantly in late phases of the infection but is only loosely incorporated (not as a structural component) into virions (Resch and Moss, 2005). Loss of L3L expression may reduce the infectious activity of the incoming particles, possibly because transcription or export of nascent mRNA of the newly infecting cores is disturbed (Resch and Moss, 2005). Conditional expression of L3L had no impact on the processing of virions, their association with the host cell membrane or the formation of actin tails that have been implicated in spread of the virus (Doceul et al., 2010; Resch and Moss, 2005).

Insertion of the L3 V110A mutation into wildtype virus did not result in obvious changes to the plaque phenotype 48 h PI (Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.). It was next tested for enhanced initial infectivity by comparing the expansion of foci in adherent cells infected with different recombinant viruses. A NyONE cell imager (SynenTec GmbH, Germany) was used to quantify how much of the cell area is covered with GFP-expressing (infected) cells at two time points (24 and 40 h PI) and increasing MOI (0.05, 0.1 and 1). Because correct MOI is an important parameter in this study, two separate preparations of MVA-WT.L3LCR.GFP (the L3L mutation of MVA-CR19 in the backbone of wildtype virus) were used. As shown **Figure 6 c and d**, there appeared to be no differences in the spread of viruses in the first 24 h and at a MOI below 1. Only MVA-CR19.GFP appeared to have a slight initial advantage at MOI of 1. At 40 h PI there were again no significant differences in the GFP-positive area between wildtype and the L3L mutant, independent of MOI. However, MVA-CR19.GFP has occupied a significantly larger area of the infected cell monolayer.

The L3L is an essential gene of vaccinia virus replication (Upton et al., 2003). However, the L3 mutation discovered here did not reduce infectious titers and viruses with that mutation in the

wildtype backbone replicated with very high efficiencies and were not inferior to the wildtype reference in single-cell suspensions (**Figure 6 b**). MVA-CR19.GFP replicated to the expected high titers also without induction of aggregates in the same experiment, and a wildtype virus with all of the observed mutations of the CR genotype replicated to very high titers only if cell aggregates were induced.

3. Discussion

A hitherto undescribed but highly stable vector strain has been isolated and characterized. A set of four mutations characterize the genomic DNA of the virus and have a major influence on the phenotype. Very extensive changes have occurred at the left side of the viral genome of MVA-CR19. When analysing GFP-recombinant viruses with the series of primers (Kremer et al., 2012) that are used to characterize the six deletion sites of MVA, no signal for deletion site I in MVA-CR19 derivatives could be detected. Further investigation suggested that a recombination has occurred in which the left side of the genomic DNA was replaced by the right side including the ITR. This event has led to an extensive symmetry and duplication of a number of genes (listed in Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. C) and loss of MAV001L to MVA013L. The telomeres have not been sequenced. But by using Genbank sequence U94848 and the result of the diagnostic long-PCR as basis, then the left genomic region that characterizes MVA-CR19 may have expanded from 15327 bp to 27108 bp. The rearrangement may therefore have increased the area of complementarity between the two telomers but has not affected the GC content (16.3 vs. 16.6 and 17.7 vs 17.5 %, for CR19 vs. wildtype left telomers).

Three functional genes, MVA005R (C11R), MVA006L (C10L) and MVA008L (D7L) (Antoine et al., 1998; Meisinger-Henschel et al., 2007), appear to have been irreversibly lost in this rearrangement and may impact biological properties of MVA-CR19. Deletion of the C11R gene may interfere with the capacity of MVA to engage extracellular signal-regulated kinase 2 (ERK2) that causes in NF- κ B activation (Martin et al., 2012). The final effect on replication of viruses is difficult to predict since NF- κ B activation furcates into several signaling pathways with different outcomes (Santoro et al., 2003). However, vaccinia viruses interfere with NF- κ B activation (Mohamed and McFadden, 2009; Oie and Pickup, 2001; Shisler and Jin, 2004) whereas MVA is reported to have lost the defensive factors against NF- κ B pathways (Antoine et al., 1998). A less vigorous activation of NF- κ B may therefore improve reactogenicity because a potentially antiviral signal is not activated anymore by a virus that has lost part of its defenses against this particular signaling cascade.

The C10 protein appears to antagonize IL-1 β by masking the cellular receptor for this proinflammatory cytokine (Kluczyk et al., 2002). Loss of C10 in MVA-CR19 may have only a limited effect in vivo because another viral factor also interferes with IL-1 β , a soluble receptor expressed by the MVA184R gene (Blanchard et al., 1998). Inactivation of MVA184R was shown to augment the reactogenicity of MVA vectors and to prolong T-cell memory responses in mice (Staib et al., 2005). This observation may suggest that a knock-out of MVA184R in MVA-CR19 may act synergistically with loss of C10 and may have the potential to further improve the self-adjuvanting properties of MVA.

Deletion of D7L has also been used previously to augment reactogenicity of MVA (Falivene et al., 2012). The D7 protein is secreted by the infected host cell. It can bind to glycosaminoglycans in the extracellular matrix at the site of infection and may both delay inflammatory responses and interfere with the function of interleukin-18, a central signal molecule for antiviral responses by the innate and adaptive immune systems (Damon et al., 1998; Esteban et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2000).

Heterogeneity and rearrangements in the ITRs of vaccinia viruses has been described previously (for example, (Moss et al., 1981; Paez et al., 1985; Pickup et al., 1982; Qin et al., 2011)). The results here differ from some of the previous studies in that not only a deletion but an extensive rearrangement has been observed that appears to improve (rather than interfere with) the replication of the affected virus. The study confirms high mutational and genetic stability of diverse plaque-purified MVA vectors across several genetic markers and for different inserts in deletion site III. The recombination between the left and right parts of the genome of MVA-CR19 caused a diagnostic loss of deletion site I and is associated with deletion of C11R, C10L, and D7L. It is tempting to speculate that the observed combined disruption may improve the reactogenicity of vaccines based on the novel genotype.

The following abbreviations are used in this patent application:

MVA, MVA-WT: modified vaccinia virus Ankara, MVA-wildtype.

MVA-CR19: a novel strain at passage 19, related to MVA and isolated out of cultures of CR.pIX cells.

MVA-WT A3A9A34L3: A mutant of MVA-WT that contains point mutations H639Y, K75E and D86Y in the genes A3L, A9L and A34R.

MVA-WT L3: A mutant of MVA-WT that contains point mutation V110A in the gene L3L.

PI: post infection

MOI: multiplicity of infection

CR.pIX: Cairina moschata retina cell line that stably expresses the pIX protein, a minor structural protein of human adenovirus type 2.

GFP: green fluorescent protein

The following sequences are part of the sequence listing:

SEQ ID NO: 1	A3L gene product
SEQ ID NO: 2	A34R gene product
SEQ ID NO: 3	A9L gene product
SEQ ID NO: 4	H639Y A3L gene product mutant
SEQ ID NO: 5	D86Y A34R gene product mutant
SEQ ID NO: 6	K75E A9L gene product mutant
SEQ ID NO: 7	A3L gene
SEQ ID NO: 8	A34R gene
SEQ ID NO: 9	A9L gene
SEQ ID NO: 10	A3L gene mutant
SEQ ID NO: 11	A34R gene mutant
SEQ ID NO: 12	A9L gene mutant
SEQ ID NO: 13	L3L gene product
SEQ ID NO: 14	V110A L3L gene product mutant
SEQ ID NO: 15	L3L gene
SEQ ID NO: 16	L3L gene mutant
SEQ ID NO: 17:	LeftF primer
SEQ ID NO: 18:	LeftR primer
SEQ ID NO: 19:	RightF primer
SEQ ID NO: 20:	RightR primer
SEQ ID NO: 21:	PromEL sequence
SEQ ID NO: 22:	A34F primer
SEQ ID NO: 23:	A34R primer
SEQ ID NO: 24:	L3F primer
SEQ ID NO: 25:	L3R primer
SEQ ID NO: 26:	A3F primer
SEQ ID NO: 27:	A3R primer
SEQ ID NO: 28:	A9F primer
SEQ ID NO: 29:	A10R primer

SEQ ID NO: 30: D2 RII primer
 SEQ ID NO: 31: D2 primer
 SEQ ID NO: 32: AAP primer
 SEQ ID NO: 33: GSPD2-R primer
 SEQ ID NO: 34: RS469F primer
 SEQ ID NO: 35: RS469R primer
 SEQ ID NO: 36: ITR-M primer
 SEQ ID NO: 37: MVA related Virus (MVA-CR19.GFP)

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CLAIMS

1. A Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA) related virus comprising one or more of the following features:
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
 - (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
 - (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
 - (iv) no deletion site I,
 - (v) two deletion sites IV,
 - (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
 - (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R, and/or
 - (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product.
2. The MVA related virus of claim 1, wherein
 - (i) the region that includes the right ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site III has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 162221 to 190549, or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 95% identical to said nucleic acid sequence,
 - (ii) the region that includes the left ITR and extends to but excludes deletion site V has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 1 to 31261, or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 95% identical to said nucleic acid sequence, and/or
 - (iii) the nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR has a nucleic acid sequence according to SEQ ID NO: 37 or Genbank Accession

number KY633487 (preferably ranging from nucleotide position 179272 to 190549, or a nucleotide position corresponding thereto) or is a variant thereof which is at least 95% identical to said nucleic acid sequence, and/or

3. The MVA related virus of claims 1 or 2, wherein the virus further comprises a heterologous nucleic acid sequence.
4. The MVA related virus of claim 3, wherein the heterologous nucleic acid sequence is selected from a sequence coding for
 - (i) an antigen, particularly an epitope of an antigen,
 - (i) a diagnostic compound, and
 - (iii) a therapeutic compound.
5. The MVA related virus of any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the virus is capable of productive replication in avian cells.
6. The MVA related virus of any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the virus is not capable of productive replication in primate cells, more preferably human cells.
7. A genome of the MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6.
8. A cell comprising the MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 or the genome according to claim 7.
9. The cell of claim 8, wherein the cell is a non-adherent/suspension cell.
10. The cell of claims 8 or 9, wherein the cell is an avian cell.
11. A method for culturing a MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 comprising the steps of:
 - (a) providing a cell according to any one of claims 18 to 20,
 - (b) culturing the cell, and
 - (c) isolating the MVA related virus.

12. A method for producing a MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 comprising the steps of:
- (a) infecting a cell with a MVA virus,
 - (b) culturing the cell,
 - (c) isolating the MVA virus, and
 - (d) repeating steps (a) to (c) with the MVA virus isolated in step (c) until a MVA related virus comprising one or more of the following features:
 - (i) a nucleic acid sequence corresponding to a region that includes the right Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site III instead of a nucleic acid sequence that includes the left Inverted Terminal Repeat (ITR) and extends to but excludes deletion site V,
 - (ii) two copies of a nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site IV and the right ITR,
 - (iii) no nucleic acid sequence comprising deletion site I and the left ITR,
 - (iv) no deletion site I,
 - (v) two deletion sites IV,
 - (vi) no open reading frame for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of C11R, C10L, and D7L,
 - (vii) two open reading frames for at least one gene product selected from the group consisting of A57R, B1R, B2R, B3R, B4R, B5R, B6R, B7R, B8R, B9R, B10R, B11R, B12R, B15R, B16R, B17L, B18R, B19R, and B22R and/or
 - (viii) a nucleic acid sequence encoding a L3L gene product, wherein said nucleic acid sequence comprises at least one mutation resulting in an amino acid sequence modification of said gene product is detected.
13. A pharmaceutical composition comprising the MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 or the genome according to claim 7 and one or more pharmaceutical acceptable excipient(s), diluent(s), and/or carrier(s).
14. A vaccine comprising the MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 or the genome according to claim 7.

15. A MVA related virus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 or a genome according to claim 7 for use in medicine.

FIGURE 1

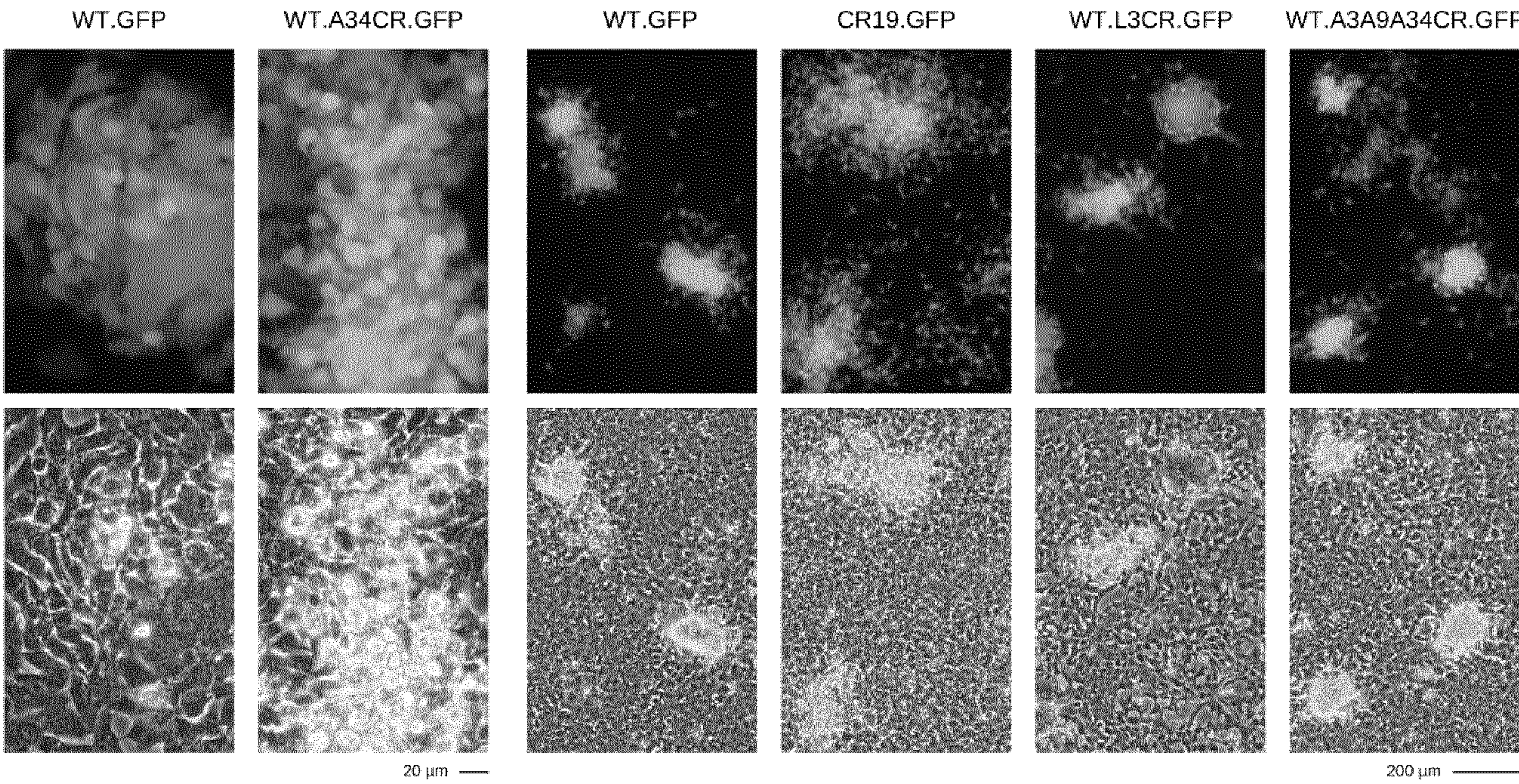


FIGURE 2

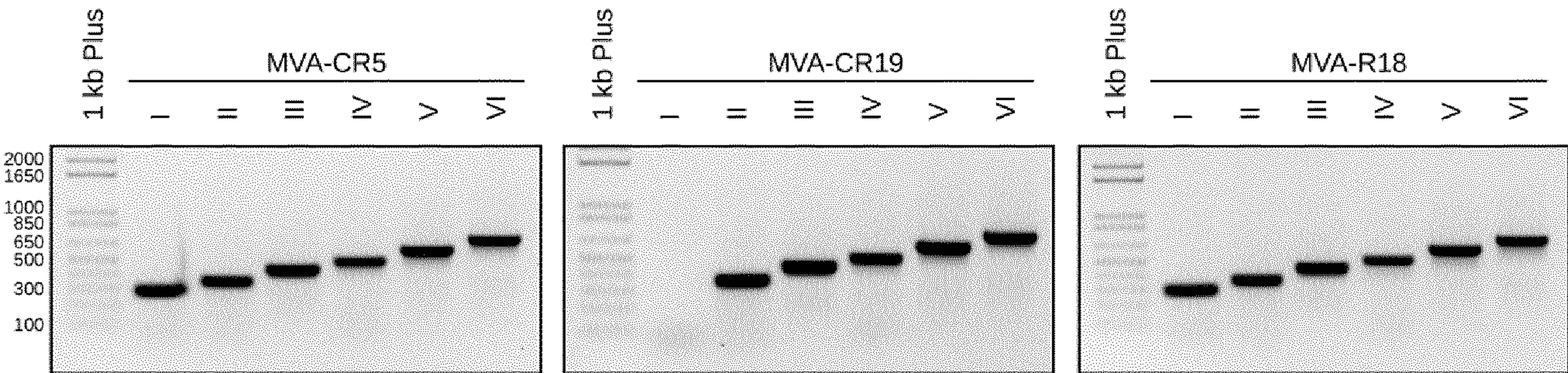


FIGURE 3

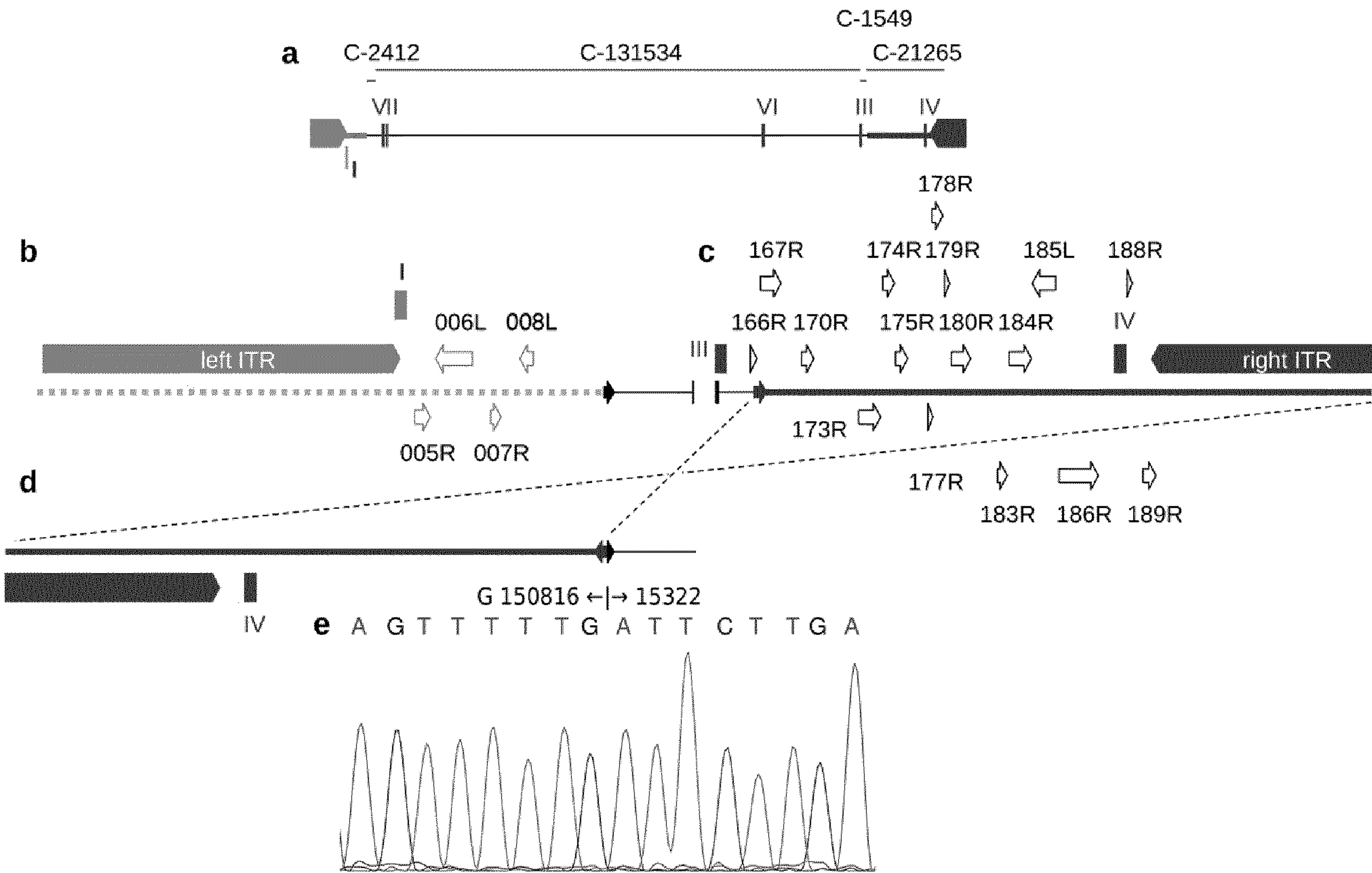


FIGURE 4

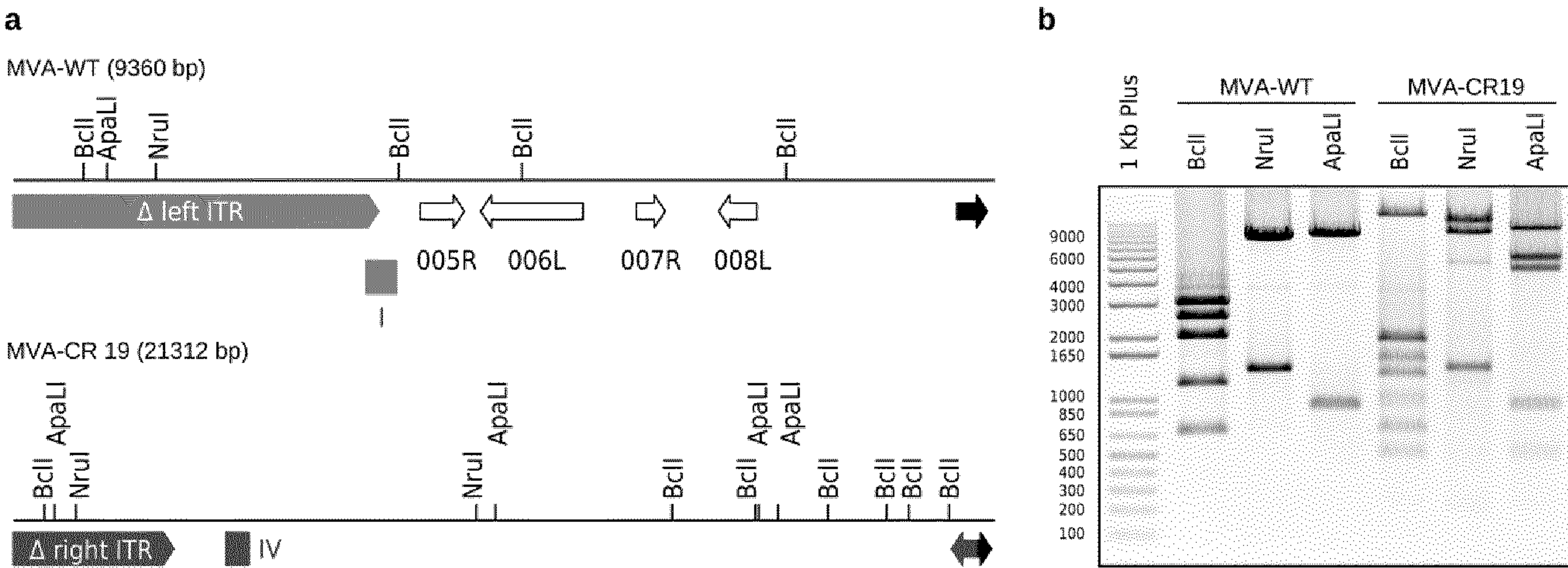


FIGURE 5

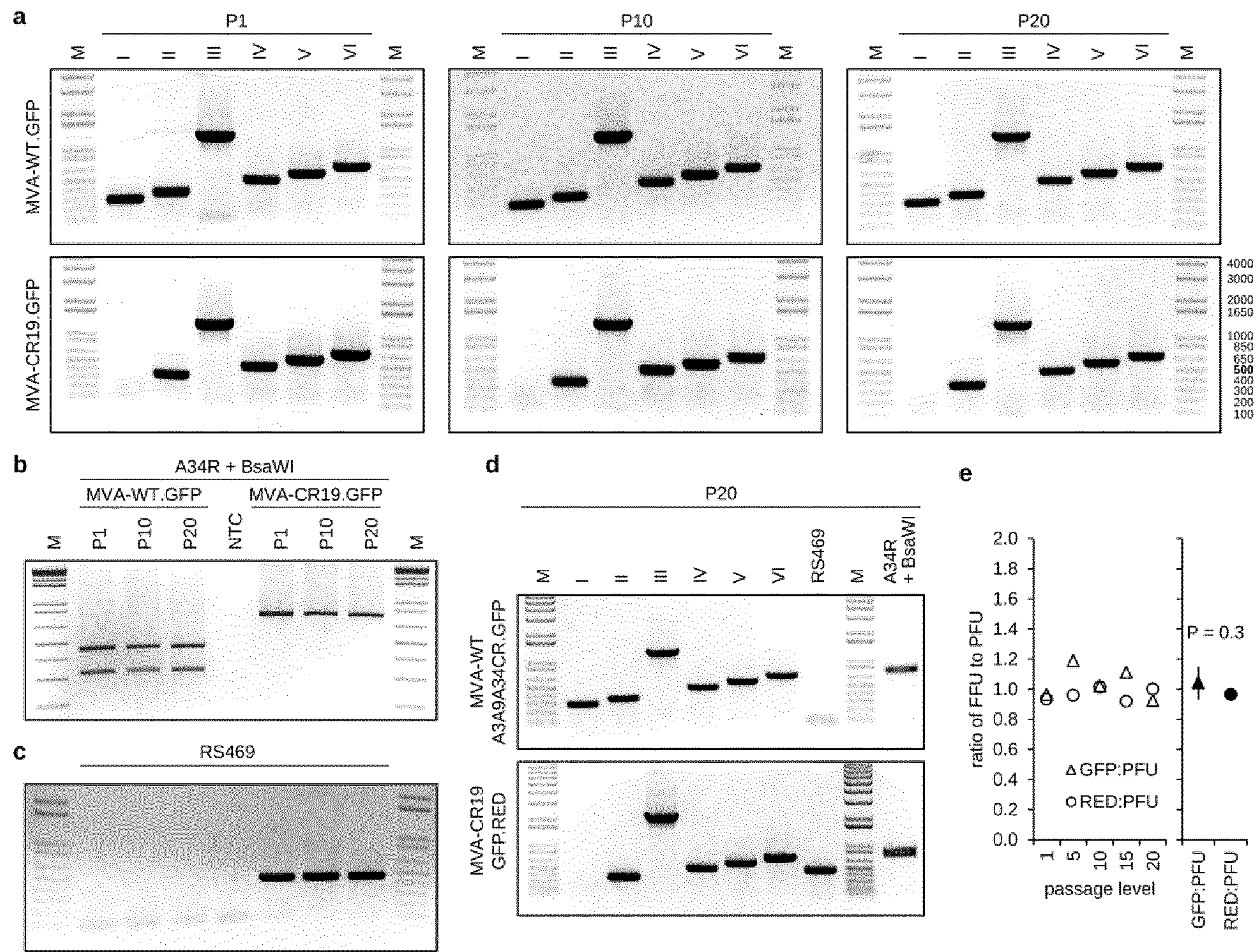


FIGURE 6

