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54 Titre: Vaccines against infections caused by YF virus; YF infectious cDNA, method for producing a recombinant YF virus from the YF infectious cDNA and plasmids to assemble the YF infectious cDNA.

57 Abrégé: The present invention is related to a vaccine composition for humans against YF infections consisting essentially of a recombinant YF virus, YFiv5.2/DD, which is regenerated from YF infectious cDNA. There is provided new plasmids, pYF 5'3' IV/G1/2 and pYFM 5.2/T3/27, which together, have the complete sequence of said YF infectious cDNA. The method for producing recombinant YF virus and the Original, Primary and Secondary Seed Lots are other embodiments of the present invention.

Title: Vaccines against infections caused by YF virus; YF infectious cDNA, Method for producing a recombinant YF virus from the YF infectious cDNA and Plasmids to assemble the YF infectious cDNA

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The present invention relates to a vaccine against infections caused by YF virus and its preparation by regenerating YF 17D virus from the correspondent complementary DNA (cDNA) which is present in the new  
10 plasmids pYF 5'3' IV/G1/2 and pYFM 5.2/T3/27.

#### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The *Flavivirus* genus consists of 70 serologically  
15 cross-reactive, closely related human or veterinary pathogens causing many serious illnesses, which includes dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis (JE), tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) and yellow fever (YF). The  
20 Flaviviruses are spherical with 40-60 nm in diameter with an icosahedral capsid which contains a single positive-stranded RNA molecule.

YF virus is the prototype virus of the family of the Flaviviruses with a RNA genome of 10,862 nucleotides (nt), having a 5' CAP structure (118 nt) and a  
25 nonpolyadenylated 3' end (511 nt). The complete nucleotide sequence, of its RNA genome was determined by Pice, C.M. et al (1985).

The single RNA is also the viral message and its translation in the infected cell results in the synthesis of a polyprotein precursor of 3,411 amino acids which is cleaved by proteolytic processing to generate 10 virus-specific polypeptides. From the 5' terminus, the order of the encoded proteins is: C; prM/M; E; NS1; NS2A; NS2B; NS3; NS4A; NS4B and NS5. The first 3 proteins constitute the structural proteins, i.e., they form the virus together with the packaged RNA molecule. The remainder of the genome codes for the nonstructural proteins (NS) numbered from 1 through 5, according to the order of their synthesis.

The C protein, named capsid, has a molecular weight ranging from 12 to 14 kDa (12-14 kilodaltons); the membrane protein, M has a molecular weight of 8 kDa, and its precursor (prM) 18-22 kDa; the envelope protein, E, has 52-54 kDa, being all of them encoded in the first quarter of their genome.

Three of the nonstructural proteins are large and have highly conserved sequences among the flaviviruses, namely, NS1 has a molecular weight ranging from 38 to 41 kDa; NS3 has 68-70 kDa and NS5, 100-103 kDa. No role has yet been assigned to NS1 but NS3 has been shown to be bifunctional having a protease activity needed for the processing of the polyprotein, and the other is a nucleotide triphosphatase/helicase activity which is associated with viral RNA replication. NS5, the largest and most conserved protein, contains several sequence

motifs which are characteristic of viral RNA polymerases. The 4 small proteins , namely NS2A, NS2B, NS4A and NS4B, are poorly conserved in their amino acid sequences but not in their pattern of multiple hydrophobic stretches. 5 NS2A has been shown to be required for proper processing of NS1 whereas NS2B has been shown to be associated with the protease activity of NS3.

Two strains of yellow fever virus (YF), isolated in 1927, gave rise to the vaccines to be used for human 10 immunization. One, the Asibi strain, was isolated from a young african named Asibi by passage in Rhesus monkey (*Macaca mulatta*), and the other, the French Viscerotropic Virus (FVV), from a patient in Senegal.

In 1935, the Asibi strain was adapted to growth in 15 mouse embryonic tissue. After 17 passages, the virus, named 17D, was further cultivated until passage 58 in whole chicken embryonic tissue and thereafter, until passage 114, in denervated chicken embryonic tissue only. Theiler and Smith (Theiler, M. and Smith, H.H. (1937). 20 "The effect of prolonged cultivation in vitro upon the pathogenicity of yellow fever virus". J. Exp. Med. 65:767-786) showed that, at this stage, there was a marked reduction in viral visceroto and neurotropism when inoculated intracerebrally in monkeys. This virus was 25 further subcultured until passages 227 and 229 and the resulting viruses, without human immune serum, were used to immunize 8 human volunteers with satisfactory results,

as shown by the absence of adverse reactions and seroconversion to YF in 2 weeks. These passages yielded the parent 17D strain at passage level 180 (see Figure 1), 17DD at passage 195, and the 17D-204 at passage 204. 5 17DD was further subcultured until passage 241 and underwent 43 additional passages in embryonated chicken eggs to yield the virus currently used for human vaccination in some countries (passage 284). The 17D-204 was further subcultured to produce Colombia 88 strain 10 which, upon passage in embryonated chicken eggs, gave rise to different vaccine seed lots currently in use in France (I. Pasteur, at passage 235) and in the United States (Connaught, at passage 234). The 17D-213 strain was derived from 17D-204 when the primary seed lot (S1 15 112-69) from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG 83-66) was used by the World Health Organization (WHO) to produce an avian leukosis virus-free 17D seed (S1 213/77) at passage 237.

In the late 1930's and early 1940's, mass 20 vaccination was conducted in Brazil with the use of several substrains of 17D virus (Table I). These substrains differed in their passage history and they overlapped with regard to time of their use for inocula and/or vaccine production. The substitution of each one 25 by the next was according to the experience gained during vaccine production, quality control and human vaccination in which the appearance of symptomatology led to the discontinuation of a given strain.

Each of these 17D-204 strains (C-204; F-204) was plaque purified in different cell lines, the virus finally amplified in SW13 cells and used for cDNA cloning and sequence analyses (Rice, C.M.; Lenches, E.; Eddy, S.R.; Shin, S.J.; Sheets, R.L. and Strauss, J.H. (1985). "Nucleotide sequence of yellow fever virus: implications for flavivirus gene expression and evolution". *Science*. 229: 726-733; Despres, P.; Cahour, A.; Dupuy, A.; Deubel, V.; Bouloy, M.; Digoutte, J.P.; Girard, M. (1987). "High genetic stability of the coding region for the structural proteins of yellow fever strain 17D". *J. Gen. Virol.* 68: 2245-2247).

The 17D-213 at passage 239 was tested for monkey neurovirulence (R. S. Marchevsky, personal communication, see Duarte dos Santos et al, 1995) and was the subject of sequence analysis together with 17DD (at passage 284) and comparison to previously published nucleotide sequences of other YF virus strains (Duarte dos Santos et al, 1995) (Asibi: Hahn, C.S.; Dalrymple, J.M.; Strauss, J.H. and Rice, C.M. (1987). "Comparison of the virulent Asibi strain of yellow fever virus with the 17D vaccine strain derived from it". *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA.* 84: 2029-2033; 17D-204 strain, C-204: Rice, C.M.; Lenches, E.M.; Eddy, S.R.; Shin, S.J.; Sheets, R.L. and Strauss, J.H. (1985). "Nucleotide sequence of yellow fever virus: implications for flavivirus gene expression and evolution". *Science*. 229: 726-733; F-204: Despres, P.;

Cahour, R.; Dupuy, A.; Deubel, V.; Bouloy, M.; Digoutte, J.P. and Girard, M. (1987). "High genetic stability of the coding region for the structural proteins of yellow fever virus strain 17D". J. Gen. Virol. 68: 2245-2247)  
5 (see figure 1).

A total of 67 nucleotide differences, corresponding to 31 amino acid changes, were originally noted between the Asibi and 17D-204 genomic sequences (see Hahn, C.S. et al, 1987). The comparison between the nucleotide  
10 sequences of 17DD and 17D-213 substrains (see Duarte dos Santos et al, 1995) and the nucleotide sequence of 17D-204 substrain (see Rice et al, 1985) showed that not all changes are common and thus not confirmed as being 17D-specific. Therefore, the 17D-substrain specific changes  
15 observed are very likely not related to attenuation but may reflect differences in behavior of these strains in monkey neurovirulence tests. In consequence, the number of changes likely to be associated with viral attenuation were reduced by 26%, i.e., to 48 nucleotide changes. From  
20 these 48 nucleotide sequence changes which are scattered along the genome, 26 are silent mutations and 22 led to amino acid substitutions. More important are the alterations noted in the E protein because it is the main target for humoral neutralizing response, i.e., it is the  
25 protein where hemagglutination and neutralization epitopes are located, and it mediates cell receptor recognition and cell penetration, therefore targeting the virus to specific cells. Importantly, E protein

accumulate the highest ratio of nonconservative to conservative amino acid changes. Altogether, eleven nucleotide substitutions were observed in the E protein gene leading to 8 amino acid changes at positions 52, 170, 173, 200, 299, 305, 331 and 380 (respectively nucleotides 1127, 1482, 1491, 1572, 1870, 1887, 1965 and 2112 from the RNA 5' end).

Alterations at amino acids 52 and 200 are located in domain A of E protein (domain II in 3-D structure proposed for Flaviviruses E protein - Rey, F.A.; Heinz F.X.; Mandl, C.; Kunz, C and Harrison, S.C. (1995). "The envelope glycoprotein from tick-borne encephalitis virus at 2Å resolution". *Nature*. **375**: 291-298) which is conserved among Flaviviruses and contains cross-reactive epitopes as shown by Mandl, C.W. et al (Mandl, M.W.; Guirakhoo, F.; Holzmann, H.; Heinz, F.X. and Kunz, C. (1989). "Antigenic structure of the flavivirus envelope E protein at the molecular level using tick-borne encephalitis virus as a model". *J. Virol.* **63**: 564-571).

This domain II is highly crosslinked by disulphide bonds and undergoes low pH transition which is related to exposing a strictly conserved and hydrophobic stretch of amino acids which are supposed to be involved in the fusion of the viral envelope to the endosome membrane.

Alterations at amino acids 299, 305, 331 and 380 are located in the B domain (domain III in the 3-D structure - see Rey, F.A. et al). This domain was suggested to be

involved in viral attachment to a cellular receptor and consequently being a major determinant both of host range and cell tropism and of virulence/attenuation. The 4 amino acid changes reported for YF are located on the distal face of domain III. This area has a loop which is a tight turn in tick-borne encephalitis virus but contains 4 additional residues in all mosquito-borne strains. Because viruses replicate in their vectors, this loop is likely to be a host range determinant. This enlarged loop contains an Arginine-Glycine-Aspartic Acid (Arg-Gly-Asp) sequence in all 3 YF 17D vaccine strains. This sequence motif is known to mediate a number of cell interactions including receptor binding and is absent not only in the parental virulent Asibi strain but also in other 22 strains of YF wild type virus (Lepiniec, L.; Dalgarno, L.; Huong, V.T.Q.; Monath, T.P.; Digoutte, J.P. and Deubel, V. (1994). "Geographic distribution and evolution of yellow fever viruses based on direct sequencing of genomic DNA fragments". *J. Gen. Virol.* 75: 417-423). Such a fact suggests that the mutation from Threonine (Thr) to Arginine (Arg), creating a Arg-Gly-Asp motif, is likely to be relevant for the attenuated phenotype of the YF 17D strain. Consistently, Lobigs et al (Lobigs, M.; Usha, R.; Nesterowicz, A.; Marschall, I.B.; Weir, R.C. and Dalgarno, L. (1990). "Host cell selection of Murray Valley encephalitis virus variants altered at an RGD sequence in the envelope protein and in

mouse neurovirulence". *Virology*. **176**: 587-595) identified a Arg-Gly-Asp sequence motif (at amino acid 390) which led to the loss of virulence of Murray Valley encephalitis virus for mice.

5       Alterations at amino acids 170 and 173 in domain C (domain I of the E protein in the 3-D structure) map very close to the position that a neutralization epitope was identified for tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) virus (see Mandl, C.W. et al). A mutation at position 171 of TBE  
10 virus E protein was shown to affect the threshold of fusion-activating conformational change of this protein and the 2 changes observed for YF 17D virus may be related to same phenomenon. It is conceivable that a slower rate of fusion may delay the extent of virus  
15 production and thereby lead to a milder infection of the host. It is noteworthy that the recent development of infectious cDNA for Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus made by Sumiyoshi, H. et al (Sumiyoshi, H.; Hoke, C.H. and Trent, D.W. (1992). "Infectious Japanese encephalitis  
20 virus RNA can be synthesized from in vitro-ligated cDNA templates". *J. Virol.* **66**: 5425-5431) allowed the identification of a mutation (Lys for Glu) at amino acid 136 of the E protein which resulted in the loss of neurovirulence for mice (see Sumiyoshi, H.; Tignor, G.H.  
25 and Shope, R.E. (1996). "Characterization of a highly attenuated Japanese encephalitis virus generated from molecularly cloned cDNA". *J. Infect. Dis.* **171**: 1144-

1151). This means that domain I is an important area which contains a critical determinant of JE virus virulence in contrast to most of the data obtained from the analyses of virulence for several other flaviviruses for which it is suggested that domain III would be the primary site for virulence/attenuation determinants. Nevertheless, such analyses of the E protein provides a framework for understanding several aspects of flavivirus biology and suggests that it should be possible to engineer viruses for the development of new live flavivirus vaccine.

The issue of virulence/attenuation is of special interest for vaccine development but conceivably viral attenuation can result from genetic modification in one or more viral functions. YF virus is the ideal system to study flavivirus virulence and attenuation because: (i) there is a virulent strain (Asibi) from which an extremely well characterized vaccine strain was derived (17D) and has been successfully used for human vaccination for over 50 years; (ii) there is an animal system which reflects human infection; (iii) the complete nucleotide sequences from both virulent and attenuated strains have been determined and (iv) cDNA clones from which infectious RNA can be synthesized are available.

Holland, J. et al (Holland, J.; Spindler, K.; Horodyski, H.; Grabau, E.; Nichol, S. and VandePol, S. (1982). "Rapid evolution of RNA genomes". Science. 215:

1577-1585) described the fact that viral RNA genomes evolve rapidly. Therefore, a given viral population including YF vaccine viruses is likely to consist of a major type sequence population in which genetic variants  
5 can be detected. For YF 17D virus, this is easily seen when the virus is plaqued on cultured cells under an semi-solid overlay in which plaques of different sizes are observed. Previous genomic variability analysis using oligonucleotide fingerprinting suggested a high degree of  
10 genetic similarity between vaccines produced worldwide with an estimated sequence homology of 98-100%. However, genetic changes were detected and may have occurred within 1-2 passages possibly due to the selection of virion subpopulations or to point mutations. It is  
15 unknown whether the outstanding vaccine properties of the YF 17D virus are due to the existence of genetic variants in the vaccine population. Anywise, the stabilization of the YF 17D genome as DNA not only will reduce the accumulation of mutations in the viral genome as seed  
20 lots are produced to replace the previous one but will also provide a much more homogeneous population in terms of nucleotide sequence and consequently in terms of phenotypic markers including attenuation for humans, thereby providing the necessary standardization of YF  
25 substrain use for vaccine production.

The capability to manipulate the genome of flaviviruses through infectious clone technology has opened new possibilities for vaccine development. This is

so because virus can be recovered from complementary DNA by *in vitro* transcription and transfection of cultured cells with RNA, and these cDNAs corresponding to the complete viral genome allow introducing genetic modifications at any particular site of the viral genome. The pioneer study of Racaniello and Baltimore (Racaniello, V.R. and Baltimore, D. (1981). "Cloned poliovirus complementary DNA is infectious in mammalian cells". Science, 214: 916-919) first showed the feasibility to regenerate virus from cloned cDNA. In the patent US 4,719,177, Racaniello and Baltimore described, in details, the production of RNA viral cDNA by reverse transcribing viral RNA and inserting the resulting cDNA molecule into a recombinant DNA vector. The process was particularly concerned to the production of poliovirus double-stranded complementary DNA (ds cDNA). They found out that the transfected full-length poliovirus cDNA was itself infectious.

In addition, with the development of *in vitro* transcription systems (see Melton, D.A.; Krieg, P.A.; Rabagliati, M.R.; Maniatis, T.; Zinn, K. and Green, M.R. (1984). "Efficient *in vitro* synthesis of biologically active RNA and RNA hybridization probes from plasmids containing a bacteriophage SP6 promoter". Nucl. Acids. Res. 12: 7035-7056), a much higher efficiency in the synthesis of full length viral RNA, as compared to cDNA transcription in the cell, became possible. Furthermore,

the development of improved transfection methodologies such as cationic liposomes and electroporation increased the efficiency of RNA transfection of cultured cells.

The construction and cloning of a stable full-length dengue cDNA copy in a strain of *Escherichia coli* using the pBR322 plasmid vector was described by Lai, C.J. et al (Lai, C.J.; Zhao, B.; Hori, H. and Bray, M. (1991). "Infectious RNA transcribed from stably cloned full-length cDNA of dengue type 4 virus". Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA. 88: 5139-5143). They verified that RNA molecules produced by *in vitro* transcription of the full-length cloned DNA template were infectious, and progeny virus recovered from transfected cells was indistinguishable from the parental virus from which the cDNA clone was derived. But, as mentioned in the Patent Application WO 93/06214, such an infectious DNA construct and RNA transcripts generated therefrom were pathogenic, and that the attenuated dengue viruses generated thus far were genetically unstable and had the potential to revert back to a pathogenic form overtime. To solve this problem, the Applicant proposed to construct cDNA sequences encoding the RNA transcripts to direct the production of chimeric dengue viruses incorporating mutations to recombinant DNA fragments generated therefrom. A preferred mutation ablates NS1 protein glycosylation.

The construction of full-length YF 17D cDNA template that can be transcribed *in vitro* to yield infectious YF virus RNA was described by Rice et al (Rice, C.M.; Grakoui, A.; Galler, R. and Chambers, T. (1989). "Transcription of infectious yellow fever RNA from full-length cDNA templates produced by *in vitro* ligation". The New Biologist. 1: 285-296). Because of the instability of full-length YF cDNA clones and their toxic effects on *Escherichia coli*, they developed a strategy in which full-length templates for transcription were constructed by *in vitro* ligation of appropriate restriction fragments. Moreover, they found that the YF virus recovered from cDNA was indistinguishable from the parental virus by several criteria. The YF infectious cDNA is derived from the 17D-204 substrain.

Notwithstanding the YF virus generated from the known YF infectious cDNA is rather attenuated, it cannot be used for human vaccination because of its residual neurovirulence, as determined by Marchevsky, R.S. et al (Marchevsky, R.S.; Mariano, J.; Ferreira, V.S.; Almeida, E.; Cerqueira, M.J.; Carvalho, R.; Pissurno, J.W.; Travassos da Rosa, A.P.A.; Simões, M.C.; Santos, C.N.D.; Ferreira, I.I.; Muylaert, I.R.; Mann, G.F.; Rice, C.M. and Galler, R. (1995). "Phenotypic analysis of yellow fever virus derived from complementary DNA". Am. J. Trop. Med. Hyg. 52(1): 75-80).

In short, to obtain a YF vaccine virus using recombinant DNA techniques, it is necessary, cumulatively:

- 5 (1) to genetically modify the existing YF infectious cDNA;
- (2) to assure that the infectious DNA construct and RNA transcripts generated therefrom give rise to virus which is not pathogenic, and, moreover, does not have the potential to revert to a pathogenic form;
- 10 (3) the YF virus generated from cloned cDNA, in addition to being attenuated should retain its immunological properties.

Accordingly, an improved YF virus vaccine without neurovirulence and immunogenic generated from a cloned YF  
15 infectious cDNA should be developed for human immunization.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

20 It is an object of the present invention to provide a safe and effective YF virus vaccine obtained from a cloned cDNA having the phenotypic characteristics of the 17DD strain, mainly its attenuation and immunogenicity.

In one embodiment, the present invention relates to  
25 a new version of YF infectious cDNA clone that is 17DD-like, which is the most genetically stable substrain of the YF 17D strain.

In another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided new YF plasmids which have the complete sequence of the YF infectious cDNA.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a recombinant YF virus which is regenerated from a YF infectious cDNA

In another embodiment, the present invention relates to a process for production of a YF vaccine virus by transfecting host cells and recovering 17DD-like virus.

The cDNA template of the present invention resulted of nine mutations which have been introduced in the infectious cDNA named YFiv5.2 (see Rice et al, 1989).

New plasmids, named pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 and pYF45.2/T3/27, and a method to obtain the same are provided to accomplish the mentioned mutations.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 illustrates the passage history of the original YF Asibi strain and derivation of YF 17D vaccine strains.

FIGURE 2 the use of YF 17DD virus for human immunization during the establishment of the 17D strain in Brazil.

FIGURE 3 shows the analysis of viral E protein N-linked glycosylation on denaturing polyacrylamide gel.

FIGURE 4 shows the structure of plasmid pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 bearing the extreme 5' and 3' end sequences of the infectious cDNA of the present invention.

FIGURE 5 shows the structure of plasmid pYFM5.2/T3/27 bearing the genome middle region of the YF infectious cDNA of the present invention.

FIGURE 6 sets forth the complete nucleotide sequence of the YF infectious cDNA of the present invention.

FIGURE 7 illustrates the methodology for the regeneration of YF virus from cloned cDNA of the present invention.

FIGURE 8 displays the comparative plaque size analysis among YF 17D viruses.

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#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The phenotypic testing of the virus recovered from the 17D-204 substrain cDNA described by Rice et al., 1989 showed that the virus is suitable for mapping virulence determinants as far as reversion to the wild type phenotype is concerned. However, the slightly higher clinical score observed in neurovirulence tests suggests caution in its use for human vaccination (Marchevsky et al., 1995). It is also noteworthy that the YF 204 substrain, used for the preparation of the cDNA library and the infectious cDNA (Rice et al, 1985; 1989), is closely related in terms of lineage and passage number to other YF 204 substrains which brought about most cases of post vaccine encephalitis in vaccinees (Schoub, B.D.; Eppmann, C.J.; Johnson, S.; Downie, C. and Patel, P.L. 1990). "Encephalitis in a 13-year old boy following 17D YF vaccine". J. Infection 21: 105-106; Merlo, C.,

Steffen, R.; Landis, T., Tsai, T. and Karabatsos, N.  
(1993). "Possible association of encephalitis and a 17D  
TF vaccination in a 29-year old traveller". *Vaccine*. 11:  
691). In contrast, no cases of post vaccine encephalitis  
5 were recorded with the 17DD substrain, even in the early  
days of vaccination (Fox, J.P.; Lennette, E.H.; Manso, C.  
and Souza Aguiar, J.R. (1942). "Encephalitis in man  
following vaccination with yellow fever 17D virus *Am. J.*  
*Hyg.* 36: 17-142; Fox, J.P. and Penna, H.A. (1943).  
10 "Behavior of 17D yellow fever virus in Rhesus monkeys.  
Relation to substrain, dose and neural or extraneural  
inoculation". *Am. J. Hyg.* 38: 52-172).

As is evident from Table 1 and Figure 2 the 17DD  
substrain was by far the mostly used substrain for both  
15 inocula and vaccine production with special emphasis for  
the EPlow substrain which is still being used nowadays.  
The complete nucleotide sequence of the genome of 17DD  
EPlow substrain has been recently derived (Duarte dos  
Santos et al, 1995) and its comparison with the sequences  
20 available for other substrains like 17D-204 (Rice et al,  
1985; Despres et al, 1987) and 17D-213 (Duarte dos Santos  
et al, 1995) provides an estimate of the extent of  
genetic variability among these strains. The average  
number of fixed nucleotide or amino acid sequence changes  
25 per passage of the virus is significantly lower for DD  
suggesting that the 17DD strain is genetically more  
stable than the others (Galler, R. et al, *Vaccine*, in

press) and this may be of importance regarding YF vaccine production.

Table 1: Estimated amounts of inocula and vaccine produced with different substrains during the period of 1937-1942 in Brazil

17D substrains	Period of use in month	Inocula (ml)	Vaccine (ml)
17DRio	8	161	NA
17Dlow	15	132	NA
17D2Rio	12	NA	NA
17D3Rio	6	NA	4,080
17DDhigh	11	969	36,125
17DDlow	16	365	55,778
17DD1-8	12	Vaccine*	33,842
17D-NY102	6	1,317	2,668
17D-NY104	17	Vaccine	14,073
17D-NY316	3	Vaccine	1,820
17D-NY310	3	Vaccine	4,457
17DD EP	48	Vaccine	11,754
17DD EP <sub>low</sub>	48	NA	7,097
17DD EP <sub>high</sub>	2	NA	2,781

Vaccine means that the inocula for the subsequent vaccine production was also a lot of vaccine. The amount of inocula in these cases are not available.

Currently in use for vaccine production at FIOCRUZ

5 NA not available

Therefore, in the present invention, mutations have been introduced in the YF infectious clone cDNA, namely YFiv5.2, to make it ~~DD~~-like. These mutations are located  
10 at the following nucleotide position/gene/amino acid:

- 1140/E/36 (T (Thymine)  $\Rightarrow$  Val (Valine)  $\rightarrow$  C (Cytosine)  $\Rightarrow$  Ala (Alanine)),
- 1436, 1437/E/155 (G (Guanine), A (Adenine)  $\Rightarrow$  Asp (Aspartic Acid),  $\rightarrow$  A (Adenine), G (Guanine)  $\Rightarrow$  Ser (Serine)),  
15
- 1946/E/335 (T (Thymine)  $\Rightarrow$  Ser (Serine)  $\rightarrow$  C (Cytosine)  $\Rightarrow$  Pro (Proline)),
- 2219, 2220/E/409 (A (Adenine), C (Cytosine)  $\Rightarrow$  Thr (Threonine)  $\rightarrow$  G (Guanine), T (Thymine)  $\Rightarrow$  Val (Valine)),
- 20 • 8808/NS5/391 (A (Adenine)  $\Rightarrow$  Asn (Asparagine)  $\rightarrow$  G (Guanine)  $\Rightarrow$  Ser (Serine)),
- 9605/NS5/657 (G (Guanine)  $\Rightarrow$  Asp (Aspartic Acid)  $\rightarrow$  A (Adenine)  $\Rightarrow$  Asn (Asparagine)).

25 In addition to these mutations, one coding and four silent mutations occurred fortuitously at the following

nucleotide/gene 2356/E (T (Thymine) → C (Cytosine)),  
2602/NS1 (T (Thymine) → C (Cytosine)), 2677/NS1 (C  
(Cytosine) → T (Thymine)), 2681/NS1 (G (Guanine) ⇒ Ala  
(Alanine) → A (Adenine) ⇒ Thr (Threonine)), and 10722 (G  
5 (Guanine) → A (Adenine)). Finally, the mutation occurring  
at nucleotide/gene 8656/NS5 (A (Adenine) → C (Cytosine))  
was necessary to create a BstEII site permitting the  
appropriate ligation and regeneration of the complete  
genome and, consequently, the recovery of virus.

10 In the E protein, the creation of a N-linked  
glycosylation site at amino acid E/155 (nt), which is  
located in domain I (as defined in Rey, F.A. et al),  
might influence the fusogenic activity of the E protein  
as observed for a dengue type 2 virus that had that site  
15 eliminated by mutation. This is so because E proteins, in  
absence of sugar moiety, have a higher pH threshold and  
would therefore fuse to the endosomal membrane more  
easily and thereby allow the viral cycle to proceed. In  
this regard, the YF virus 17D-204 vaccine consists of a  
20 mixed population of viruses with or without that  
glycosylation site in contrast to the 17DD and 17D-213  
viruses (see Post, P.R.; Santos, C.N.D.; Carvalho, R.;  
Cruz, A.C.R.; Rice, C.M. and Galler, R. (1992).  
"Heterogeneity in envelope protein sequence and N-linked  
25 glycosylation among Yellow Fever virus vaccine strains.  
Virology. 188: 160-167). For the construction of the

infectious YF cDNA a population devoid of this site was selected. It is noteworthy that a 17D-204 virus that caused a fatal human case of post vaccinal encephalitis also had no N-linked glycosylation site due to mutation  
5 (see Jennings, A.D.; Gibson, C.A.; Miller, B.R.; Mathews, J.H.; Mitchell, C.J.; Roehrig, J.T.; Wood, D.J.; Taffs, F.; Sil, B.K.; Whitby, S.N.; Monath, T.P.; Minor, P.D.; Sanders, P.G. and Barrett, A.D.T. (1994). "Analysis of a yellow fever virus isolated from a fatal case of vaccine-  
10 associated human encephalitis". J. Infect. Dis. 169: 512-518).

Figure 3 shows a gel of immunoprecipitation of [<sup>35</sup>S] methionine labeled viral proteins of two Yellow Fever vaccine strains and of Yellow Fever Virus infectious  
15 clones. VERO cells were infected at an MOI of 1. At 48 hours post-infection, cell monolayers were pulsed-labeled with [<sup>35</sup>S] methionine for 1 hour. Detergent cell extracts were immunoprecipitated with yellow fever-specific mouse hyperimmune antiserum (obtained from ATCC). All  
20 immunoprecipitates were collected using protein A-sepharose. Samples were analysed by 10% sodium dodecyl sulfate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and by fluorography and exposition at -70°C. The numbers on the lanes correspond to: (1) vaccine strain 17DD; (2)  
25 infectious clone A5/2-T3; (3) infectious clone A5/T3; (4) vaccine strain 17D-213; (5) infectious clone G1/5.2; (6) infectious clone A5-T3/27; (7) infectious clone G1/2-T3

N/S; (8) infectious clone G1/2-T3/27. The positions of molecular weight markers are shown on the left and the yellow fever viral proteins on the right.

The potential role of the other changes in the E protein sequence for the complete attenuation of the virus recovered from cDNA is less clear.

Regarding the 2 alterations in the NS5 protein, there are no structural analyses available to date and it is, therefore, difficult to predict the effect of any particular amino acid change in its conformation/function. However, the mutation at amino acid 657 from the NS5 amino terminus is only 8 amino acids away from the putative catalytic site of the RNA replicase, the Gly-Asp-Asp (Glycine-Aspartic Acid-Aspartic Acid) motif, which is conserved throughout viral RNA polymerases from plant to animal viruses. It would not be surprising if this mutation has somewhat altered the activity of the enzyme leading to better RNA replication kinetics in the infected cell and consequently a higher viral output.

The mutations at nt sites 1140, 1436, 1437, 1946, 2219, 2220, 8808 and 9605 have been introduced in the YF infectious cDNA YFiv5.2. The YF infectious cDNA in its known version exists in the form of two plasmids bearing the extreme 5' and 3' end sequences (pYF5'3'IV) and the genome middle region (pYFM5.2) as described by Rice, C.M. et al (Rice et al, 1989). The construction of these YF plasmids required the ligation of several cDNA fragments

present in different plasmids of the cDNA library. The virus that gave rise to this cDNA library had been twice plaque purified in CEF cultures and the titer amplified by consecutive passages in Vero, BHK and SW13 cells, once  
5 each (see Figure 1). The extent of genetic variability in the viral population used for RNA extraction is not known. However, the complete nucleotide sequence analysis of the final infectious cDNA plasmids provided the identification of nucleotide changes not present in any  
10 other 17D virus for which genomic sequences are available. Due to stability problems, it was impossible to include the whole YF genome in one single plasmid and therefore a two-plasmid system and *in vitro* ligation of purified restriction fragments to regenerate the complete  
15 genome was established (see Rice, C.M. et al, 1989).

Plasmid pYF5'3'IV contains the YF 5' terminal sequence (nt 1-2271) adjacent to the SP6 phage polymerase promoter and 3' terminal sequence (nt 8276-10862) adjacent to the XhoI site used for production of run off  
20 transcripts (see figure 2 in Rice, C.M. et al, 1989). The plasmid pYFM5.2 contains YF 17D cDNA from nt 1372 to 9794.

The pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 plasmid is prepared from pYF5'3'IV by creating changes, in the YF 5' terminal  
25 sequence, at nucleotides 1140 and 1436/1437, and in the 3' terminal sequence, at nucleotides 8656 and 9605 (see Table 2). The remaining of the plasmid consists of pBR

322 with a deletion from the AatII to the Eco0109 sites which resulted in the destruction of both sites. This plasmid contains a unique AatII site corresponding to nt 8406 of the YF 17D cDNA. To accomplish the changes, two  
 5 separate rounds of cloning/mutagenesis steps were necessary to create the relevant mutations in the E and NS5 proteins. The E mutations were introduced by cloning a XbaI/PstI fragment into pAlter™ (Promega, Inc.) and restriction fragment exchanging with ApaI/NotI. The NS5  
 10 changes were introduced by cloning/mutagenesis of an EcoRI/SstI fragment in pAlter and swapping it back into the original plasmid using the same enzymes. The structure of plasmid pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 is shown in figure 4.

15 Table 2: YF plasmid genetic modification.

Plasmid	Nucleotide changes <sup>a</sup>	
YF5'3'IV	G1/2	1140
		1436/1437
		8656, 9605
YFM5.2	T3/27	1946
(Plasmid extended 719		2219/2220
nucleotides to the unique		8656
SalI site- T3 series)		8808

a. All changes were confirmed by nucleotide sequence determination on plasmid DNA and cDNA from recovered virus.

The plasmid pYFM5.2/T3/27 is prepared from pYFM5.2 by introducing the changes at nucleotides 1946, 2219/2220, 8656 and 8808. To accomplish the nucleotide changes, it was introduced into pYFM5.2 an AatII/SalI  
5 fragment encompassing YF nts 8406-9423 rendering this plasmid 719 nucleotide longer than its parental plasmid pYFM5.2. Since the SalI is also present at the same nucleotide position in the YF sequences contained in the other YF plasmid (pYF5'3' IV) it became possible to use a  
10 combination of ApaI or NsiI and SalI to produce the relevant restriction enzyme fragments. The intermediate plasmid pYFM5.2/T3 was used to derive the T3/27 plasmid which contains the changes at nucleotides 1946 (T→ C), 2219 (A→ G) and 2220 (C→ T) as compared to the parental  
15 YFiv 5.2 (see Table 3). The structure of plasmid pYFM5.2/T3/27 is shown in figure 5.

Table 3: Comparison of YF infectious plasmid clone sequences.

NT/gene	YFiv5.2 <sup>a</sup>	DD <sup>b</sup>	YFiv5.2/ DD <sup>c</sup>	NT→AA
1140/E	T	C	C	T→Val→C→Ala
1436,1437/E	G,A	A,G	A,G	G,A→Asp→A,G→Ser
1946/E	T	C	C	T→S→C→P
2219,2220/E	A,C	G,T	G,T	A,C→Thr→G,T→Val
2356/E	T	T	C	-
2602/NS1	T	T	C	-
2677/NS1	C	C	T	-
2681/NS1	G	G	A	G→Ala→A→Thr
8656/NS5	A	A	C	-
8808/NS5	A	G	G	A→Asn→G→Ser
9605/NS5	G	A	A	A→Asp→G→Asn
10454	G	A	A	-
10722	G	G	A	-

<sup>a</sup> Rice et al (1989)

<sup>b</sup> Duarte dos Santos et al (1995)

<sup>c</sup> Ferreira, II and Galler, R. (unpublished).

The BstEII site at YF nt 8656 was created in both YF plasmids and their digestion with ApaI or NsiI and BstEII provides the appropriate restriction enzyme fragments for the ligation and regeneration of the complete genome of

virus. This feature constitutes another genetic marker for this new version of the YF infectious cDNA. The complete nucleotide sequence of YF infectious cDNA (YFiv5.2/DD) is shown in Figure 6. Deposit of plasmids 5 pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 and pYFM5.2/T3/27 has been made at the American Type Culture Collection and they are identified by ATCC Accession No. 97771 and 97772, respectively.

Figure 7 shows the methodology for the regeneration of YF virus from cloned complementary DNA. The plasmids 10 G1/2 and T3/27 shown in figures 4 and 5 are digested with *ApaI* and *SalI* to produce restriction fragments which are purified, ligated and digested with *XhoI*. The resulting DNA corresponds to full-length YF cDNA template that can be used for *in vitro* transcription with SP6 polymerase to 15 produce infectious RNA transcripts upon transfection of cultured vertebrate cells. The black area corresponding to the vector sequences contain the beta-lactamase gene and the origin of replication. The position of the SP6 promoter is shown and is adjacent to the first 5' 20 nucleotide of the YF genome. Nucleotides 1-1603 (down to the *ApaI* site) and 9424 (*SalI*) to 10862 (*XhoI*) come from plasmid G1/2 whereas nucleotides from 1604 (*ApaI*) to 9423 (*SalI*) come from plasmid T3/27.

Besides pBR 322, other vectors which provide the 25 stabilization of the YF virus genome can be used to prepare the plasmids of the present invention. Specific examples include plasmids such as pBR 325, pBR 327, pBR

328, pUC 7, pUC 8, pUC 9, pUC 19, phages such as  $\lambda$  phage, M13 phage and the like.

Templates were prepared from pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 and pYFM5.2/T3/27 using ApaI/SalI and NsiI/SalI to produce  
5 the restriction fragments for *in vitro* ligation. After digestion with XhoI to linearize the ligated DNA, the template was used for *in vitro* transcription. Virus has been recovered after RNA transfection of cultured animal cells.

10 The virus regenerated from plasmids pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 and pYFM5.2/T3/27 will be hereinafter referred to as YFiv5.2/DD.

Similarly to YF 17DD and 17D-213 the new virus produces large plaques in Vero cells in contrast to the  
15 17D virus recovered from the original cDNA (Yfiv5.2; see figure 8). In ten consecutive passages of this virus in CEF cells this large plaque phenotype was shown to be stable. In addition, there was no alteration in its neurovirulence for mice as compared to the other well  
20 known YF 17D vaccine controls (Table 4).

Table 4: Mouse<sup>a</sup> neurovirulence and neuroinvasiveness of YF 17D viruses

virus	route of inoculation					
	intracerebral		intranasal			
	inoculum (PFU/ml) <sup>c</sup>	deaths	average survival time	inoculum (PFU/ml) <sup>c</sup>	deaths	average survival time
17D10 <sup>d</sup>	6.5x10 <sup>5</sup>	7/8	10.43±1.13	6.5x10 <sup>6</sup>	1/10	N.A. <sup>h</sup>
17D-213 <sup>e</sup>	2x10 <sup>6</sup>	8/8	8.50±1.07	2.1x10 <sup>6</sup>	2/10	16.5 days
17D-204/A5-13 <sup>f</sup>	4.75x10 <sup>5</sup>	8/8	8.50±0.93	4.75x10 <sup>6</sup>	0/9	N.A. <sup>h</sup>
17D-204/G112-13/27 <sup>g</sup>	1.3x10 <sup>6</sup>	8/8	8.50±0.93	1.3x10 <sup>7</sup>	0/14	N.A. <sup>h</sup>

a. Swiss inbred mice, 3-week old (11g).

b. pfu= plaque-forming unit

c. inoculum of 20µl each i.c and i.n.

d. Current substrain used for YF vaccine production the sequence of which base the genetic modifications introduced into the first YF infectious cDNA.

e. An early experimental tissue culture vaccine strain, it is also the WHO substrain.

f. This substrain corresponds to the original virus derived from the first version of the YF infectious cDNA.

g. Current version of the virus progeny from the genetically modified infectious cDNA clone.

h. N.A= not available

The animal cell culture used herein may be any cell insofar as YF virus 17D strain can replicate. Specific examples include, Hela (derived from carcinoma of human uterine cervix), CV-1 (derived from monkey kidney), BSC-1 (derived from monkey kidney), RK 13 (derived from rabbit kidney), L929 (derived from mouse connective tissue), CE (chicken embryo) cell, CEF (chicken embryo fibroblast), SW-13 (derived from human adrenocortical carcinoma), BHK-21 (baby hamster kidney), Vero (african green monkey kidney), LLC-MK2 (derived from Rhesus monkey kidney (Macaca mulata)), etc.

Therefore, according to one of the embodiments of the present invention, a protocol was established leading from nucleic acid to YF vaccine virus production under Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) by transfecting cells certified for human vaccine production and recovering 17DD-like virus. This virus was then used to produce primary and secondary seed lots in primary cultures of chicken embryo fibroblasts under GMP. The virus resulting from seed lots is tested for monkey neurovirulence. This work should set the precedent for the production of new live attenuated flaviviruses from cloned cDNA considering that infectious clones are now available for several of them with special emphasis on dengue and japanese encephalitis.

The work carried out to produce the original, primary and secondary seed lots is detailed in Example 5.

The production of YF vaccine based on the seed lot system has arisen from the necessity of having reliable virus regarding human vaccination. Thus, the concept of the seed lot system was the first break-through in the development of the YF vaccine. In the period of 1937-1942, the scientists which were working with the establishment of YF vaccine production did use a number of viral 17D substrains (17D Rio, 17Dlow, 17D2Rio, 17D3Rio, 17DD, 17DDhigh, 17DDlow, EP, EPlow, EPhigh, NY102, NY104, NY 310/318). As production and the vaccination campaigns went on and complications with vaccinees were noted it was realized the possibility of phenotypic selection of viruses by serial passage in tissue culture. When checking early records of vaccine production at FIOCRUZ, we have noticed that for all substrains more inocula was prepared than what was actually used for vaccine production and therefore vials of specific passages were usually available (Post, PR. and Galler, R., unpublished). This operating procedure together with the use of multiple strains at one time in a way did allow them to have uninterrupted production. With the observation of post-vaccinal complications in humans and also the failure of some viruses in the quality control tests (neurovirulence for monkeys) as described by Fox et al

(1942) and Fox and Penna (1943) it became imperative to reduce the variables during vaccine production. One of the possibilities was to reduce the viral passages used for production. That was accomplished by establishing the seed lot system in which the virus is kept at defined passage levels whereas that particular passage is quality tested. In the records we have noted that the primordial fact that led to this development was the observation that high passages of DD substrain (named DDhigh) led to the loss of immunogenicity in human vaccinees with deficient coverage of the local population against wild type YF (Fox & Penna, 1943). This observation led the scientists back to the initial passages of DD substrain, more precisely at sc 229/230, which was then used to prepare 8 consecutive inocula (named DD1 to 8). Each of these DD substrains were cultivated for not more than 30 passages. Every passage was actually used for vaccine production but to different extents. The procedure yielded reliable virus regarding human vaccination. At this stage the NY104 substrain was the one being used for most production of vaccine and therefore this change in operation was implemented and NY104 was the first substrain to be fully employed in the seed lot system. It is illustrative to such operating practice that only 3 seed lots (E688, E694 and E716) were used to produce almost 2 million doses of vaccine during a 10-month time interval.

Unfortunately, some of these vaccine batches turned out to be extremely neurotropic (Fox et al, 1942; Fox & Penna, 1943) and the use of this substrain was discontinued. The next strain in line was EPlow which was used at sc243 to produce inocula in embryonated eggs instead of chicken embryonic tissue without nervous system. There were 150 serial passages of EPlow in embryonated eggs but only 7 of these passages were used for vaccine production. Virus produced in that way performed well in monkey neurovirulence tests and in human trials. Therefore, EPlow at chicken embryo passage 35 was used to prepare the EPF374 vaccine which later gave rise to the DD primary and secondary seed lots under use nowadays, which are just 2 passages ahead of the original seed over a time period of 50 years.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, to accomplish the YF 17D vaccine virus propagation in cells certified for the production of human vaccines, primary cultures of chicken embryo fibroblasts (CEF) were used in all production steps. There are several reasons to use CEF cells: these cells have been used successfully for measles vaccine production for years with extensive experience in its preparation and quality controls; a number of Standard Operating Practices (SOPs) is available. Moreover, the production of YF vaccine in CEF cultures led to 3

consecutive lots of vaccine that passed all tests including neurovirulence for monkeys.

The stabilization of the YF 17D genome as DNA not only will reduce the accumulation of mutations in the viral genome as seed lots are produced to replace the previous one but will also provide a much more homogeneous population in terms of nucleotide sequence and consequently in terms of phenotypic markers including attenuation for humans.

As mentioned before, in a preferred embodiment, all lots were prepared in primary cultures of chicken embryo fibroblasts (CEF) using eggs derived from SPF (Specific Pathogen Free) flocks. Cell cultures were set up in a suitable medium and used later post-seeding. Viruses were recovered after incubation by centrifugating and removing the cellular debris. To the supernatant containing the viruses was added a stabilizer which is, for the skilled in the art, known to enhance the stability of viral immunogenic compositions. All viruses are stored at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

The following examples are illustrative of the invention and represent preferred embodiments. Those skilled in the art may know, or be able to find using no more than routine experimentation, to employ other appropriate materials and techniques, such as the above mentioned vectors, cultured cells and transfection methods.

## EXAMPLE 1

## Preparation of plasmids DNAs:

## a) Derivation of plasmid pYF5'3'IV

As described in Rice et al, 1989, plasmid pYF5'3'IV contains the 5' terminal YF sequence (nt 1-2271) adjacent to the SP6 promoter, and the 3' terminal sequence (nt 8276-10862) adjacent to the XhoI site, which is used to linearize the template and thereby allow the production of run-off transcripts, all introduced in the pBR322 sequence. The original plasmids from which the 5' terminal YF sequence was derived are: pYF5'ext#20 (nt 1-536), p28::: (nt 537-1964), and p10::: (nt 1965-2271). p35::: (nt 8276-8732), p34::: (nt 9658-10223), pYF3'ext.#17 (nt 10224-10708) and pYF3'1#12 (nt 10709-10862) were the original plasmids to derive the 3' terminal YF sequence (Rice et al, 1989). Plasmid pYF5'3'IV contains a unique AatII site corresponding to nt 8406 of the YF 17D cDNA.

## b. Derivation of plasmid pYF5'3'IV/G1/2

pYF5'3'IV/G1/2 was prepared from pYF5'3'IV by carrying out two separate rounds of cloning/mutagenesis to create the

changes in nucleotides 1140, 1436/1437 in E protein, and in nucleotides 8656, 8808 and 9605 in NS5 protein. The former genetic changes were carried out by cloning a XbaI/PstI fragment into pAlter (Promega Corp.) and replacing the original sequence with the mutant one by restriction fragment exchange using ApaI/NotI. The NS5 changes were introduced by cloning/mutagenesis of an EcoRI/SstI fragment in pAlter and swapping it back into the original plasmid using the same enzymes.

c) Preparation of plasmid pYFM5.2

The pYFM5.2 plasmid used was also described in Rice et al, 1989. The original plasmids from which the nucleotide sequence 1372-8704 of YF 17D cDNA was derived are: p9:: (nt 1372-1603), p10:: (nt 1604-3823), p3:: (nt 3824-6901), p9:: (nt 6902-7888) and p35:: XhoI#19 (nt 7889-8704).

p35:: XhoI#19 was constructed from p35:: in which a silent C to T change at nt 8212 was introduced to destroy the XhoI site in the YF cDNA as to allow the use of XhoI to linearize the DNA templates and consequently the production of run-off transcripts.

d) Derivation of plasmid pYFM5.2/T3/27

pYFM5.2/T3/27 was prepared from pYFM5.2 by introducing an AatIII/SalI fragment which encompasses YF nts 8406-9423 and creating a BstEII site at YF nt 8656. A second mutation was introduced at position 8808 in NS5 protein.

Since digestion of plasmid DNAs with AatIII is difficult because it is a very finicky and expensive enzyme, a BstEII site was created at YF nt 8656 in both YF plasmids, following a digestion with ApaI or NsiI to produce the appropriate restriction enzyme fragments for the ligation and regeneration of the complete genome, allowing the recovery of virus. This can also be accomplished when the restriction fragments are produced by digestion with ApaI or NsiI and SalI.

The structure of each plasmid is shown in figures 3 and 4 and the complete sequence of the YF coding sequences for each plasmid is given in figure 5.

A comparison between the original YF infectious plasmid clone, YF 17DD strain and the YF infectious cDNA clone, YFiv5.2/DD, sequences is shown in Table 3.

e) Preparation of large amounts of plasmid DNA

To prepare plasmids DNAs from bacteria, glycerol stocks of the *E. coli* harboring each of the two YF plasmids must be available. Luria Broth-50% glycerol media is used in the preparation of the stocks, which are stored at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Frozen aliquots of the pDNA are also available.

The bacteria are grown in 5 ml LB containing ampicillin (15  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ ) overnight at  $37^{\circ}\text{C}$ . This is used to inoculate 1:100 large volumes of LB (usually 100-200 ml). At  $\text{OD}_{600}$  of 0.8, chloramphenicol is added to 250  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  for the amplification of the plasmid DNA overnight. The plasmid is extracted using the alkaline lysis method. The final DNA precipitate is resuspended in TE (Tris-EDTA buffer) and cesium chloride is added until a refraction index of 1.3890 is reached. The plasmid DNA is banded by ultracentrifugation for 24 hours. The banded DNA is recovered by puncturing the tube, extracting with butanol and extensive dialysis.

The yields are usually 1 mg of pDNA/liter of culture for pYF5'3' IVG1/2 and 0.2 mg/liter for pYFM5.2/T3/27.

## EXAMPLE 2

## Preparation of DNA template:

The template to be used for the regeneration of YF 171 virus is prepared by digesting the plasmid DNA with NsiI and Sall (Promega Inc.) in the same buffer conditions, as recommended by the manufacturer. Ten  $\mu\text{g}$  of each plasmid are digested with both enzymes (the amount required is calculated in terms of the number of pmol-hits present in each pDNA in order to achieve complete digestion in 2 hours). The digestion is checked by removing an aliquot (200 ng) and running it on 0.8% agarose/TAE gels. When the digestion is complete, the restriction enzymes are inactivated by heating.

The DNA fragments are ligated at a concentration of 20  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  for each fragment and T4 DNA ligase to 5 U/ml. Ligation is allowed to proceed overnight at 15°C. The ligation mixture is heated to 65°C for 20 minutes to inactivate the T4DNA ligase and an aliquot taken out (200 ng).

Further digestion of the DNA resulting of the ligation is carried out by the use of XhoI, and is performed with

buffer conditions adjusted according to the manufacturer (Promega) specifications in order to linearize the template. The resulting product is thereafter phenol-chloroform extracted and ethanol precipitated.

The precipitate is washed with 80% ethanol and resuspended in sterile RNase-free Tris-EDTA buffer.

A template aliquot is taken for agarose gel analysis together with commercial markers for band sizing and quantitation. The template is stored at -20°C until use for *in vitro* transcription.

#### EXAMPLE 3

RNA transcription from cDNA template of the present invention:

RNA transcripts were prepared by using DNA template of the present invention, in a similar manner as described in Konarska *et al*, 1984 and in Rice *et al*, 1987 (Konarska, M.M.; Padgett, R.A.; Sharp, P.A. (1984) "Recognition of cap structure in splicing *in vitro* of mRNA precursors". *Cell*. 38: 731-736; Rice, C.M.; Levis R.; Strauss, J.H.; Huang, H.V. (1987) "Production of infectious RNA transcripts from

Sindbis virus cDNA clones: Mapping of lethal mutations, rescue of a temperature-sensitive marker, and *in vitro* mutagenesis to generate defined mutants. J Virol 61: 3809-3819). The reaction was allowed to proceed at 39°C for 1 hour. The mix is extracted with phenol-chloroform twice and the nucleic acid recovered by precipitation with ethanol. The precipitate is resuspended in sterile RNase-free water and an aliquot taken for specific infectivity determination.

#### EXAMPLE 4

##### RNA transfection:

Transfection of CEF is carried out using LipofectAMINE (Life Technologies catalogue # 18324-012. It is a 3:1 (w/w) liposome formulation of the polycationic lipid 2,3-dioleoyloxy-N-[2(sperminecarboxiamido)ethyl]-N-N, dimethyl-2,3-bis(9-octadecenyloxy)-1-propanaminium trifluoro acetate) and the neutral dioleoylphosphatidyl ethanolamine (DOPE) in membrane-filtered water) at a concentration of 20 µg/ml in RNase-free PBS. PBS - phosphate buffer saline- is prepared and sterilized by autoclaving at 121°C for 20 minutes. The LipofectAMINE is pipeted into a polystyrene 5 ml tube containing PBS. Primary CEF cells are seeded and used 24 hours post seeding.

The transcription mix is added to the cell culture monolayer dropwise. Cells are incubated for 20 minutes at room temperature. Thereafter, the mix is removed by aspiration, washed with PBS and incubated for 72 hours in 199 medium.

The culture supernatant constitute the viral stock after addition of stabilizer. The viral stock is tested for sterility, toxicity, potency and for the presence of adventitious agents. The viral stock is the original seed lot.

The specific infectivity of the transcripts is deduced from experiments in which serial dilutions of the RNA are transfected into Vero cells and these are overlaid with semi-solid medium. Staining with crystal violet for the counting of plaques and knowing the amount of RNA, as determined by measuring the OD (otic density) at 260 nm, will allow the determination of specific infectivity of the transcripts (PFU/ $\mu$ g total RNA).

This determination is relevant to establishing the multiplicity of infection events that lead to the original stock. It ensures an acceptable number of events equivalent to infection with live virus in order to reduce the

probability of accumulation of mutations in the viral genome given the high number of replication cycles due to low RNA input.

There are currently two methods for an efficient transfection of cultured cells with RNA. One is lipid-mediated and the other is electroporation. In the lipid-mediated method, LipofectAMINE or Lipofectin are normally used. A series of experiments using viral RNA extracted from YFiv5.2/DD-infected Vero cells allowed the comparison of the efficiency of Lipofectin and LipofectAMINE as well as the amount of RNA which provide the highest transfection yields (measured by specific infectivity titers) as related to the concentration of lipid used (concentrations ranging from 10 to 40  $\mu\text{g/ml}$ ). LipofectAMINE is the reagent used in the present invention because it had the highest performance. The amount of RNA to be used cannot be very high. There is a limit in the amount of RNA that can be mixed with a corresponding amount of lipid to reach the best transfection efficiency, and, in consequence, the highest specific infectivity. In the present invention, it is used a ratio of the reagents ranging 0.5-2  $\mu\text{g}$  of total RNA: 10-40  $\mu\text{g}$  of LipofectAMINE per 1 ml of PBS.

## EXAMPLE 5

## Preparation of seed lots

All lots were prepared in primary cultures of CEF using eggs derived from SPF (Specific Pathogen Free) flocks. Viruses were recovered by pooling the medium present in each T-flask into centrifuge bottles and spinning at low speed to remove cellular debris. The supernatant was aspirated into 1L flasks containing stabilizer at 1:1 ratio and frozen slowly by rotating on an ethanol dry ice bath after removal of all quality control aliquots. All viruses are stored at -70°C.

## Preparation of the original seed lot

The original seed lots consists of 3 separate transcription/transfection experiments carried out on different days with different batches of primary CEF cultures.

Primary chicken embryo fibroblasts were seeded. A total of 3 disposable T-flasks of 175 cm<sup>2</sup>, containing *in vitro* transcribed RNA were transfected into CEF cells using LipofectAmine™. Each T-flask provided a total of 80 ml of culture supernatant. In three separate transfections performed at different days and therefore with different

lots of CEF cells titers for the original seed lots were: T1,  $10^{4.66}$  (4,66 log: pfu/ml); T2,  $10^{4.87}$  (4,87 log: pfu/ml); T3,  $10^{5.46}$  (5,46 log: pfu/ml). Each lot provided a total volume of 480 ml of original virus. Eighty ml were used for quality control remaining 400 ml for the preparation of primary seed lot(s).

#### Preparation of primary seed lot

Two primary seed lots were prepared and named LP1 and LP2. LP1 derives from original seed lot T3 whereas LP2 derives from T2. Each was tested for sterility, potency and adventitious agents with satisfactory results.

The obtained volumes and titers are:

Seed lot	Volume (ml)	Titer (log <sub>10</sub> pfu/ml)
LP1	1.200	6.22
LP2	1.600	6.20

pfu= plaque-forming unit

#### Secondary seed lots

Three secondary seed lots were prepared and named LS1, LS2 and LS3. LS1 and LS2 derive from primary seed lot LP1 whereas LS3 derives from LP2. Each was tested for sterility, potency and adventitious agents with satisfactory results.

The obtained volumes and titers are:

Seed lot	Volume (ml)	Titer (log: pfu/ml)
LS1	5.200	6.20
LS2	5.600	6.05
LS3	5.200	6.73

Each of these seed lots should suffice for YF vaccine production using current manufacturing methodology (embryonated eggs) or the cellular system (CEF cells) for nearly 50 years at a rate of at least 50 million doses/year.

The foregoing provides a description of the preferred embodiments, however, it should be noted that numerous structural changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

1 AGTAAATCCT GTGTGCTAAT TGAGGTGCAT TGGTCTGCAA ATCGAGTTGC  
51 TAGGCAATAA ACACATTTGG ATTAATTTTA ATCGTTCGTT GAGCGATTAG  
101 CAGAGAACTG ACCAGAACAT GTCTGTGTCGT AAAGCTCAGG GAAAAACCCT  
151 GGGCGTCAAT ATGGTACGAC GAGGAGTTCG CTCCTTGTC AAAAAATAA  
201 AAAAAAAAC AAAACAAATT GGAAACAGAC CTGGACCTTC AAGAGGTGTT  
251 EAAGGATTTA TCTTTTCTT TTTGTTCAAC ATTTGACTG GAAAAAAGAT  
301 CACAGCCCAC CTAAAGAGGT TGTGGAAAAT GCTGGACCCA AGACAAAGCT  
351 TGGCTGTTCT AAGGAAAGTC AAGAGAGTGG TGGCCAGTTT GATGAGAGGA  
401 TTGTCCTCAA GGAAACGCCG TTCCCATGAT GTTCTGACTG TGCAATTCCT  
451 AATTTTGGGA ATGCTGTTGA TGACGGGTGG AGTGACCTTG GTGCGGAAAA  
501 ACAGATGGTT GCTCCTAAAT GTGACATCTG AGGACCTCGG GAAAACATTC  
551 TCTGTGGGCA CAGGCAACTG CACAACAAAC ATTTTGAAG CCAAGTACTG  
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951 TGGCTGTTGG TCCGGCCTAC TCAGCTCACT GCATTGGAAT TACTGACAGG  
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10801 GGTCTGTGAG CACAGTTTGC TCAAGAATAA GCAGACCTTT GGATGACAAA  
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**Figure 6**

## CLAIMS

1. A vaccine composition for humans against yellow fever infection comprising a recombinant YF virus which is regenerated from YF infectious cDNA having the base sequence set forth in figure 6 and equivalents thereto containing different codons for the same amino acid sequences or equivalent sequences.
2. A vaccine composition according to claim 1 wherein the recombinant YF virus is a virus recovered from a transfected cell culture of chicken embryo fibroblasts.
3. A vaccine composition according to claims 1 and 2 wherein the recombinant YF virus is present in said composition in an amount sufficient to induce immunity against said infection and wherein said composition further comprises a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.
4. A vaccine composition according to claim 3 which further comprises a stabilizer pharmaceutically acceptable.
5. A YF infectious cDNA having the base sequence set forth in figure 6 and equivalents thereto containing different codons for the same amino acid sequences or equivalent sequences.

6. A DNA construct consisting essentially of a vector and a DNA segment bearing the extreme 5' and 3' end sequences of the YF infectious cDNA of claim 5.

7. The DNA construct according to claim 6 wherein the  
5 said vector is selected from the group consisting of pBR322, pBR325, BR327, pBR328, pUC7, pUC8, pUC9, pUC19,  $\lambda$  phage, M13 phage or others in which the YF genome is genetically stable.

8 The DNA construct according to claim 6 which has the  
10 structure of plasmid pYF5'3' IV/G1/2.

9. The DNA construct consisting essentially of a vector and a DNA segment bearing the genome middle region of the YF infectious cDNA of claim 5.

10. The DNA construct according to claim 9 which has  
15 the structure of plasmid pYFM5.2/T3/27.

11. The DNA construct according to claims 8, 9 and 10 wherein the said vector is selected from the group consisting of pBR322, pBR325, BR327, pBR328, pUC7, pUC8, pUC9, pUC19,  $\lambda$  phage, M13 phage or others in, which the YF  
20 genome is genetically stable, either in parts or bearing the complete sequence set forth in claim 5.

12. A recombinant YF virus which is regenerated from YF infectious cDNA having the base sequence set forth in figure 6 and equivalents thereto containing different codons for  
25 the same amino acid sequences or equivalent sequences.

13. The recombinant YF virus according to claim 12 which is a virus recovered from a transfected cell culture of chicken embryo fibroblasts.

5 14. The recombinant YF virus according to claims 12 and 13 which is the YFiv5.2/DD.

15. A method for producing recombinant YF virus comprising the steps of:

- a. transfecting cells with YF infectious cDNA of claim 5;
- 10 b. culturing said cells under conditions sufficient for the cellular production of recombinant YF virus; and
- c. harvesting said recombinant YF virus which is a YF 17DD-like virus.

15 16. The method according to claim 15 wherein the said YF infectious cDNA is the cDNA as set forth in figure 6.

17. The method according to claims 15 and 16 wherein the said cells are selected from the group consisting of Hela (derived from carcinoma of human uterine cervix), CV-1 (derived from monkey kidney), BSC-1 (derived from monkey kidney), RK 13 (derived from rabbit kidney), L929 (derived from mouse connective tissue), CE (chicken embryo) cell, CEF (chicken embryo fibroblast), SW-13 (derived from human adrenocortical carcinoma), BHK-21 (baby hamster kidney), Vero (african green monkey kidney), LLC-MK2 (Rhesus monkey

kidney (Macaca mulata)) or others wherein the YF virus can replicate.

18. The method according to claim 15 wherein the said cells are CEF.

5 19. The method according to claim 15 which is carried out under Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).

20. An original seed lot comprising the YFiv5.2/DD which is produced according to claim 19.

10 21. A primary seed lot comprising the YFiv5.2/DD which is produced according to claim 19.

22. A secondary seed lot comprising the YFiv5.2/DD which is produced according to claim 19.

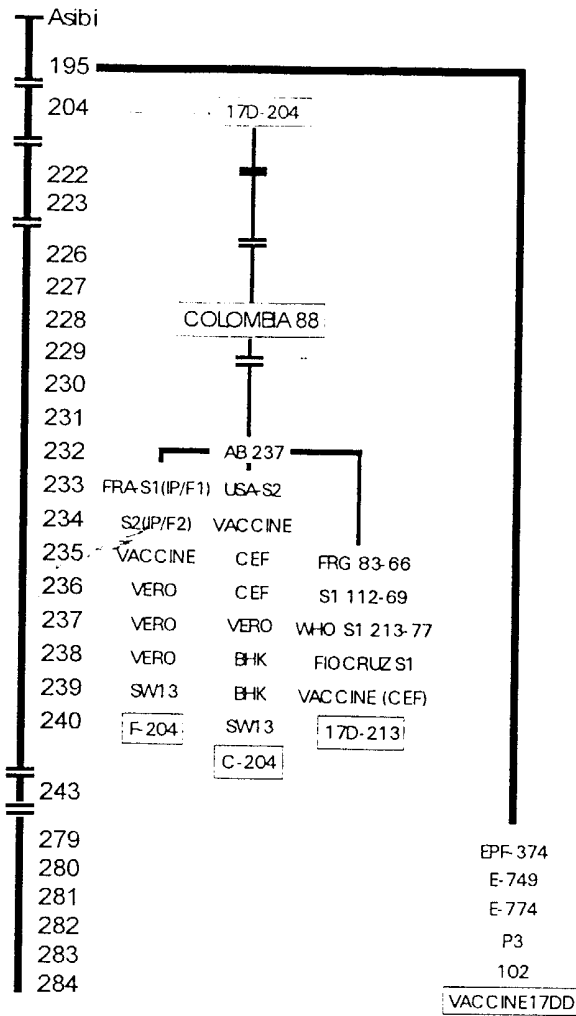


Figure 1

BREVET N°

PLANCHE II/6

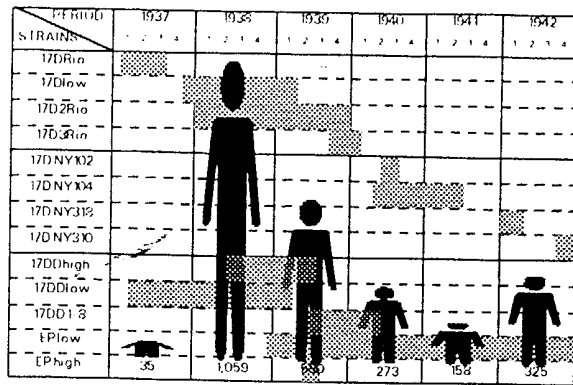


FIGURE 2

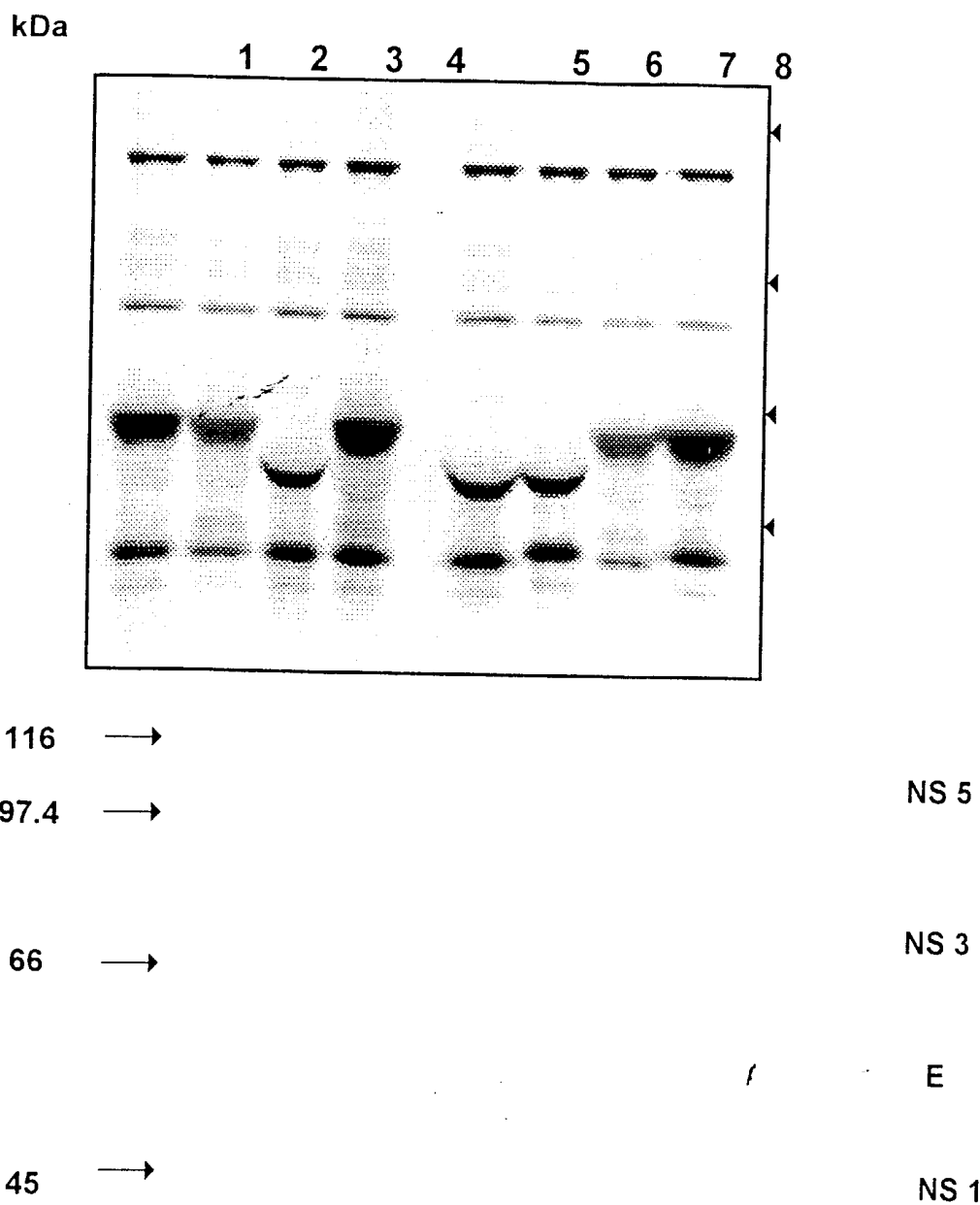


FIGURE 3

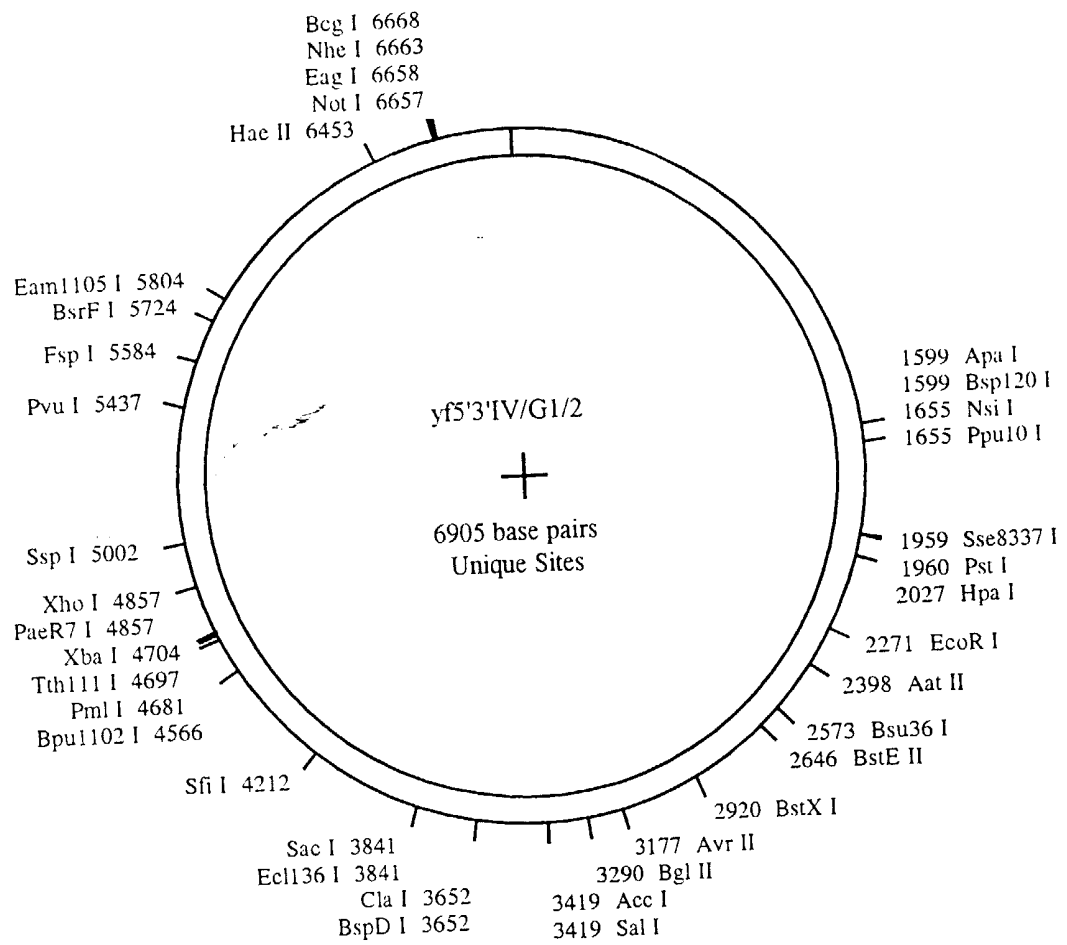


Figure 4

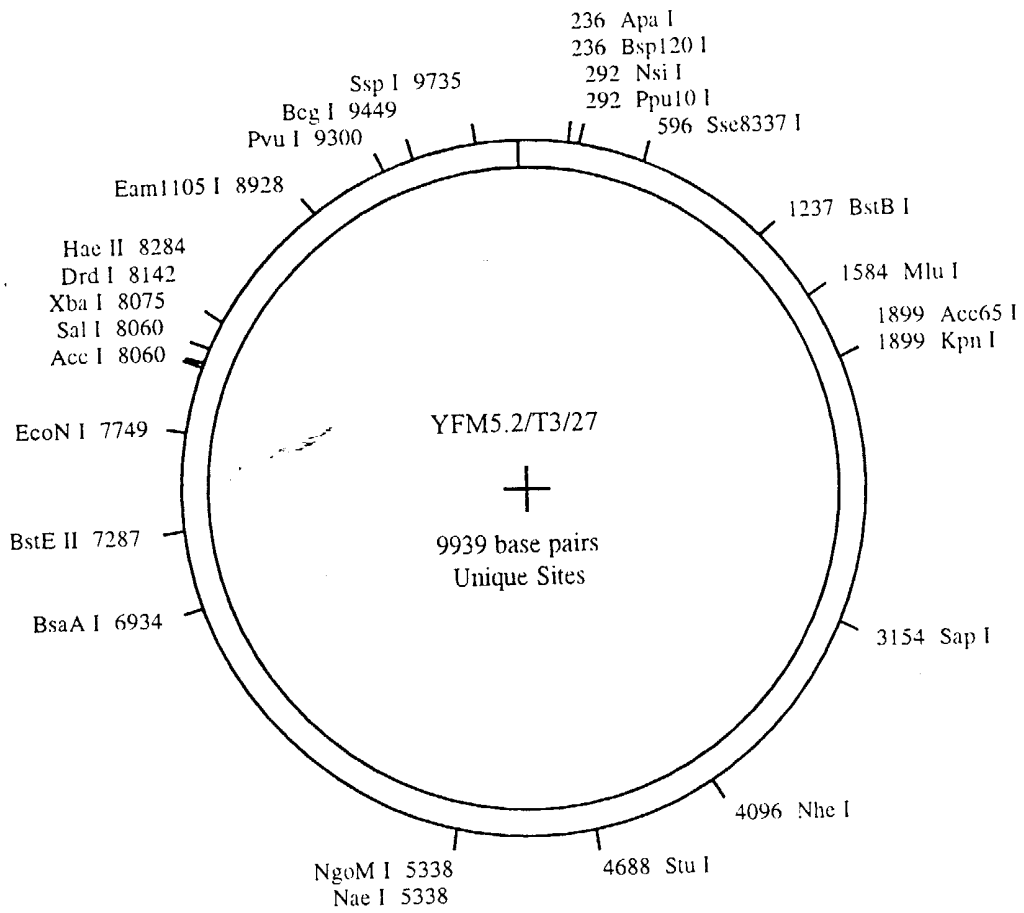


Figure 5

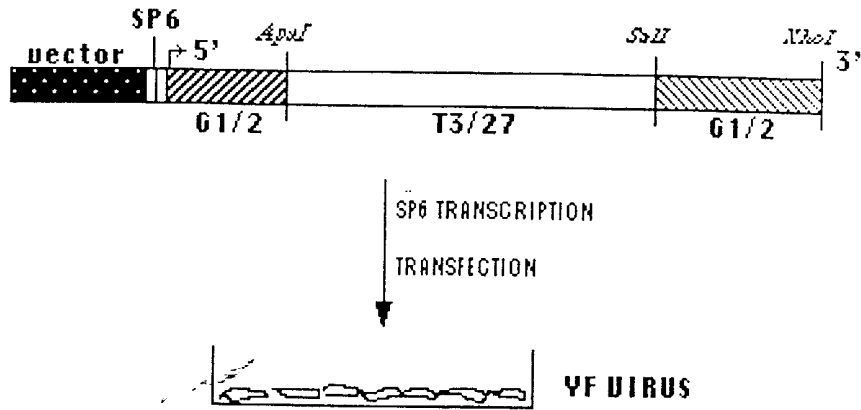


Figure 7