

(19) **DANMARK**

(10) **DK/EP 2393830 T3**



(12) **Oversættelse af
europæisk patentskrift**

Patent- og
Varemærkestyrelsen

-
- (51) Int.Cl.: **C 07 K 14/415 (2006.01)** **A 61 K 38/04 (2006.01)** **A 61 K 38/10 (2006.01)**
A 61 K 38/16 (2006.01) **A 61 K 39/36 (2006.01)** **C 07 K 7/06 (2006.01)**
C 07 K 7/08 (2006.01)
- (45) Oversættelsen bekendtgjort den: **2015-04-27**
- (80) Dato for Den Europæiske Patentmyndigheds
bekendtgørelse om meddelelse af patentet: **2015-01-28**
- (86) Europæisk ansøgning nr.: **10704399.4**
- (86) Europæisk indleveringsdag: **2010-02-05**
- (87) Den europæiske ansøgnings publiceringsdag: **2011-12-14**
- (86) International ansøgning nr.: **GB2010000198**
- (87) Internationalt publikationsnr.: **WO2010089554**
- (30) Prioritet: **2009-02-05 GB 0901927** **2009-02-05 GB 0901928**
2009-07-20 GB 0912578 **2009-08-14 WO PCT/GB2009/001995**
2009-10-12 GB 0917871
- (84) Designerede stater: **AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GR HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK
MT NL NO PL PT RO SE SI SK SM TR**
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- (54) Benævnelse: **Græspeptider til vaccine**
- (56) Fremdragne publikationer:
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DESCRIPTION

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to compositions for preventing or treating allergy to grass.

Background of the Invention

[0002] T-cell antigen recognition requires antigen presenting cells (APCs) to present antigen fragment (peptides) on their cell surface in association with molecules of the major histocompatibility complex (MHC). T cells use their antigen specific T-cell receptors (TCRs) to recognise the antigen fragments presented by the APC. Such recognition acts as a trigger to the immune system to generate a range of responses to eradicate the antigen which has been recognised.

[0003] Recognition of external antigens by the immune system of an organism, such as man, can in some cases result in diseases, known as atopic conditions. Examples of the latter are the allergic diseases including asthma, atopic dermatitis and allergic rhinitis. In this group of diseases, B lymphocytes generate antibodies of the IgE class (in humans) which bind externally derived antigens, which are referred to in this context as allergens since these molecules elicit an allergic response. Production of allergen-specific IgE is dependent upon T lymphocytes which are also activated by (are specific for) the allergen. Allergen-specific IgE antibodies bind to the surface of cells such as basophils and mast cells by virtue of the expression by these cells of surface receptors for IgE.

[0004] Crosslinking of surface bound IgE molecules by allergen results in degranulation of these effector cells causing release of inflammatory mediators such as histamine, 5-hydroxytryptamine and lipid mediators such as the sulphidoleukotrienes. In addition to IgE-dependent events, certain allergic diseases such as asthma are characterised by IgE-independent events.

[0005] Allergic IgE-mediated diseases are currently treated with agents which provide symptomatic relief or prevention. Examples of such agents are antihistamines, β_2 agonists, and glucocorticosteroids. In addition, some IgE-mediated diseases are treated by desensitisation procedures that involve the periodic injection of allergen components or extracts. Desensitisation treatments may induce an IgG response that competes with IgE for allergen, or they may induce specific suppressor T cells that block the synthesis of IgE directed against allergen. This form of treatment is not always effective and poses the risk of provoking serious side effects, particularly general anaphylactic shock. This can be fatal unless recognised immediately and treated with adrenaline. A therapeutic treatment that would decrease or eliminate the unwanted allergic-immune response to a particular allergen, without altering the immune reactivity to other foreign antigens or triggering an allergic response itself would be of great benefit to allergic individuals.

[0006] Grass allergens are universally recognised as a major cause of allergic diseases in humans and animals, including asthma, allergic rhinitis and allergic dermatitis. Proteins present in grass pollen are particularly important. For example, approximately 90% of hayfever sufferers are allergic to grass pollen. Hayfever is the common term for a form of seasonal allergy characterised by sneezing, runny nose and itching eyes. The term "hayfever" arose because this form of allergic disease is most prevalent during "haymaking season", which corresponds to the flowering season of many grasses, when grass plants release the highest quantities of pollen. It is particularly prevalent in summer, typically from the end of May to the end of August (in the Northern Hemisphere).

[0007] It has been calculated that for adults in the United States, hayfever is the 5th leading chronic disease and a major cause of work absenteeism, resulting in nearly 4 million missed or lost workdays each year, resulting in a total cost of more than \$700 million in total lost productivity. Allergies are also the most frequently reported chronic condition in children, limiting activities for more than 40% of them. Each year, allergies account for more than 17 million outpatient office visits in the United States; seasonal allergies such as hayfever account for more than half of these allergy visits.

[0008] A therapeutic or preventative treatment would therefore be of great benefit to humans that suffer or are at risk of suffering from grass allergy.

Summary of the Invention

[0009] Grass pollen allergens are typically classified into groups, with most species expressing at least one pollen allergen in each group. Examples of groups include:

- the Group 1 grass pollen allergens, which include, for example, the proteins Lol p 1 from Rye grass (*Lolium perenne*) and Phl p 1 from Timothy grass (*Phleum pratense*); and
- the Group 5 grass pollen allergens, which include, for example, the proteins Lol p 5a and Lol p 5b from Rye, Phl p 5 from Timothy, and Cyn d 5 from Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*).

[0010] The present inventors have discovered that certain peptide fragments derived from the major allergens in the pollens of grass species are particularly useful in desensitising individuals to these allergens. The polypeptide combinations of the invention have been selected for their ability to bind to many MHC Class II molecules, and cause T cell proliferation with minimal histamine release. The compositions and formulations of the invention may therefore be provided to individuals for preventing or treating allergy to grass by tolerisation.

[0011] The peptides described herein were selected as MHC class II-binding T cell epitopes through use of *in silico* analysis to predict peptide-MHC interactions and MHC class II binding assays. Additional epitopes were identified by homology. Peptides described herein and peptide combinations of the invention were further selected on the basis of *in vitro* T cell response assays.

[0012] The peptide combinations of the invention, however, provide a broad coverage of efficacy over the human population by targeting multiple different MHC molecules. A vaccine formulated with peptides as described herein would therefore have broad utility.

[0013] The inventors' work has produced peptide combinations with the following characteristics:

- the combination binds to many different MHC Class II molecules
- the combination gives significant stimulation of cytokine release in grass
- allergic individuals
- the peptides of the combinations do not give significant histamine release.

[0014] The peptide combinations are selected from an extensive analysis of grass epitope sequences to identify core peptides having particularly good MHC binding properties and cytokine response profiles in grass allergic individuals. The combinations comprise a core of three such peptides, one of each being selected from the most prevalent grasses, Timothy, Perennial Rye and Bermuda.

[0015] Providing a core group of peptides representing the three most prevalent grasses, preferably a core group of four or more different individual polypeptides in the same composition provides a variety of MHC-binding epitopes, and so builds in redundancy to allow for the polymorphic nature of the MHC. Providing a core group of the invention, preferably four or more different individual polypeptides having particularly good MHC binding properties and cytokine response profiles also provides multiple T cell epitopes, allowing recruitment of a broad range of T cell specificities for induction of tolerance. Thus, a composition of the invention has beneficial additive effects over use of single polypeptides. The Inventors have also shown that compositions of the invention were able to provide extremely high coverage of a polymorphic study population as measured by cytokine responses.

[0016] Accordingly, the present invention provides a composition suitable for use in preventing or treating allergy to grass, which composition comprises:

1. (a) the polypeptide consisting of the sequence KIPAGELQIDKIDA, or a variant thereof,
2. (b) the polypeptide consisting of the sequence SGKAFGAMAKKGQED, or a variant thereof, and
3. (c) the polypeptide consisting of the sequence LKKAVTAMSEAEK, or a variant thereof,

wherein said variant is a longer polypeptide of up to 30 amino acids in length which comprises the sequence specified in (a), (b) or (c).

Description of the sequences mentioned herein

[0017] SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 provide the polypeptide sequences as set out in Tables 2 to 4. SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 27 correspond to peptides derived from Group 1 grass allergens. SEQ ID NOS: 28 to 73 correspond to peptides derived from Group 5 allergens.

Detailed description of the invention

[0018] The invention concerns peptides which can be used in tolerisation. Such peptides may be derived from any grass allergen described herein or be variants thereof as described below. A difficulty associated with approaches to desensitisation based on peptide immunisation lies in how to select an appropriate size and region of the allergen as the basis for the peptide to be used for immunisation. The size of the peptide of choice is crucial. If the peptide is too small, the vaccine would not be effective in inducing an immunological response. If the peptides are too large, or if the whole antigen is introduced into an individual, there is the risk of inducing adverse reactions, such as anaphylaxis, which may be fatal.

[0019] The polypeptides used in the invention have been selected to retain T cell specificity whilst being small enough in size to not possess significant tertiary structure that would enable them to retain the conformation of an IgE-binding epitope of the whole molecule. The polypeptides used in the invention therefore do not induce significant crosslinking of adjacent specific IgE molecules on cells such as mast cells and basophils and consequently do not cause significant histamine release.

[0020] An advantage of the invention is the ability of the peptides to broadly target Major Histocompatibility Complex (MHC) molecules. T cell receptors (TCRs) are highly variable in their specificity. Variability is generated, as with antibody molecules, through gene recombination events within the cell. TCRs recognise antigen in the form of short peptides bound to molecules encoded by the genes of the Major Histocompatibility Complex (MHC). These gene products are the same molecules that give rise to "tissue types" used in transplantation and are also referred to as Human Leukocyte Antigen molecules (HLAs) which terms may be used interchangeably. Individual MHC molecules possess peptide binding grooves which, due to their shape and charge are only capable of binding a limited group of peptides. The peptides bound by one MHC molecule may not necessarily be bound by other MHC molecules.

[0021] When a protein molecule such as an antigen or allergen is taken up by antigen presenting cells such as B lymphocytes, dendritic cells, monocytes and macrophages, the molecule is enzymatically degraded within the cell. The process of degradation gives rise to peptide fragments of the molecule which, if they are of the appropriate size, charge and shape, may then bind within the peptide binding groove of certain MHC molecules and be subsequently displayed upon the surface of antigen presenting cells. If the peptide/MHC complexes are present upon the antigen presenting cell surface in sufficient numbers they may then activate T cells which bear the appropriate peptide/MHC-specific T cell receptors.

Due to the polymorphic nature of the MHC, individuals in an outbred population such as man will express different combinations of MHC molecules on their cell surfaces. Since different MHC molecules can bind different peptides from the same molecule based on the size, charge and shape of the peptide, different individuals will display a different repertoire of peptides bound to their MHC molecules. Identification of universal MHC-binding peptide epitopes in an outbred population such as man is more difficult than in inbred animals (such as certain strains of laboratory mice). On the basis of differential MHC expression between individuals and the inherent differences in peptide binding and presentation which this brings, it is unlikely that a single peptide can be identified which will be of use for desensitisation therapy in man.

[0022] As discussed below, the invention addresses this problem by providing compositions based on more than one peptide i.e. peptide combinations. These combinations are based on core groups of peptides identified experimentally as showing surprisingly strong responses in grass allergic patients when tested individually, and particularly when provided in combination. These core subsets of peptides have advantageous properties when included in grass peptide vaccines.

[0023] The core groups comprise at least one peptide derived from Timothy grass, at least one peptide derived from Perennial Rye and at least one peptide derived from Bermuda grass, each peptide showing particularly good individual response characteristics. The inclusion of such peptides in combination allows for coverage of the three most prevalent grasses, and additionally extends to coverage of other grasses by homology, as discussed further below.

[0024] Additionally a core group may comprise at least four peptides selected from peptides having the most highly ranked individual response characteristics from the group tested, and further shown to provide optimal response characteristics for a grass vaccine when provided together combination.

[0025] Such peptide combinations comprise at least one peptide derived from a Group I grass allergen or a variant thereof and at least one peptide derived from a Group V grass allergen or a variant thereof. The classification of grass allergens as Group I and Group V grass allergens is well known to the skilled person, and is further discussed herein. A preferred Group I grass allergen is the Bermuda Grass allergen, Cyn d 1. A preferred Group V grass allergen is the Rye Grass allergen, Lol p 5. The invention relates to a composition comprising at least one peptide derived from Cyn d1 or a variant thereof and at least one peptide derived from Lol p 5 or a variant thereof. Compositions based on combinations of Cyn d 1 and Lol p 5 peptides or variants thereof are further discussed below.

[0026] Peptides described herein comprise, consist of, or consist essentially of the sequences shown in any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. Variants of these specific peptides are also described herein. The variants may comprise, consist of, or consist essentially of sequences which are fragments of either any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 or homologues of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73.

[0027] Described herein is a composition suitable for use in preventing or treating allergy to grass pollen by tolerisation comprising:

1. (a) at least one of the polypeptides Tim07B (KIPAGELQIIDKIDA), , Tim 10B (KYTVFETALKKAITAMSE), Tim 04A (WGAIWRIDTPDKL), Tim 07G (FKVAATAANAAPANDK), or a variant of any thereof;
2. (b) at least one of the polypeptides Ber01 (SGKAFGAMAKKGQED), Ber02 (FIPMKSSWGA), Ber02C (KSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK), and Ber 02B KDSDEFIPMKSSWGAIWR, or a variant of any thereof; and
3. (c) at least one of the polypeptides Bio04A (LKKAVTAMSEAEK), Rye09B (PEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT), Bio02A (KYDAYVATLTEALR), Bio03A (KFIPTLVAAVKQAYAAKQ), Rye 08A (ETYKFIPSLEAAVKQAY), Rye 05C (NAGFKA AVAAAANAPPK), or a variant of any thereof,

wherein said variant is a longer polypeptide of up to 30 amino acids in length which comprises the sequence of the corresponding polypeptide specified in (a), (b) or (c).

[0028] The composition of the invention is selected in accordance with (a) to (c) above and comprises a minimum of three polypeptides, a first polypeptide being Tim07B or a variant thereof, a second polypeptide being Ber01 or a variant thereof, and a third polypeptide being Bio04A or a variant thereof. Preferably, the above composition comprises in addition to the core three polypeptides a fourth polypeptide of (a), (b), or (c) or a variant of any thereof. The composition may comprise four, five, six, seven, eight or more polypeptides of (a), (b), (c) or variants thereof.

[0029] In some aspects, the composition may comprise two, three, four or more polypeptides of (a) or variants thereof. In additional aspects, the composition may comprise two, three, four or more polypeptides of (b) or variants thereof. In further aspects the composition may comprise two, three, four, five, six or more polypeptides of (c) or variants thereof. These selections are subject to the composition comprising the polypeptide Tim07B or a variant thereof, the polypeptide Ber01 or a variant thereof, and the polypeptide Bio04A or a variant thereof.

[0030] The composition may comprise at least two polypeptides selected from group (a) or variants thereof, at least two polypeptides selected from group (b) or variants thereof and at least two polypeptides selected from group (c) or variants thereof.

[0031] The composition may be suitable for use in preventing or treating allergy to grass pollen by tolerisation.

[0032] All the above compositions based on (a) to (c) may comprise further polypeptides selected from any of SEQ ID NOS 1 to 73 or variants thereof not previously selected according to (a) to (c).

[0033] Also described herein is a composition suitable for use in preventing or treating allergy to grass pollen by tolerisation comprising at least four different polypeptides selected from:

1. (a) KIPAGELQIIDKIDA (Tim07B) or a variant thereof;
2. (b) SGKAFGAMAKKGQED (Ber01) or a variant thereof;
3. (c) LKKAVTAMSEAEK (Bio04A) or a variant thereof;
4. (d) PEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT (Rye09B) or a variant thereof;
5. (e) FIPMKSSWGA (Ber02) or a variant thereof;
6. (f) KSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK (Ber02C) or a variant thereof;
7. (g) KFIPTLVAAVKQAYAAKQ (Bio03A) or a variant thereof; and
8. (h) KYDAYVATLTEALR (Bio02A) or a variant thereof;

wherein said variant is a longer polypeptide of up to 30 amino acids in length which comprises the sequence of the corresponding

polypeptide specified in (a) to (h).

[0034] The composition thus comprises a minimum of four polypeptides, each of said four polypeptides being selected from polypeptides of (a) to (h) or variants thereof. The above composition may comprise additional polypeptides of (a) to (h) or a variant of any thereof, such as five, six, seven, eight or more polypeptides of (a) to (h) or variants thereof.

[0035] A composition of the invention may be selected in accordance with (a) to (h) above, subject to comprising the polypeptide Tim07B or a variant thereof, the polypeptide Ber01 or a variant thereof, and the polypeptide Bio04A or a variant thereof.

[0036] The above compositions selected from (a) to (h) preferably comprise at least four different polypeptides of (a) to (h) or comprise at least four variants each corresponding to different original or baseline sequences of (a) to (h). Thus, the compositions are typically selected on the basis of four different epitope sequences of origin.

[0037] All of the above compositions based on (a) to (h) may thus comprise further polypeptides selected from any of SEQ ID NOS 1 to 73 or variants thereof not previously selected according to (a) to (h). All selections are subject to the composition comprising at least four polypeptides selected from (a) to (h) or variants thereof.

[0038] Optionally, any composition of specific polypeptides described herein may comprise further polypeptides up to a total of fourteen unique polypeptides. The further polypeptides will typically relate to (i.e. are typically homologues and/or fragments of) the other sequences, i.e. SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73, that are not amongst the polypeptides already selected. The further peptides are typically functional variants of one of the peptides of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. The further polypeptides may be identical to any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. The composition may therefore comprise up to fourteen different polypeptides as provided in any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73, subject to at least three polypeptides being selected from Tim07B or a variant thereof, Ber01 or a variant thereof, and Bio04A or a variant thereof. However, the optional further polypeptides do not need to be 100% identical to any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. They are preferably at least 65% identical to at least 9 (for example at least 10, 11, 12 or 13) or more contiguous amino acids in any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73, not already selected amongst the at least three polypeptides. These contiguous amino acids may comprise a MHC class II epitope, for example which binds to any of the MHC molecules mentioned herein.

[0039] The invention also provides compositions and formulations comprising the polypeptides of the invention for use in preventing or treating grass allergy by tolerisation. Such tolerisation will typically be to an epitope (for example a MHC class II-binding T cell epitope) present in any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73.

[0040] A composition of the invention may be a pharmaceutical formulation comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or diluent. The pharmaceutical formulation may be used in a method of preventing or treating allergy to grass.

Grass species

[0041] The grass species Rye (*Lolium perenne*), Timothy (*Phleum pratense*) and Bermuda (*Cynodon dactylon*) are responsible for a high proportion of grass allergy worldwide, particularly allergies associated with grass pollen, such as hayfever. Other important grass species include Velvet grass (*Holcus lanatus*), Orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), Canary grass (*Phalaris canariensis*) and Meadow grass / Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*).

[0042] Rye is one of the most common grasses in the world, and is widely used as a source of animal fodder. It is native to Europe, but has been introduced on all continents worldwide and is common in all temperate zones. It can flower throughout the summer, but typically between May and July in the northern hemisphere. Rye is well adapted to mild, humid temperate climates, and grows best on rather heavy, rich, moist soils. It also grows well on well-manured lighter soils with sufficient moisture. It dislikes shade and requires a well-drained soil. Rye typically grows in locations with a soil pH in the range of about 6 to about 7, though it can tolerate a range from about 4.5 to about 8.5, preferably with an annual precipitation in the range of about 21 to about 180cm.

[0043] Timothy is another of the most common grasses in the world and is a primary source of animal fodder. It is native and widespread in most of Europe, North Africa and northern Asia. It has been introduced and is widespread in North and South America, South Africa and Australia. Timothy grass typically grows in locations with an annual precipitation in the range of about 35 to about 180cm, an annual temperature range of about 4 to about 22°C, and a soil pH of about 4.5 to about 8. It is best adapted to a cool, humid, temperate climate, growing best on heavy, deep and moist or even wet soils. The optimum temperature for growth is 18° - 21°C varying with day/night temperatures of 15°/10°C and 21°/15°C. The Timothy flowering season is typically confined to the early summer and Timothy pollen is a major cause of grass allergy during this season. In studies, up to 21% of

patients with allergic rhinitis or other symptoms have been found to be responsive to Timothy pollen.

[0044] Bermuda grass typically grows in locations with an annual precipitation of about 9 to about 429cm, an annual temperature range of about 5 to about 28°C, and a soil pH in the range of about 4 to about 8.5, preferably about 6 to about 7. The Bermuda flowering season is typically in late summer (August to October in the northern hemisphere). Bermuda plants produce high quantities of pollen and are therefore a major cause of hayfever. Bermuda plants have also been reported to cause contact dermatitis. Bermuda is widely grown throughout the world, predominantly in warm climates, and is typically found between the latitudes of about 30° north and about 30° south.

Peptide fragments of Group 1 and Group 5 grass pollen allergens

[0045] The major allergens of grass include the Group 1 grass pollen allergens and Group 5 grass pollen allergens. Proteins from different species are assigned to groups based on amino acid sequence homology. For example, Group 1 major grass pollen allergens include the Timothy protein Phl p 1 and the Rye protein Lol p 1, and the Group 5 major grass pollen allergens include the Timothy protein Phl p 5 and the Rye protein Lol p 5.

[0046] The present inventors have identified the regions in certain grass pollen allergen proteins which comprise MHC Class II-binding T cell epitopes. The present inventors have also shown that regions corresponding to MHC Class II-binding T cell epitopes within the major grass pollen allergens are highly conserved between representatives in a given group, see for example, Example 2. Based on this information, peptides derived from the relevant regions of a protein in a given Group are suitable for preventing or treating grass allergy by tolerisation to the grass allergens in that Group. For example, the relevant regions from, for example, Phl p 1 of Timothy or Lol p 1 of Rye are suitable for use in preventing or treating grass allergy by tolerisation to the Group 1 grass allergens.

[0047] The peptides described herein are derived from the Group 1 (SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 27) and Group 5 (SEQ ID NOS: 28 to 73) grass allergens. The terms "peptide" and "polypeptide" are used interchangeably herein. The above proteins are also referred to herein as "the allergens".

Tables 2 to 4 set out the sequences of the peptides described herein, indicating the parent protein from which each peptide derives.

[0048] A specific preferred composition is Combination 3 as set out in Table 7. In this composition, one or more of the individual polypeptides of SEQ ID NO:s 1, 2, 5, 31, 46 and 69 can optionally be substituted for a variant thereof. In some embodiments two, three, four, five or more of the polypeptides of SEQ ID NO:s 1, 2, 5, 31, 46 and 69 present in Combination 3 can be substituted for variants thereof.

[0049] An even more preferred composition comprises, consists or consists essentially of the polypeptides of SEQ ID NO:s 1, 2, 5, 28, 31, 91 and 93 or variants thereof. Other preferred compositions comprise SEQ ID NO:s 1, 2, 5, 28, 31, 91 and 93 or in place of one, two or three, four or more of these polypeptides, variants thereof. In some embodiments, the above seven peptide compositions do not comprise any further polypeptides or do not comprise any further polypeptides derived from grass allergens. In preferred embodiments, the compositions comprise SEQ ID NO:s 1, 2, 5, 28, 31, 91 and 93 or variants thereof and do not contain any further proteins with more than 20% homology to a protein of any species of grass mentioned herein. The above compositions may comprise further non-peptide constituents such as carriers or adjuvants.

Variants

[0050] The composition of the invention may comprise a variant of any of the polypeptides Tim07B1, Ber01 and Bio04A. Such a variant is a longer polypeptide of up to 30 amino acids in length which comprises the sequence of Tim07B1, Ber01 or Bio04A. Other variants described herein typically comprise 1, 2, 3 or more of the MHC class II epitopes present in the corresponding peptide of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73.

[0051] Functional variants are mentioned herein. Such a variant may be able to tolerate an individual to a class II MHC epitope present in the corresponding peptide of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 59, and thus it will typically comprise sequence that binds to the same MHC class II molecule and/or is recognised by a T cell which recognises the corresponding epitope in the polypeptide of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. The sequence is thus capable of tolerising against the corresponding sequence in the native polypeptide. The variant polypeptide may thus tolerate against the corresponding native polypeptide.

[0052] Variants of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 may be fragments derived by truncation, e.g. by removal of one or more amino acids from the N and/or C-terminal ends of a polypeptide. Fragments may also be generated by one or more internal deletions, provided that the core 9 amino acids that makes up the T cell epitope is not substantially disrupted.

[0053] For example, a variant of SEQ ID NO: 1 may comprise a fragment of SEQ ID NO: 1, i.e. a shorter sequence. This may include a deletion of one, two, three or four amino acids from the N-terminal end of SEQ ID NO: 1 or from the C-terminal end of SEQ ID NO: 1. Such deletions may be made from both ends of SEQ ID NO: 1. A variant of SEQ ID NO: 1 may include additional amino acids (for example from the sequence of the parent protein from which the peptide derives) extending beyond the end(s) of SEQ ID NO: 1. A variant may include a combination of the deletions and additions discussed above. For example, amino acids may be deleted from one end of SEQ ID NO: 1, but additional amino acids from the full length parent protein sequence may be added at the other end of SEQ ID NO: 1. The same discussion of variants above also applies to SEQ ID NOS: 2 to 73.

[0054] A variant peptide may include one or more amino acid substitutions from the amino acid sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 or a fragment thereof. A variant peptide may comprise sequence having at least 65% sequence identity to at least 9 or more contiguous amino acids in any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. More preferably a suitable variant may comprise at least 70%, at least 75%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, or at least 98% amino acid identity to at least 9 contiguous amino acids of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. This level of amino acid identity may be seen at any section of the peptide, although it is preferably the core region. The level of amino acid identity is over at least 9 contiguous amino acids but it may be at least 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 or at least 16 or 17 amino acids, depending on the size of the peptides of comparison. Accordingly, any of the above-specified levels of identity may be across the entire length of sequence.

[0055] Examples of preferred variants selected on the basis of sequence identity to particularly preferred peptides described herein are:

Variants of Ber01 (SEQ ID NO: 1): SGKAFGAMAKKGEED (SEQ ID NO:74), *Holcus lanatus*, Hol 11; *Poa pratensis* Poa p 1; SGHAFGSMAMKGEED (SEQ ID NO: 75), *Dactylis glomerata*, Dac g 1; *Lolium perenne* Lol p 1; SGIAFGSMAMKGDDED (SEQ ID NO: 76), *Phleum pratense*, Phl p 1, SGTAFGAMAKKGEED (SEQ ID NO: 77), *Zea mays*, Zea m 1.

[0056] Variants of Bio02A (SEQ ID NO: 28): KYDAYVATLTESLR (SEQ ID NO: 78), *Hordeum vulgare*, Hor v 5; KYDAYVATLSEALR (SEQ ID NO: 79), *Phleum pratense*, Phl p 5; *Poa pratensis*, Poa p 9; KYDAFVAALTEALR (SEQ ID NO: 80), *Dactylis glomerata*, Dac g 5; KYDAFVTTLTEALR (SEQ ID NO: 81), *Holcus lanatus*, Hol 15.

[0057] Variants of Bio03A (SEQ ID NO: 29): KFIPTLEAAVKQAYAA (SEQ ID NO: 82), *Dactylis glomerata*, Dac g 5; *Phalaris aquatica*, Pha a 5; KFIPALEAAVKQAYAA (SEQ ID NO: 83), *Phleum pratense*, Phl p 5.

[0058] Variants of Tim07B (SEQ ID NO: 69): KIPAGELQIVDKIDA (SEQ ID NO: 84), *Dactylis glomerata*, Dac g 5; *Phalaris aquatica*, Pha a 5; KIPTGELQIVDKIDA (SEQ ID NO: 85), *Lolium perenne*, Lol p 5; KIPAGEQQIIVDKIDA (SEQ ID NO: 86), *Poa pratensis*, Poa p 5. Tim07B is also conserved in *Holcus lanatus*, Hol 15b.

[0059] Variants of Bio04A (SEQ ID NO: 31): LKKAITAMSEAQK (SEQ ID NO: 87), *Phleum pratense*, Phl p5; *Holcus lanatus*, Hol 15b; LKKAITAMSQAQK (SEQ ID NO: 88), *Poa pratensis*, Poa p 5.

[0060] Variants of Ber02C (SEQ ID NO: 5): KESWGAIWRIDTPDK (SEQ ID NO: 89), *Phalaris aquatica*, Pha a 1; *Phleum pratense*, Phl p 1.

[0061] Variants of Rye09B (SEQ ID NO: 46): PQVKYAVFEAALTKAIT (SEQ ID NO: 90), *Phleum pratense*, Phl p 5.

[0062] Thus, SEQ ID NO:s 74 to 90 are preferred variants which may be used as substitutes for the above native peptides. Other preferred variants for native peptides of the invention are derived from maize allergens. Maize allergens have close homology to grass pollen allergens and so sequences derived from maize may contain cross-reactive epitopes of use in tolerisation against grass pollen allergy.

[0063] In connection with amino acid sequences, "sequence identity" refers to sequences which have the stated value when assessed using ClustalW (Thompson et al., 1994, supra) with the following parameters:

Pairwise alignment parameters -Method: accurate, Matrix: PAM, Gap open penalty: 10.00, Gap extension penalty: 0.10; Multiple

alignment parameters -Matrix: PAM, Gap open penalty: 10.00, % identity for delay: 30, Penalize end gaps: on, Gap separation distance: 0, Negative matrix: no, Gap extension penalty: 0.20, Residue-specific gap penalties: on, Hydrophilic gap penalties: on, Hydrophilic residues: GPSNDQEKR. Sequence identity at a particular residue is intended to include identical residues which have simply been derivatized.

[0064] A variant peptide may comprise 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more, or up to 10 amino acid substitutions from any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. Substitution variants preferably involve the replacement of one or more amino acids with the same number of amino acids and making conservative amino acid substitutions. For example, an amino acid may be substituted with an alternative amino acid having similar properties, for example, another basic amino acid, another acidic amino acid, another neutral amino acid, another charged amino acid, another hydrophilic amino acid, another hydrophobic amino acid, another polar amino acid, another aromatic amino acid or another aliphatic amino acid. Some properties of the 20 main amino acids which can be used to select suitable substituents are as follows:

Ala	aliphatic, hydrophobic, neutral	Met	hydrophobic, neutral
Cys	polar, hydrophobic, neutral	Asn	polar, hydrophilic, neutral
Asp	polar, hydrophilic, charged (-)	Pro	hydrophobic, neutral
Glu	polar, hydrophilic, charged (-)	Gln	polar, hydrophilic, neutral
Phe	aromatic, hydrophobic, neutral	Arg	polar, hydrophilic, charged (+)
Gly	aliphatic, neutral	Ser	polar, hydrophilic, neutral
His	aromatic, polar, hydrophilic, charged (+)	Thr	polar, hydrophilic, neutral
Ile	aliphatic, hydrophobic, neutral	Val	aliphatic, hydrophobic, neutral
Lys	polar, hydrophilic, charged(+)	Trp	aromatic, hydrophobic, neutral
Leu	aliphatic, hydrophobic, neutral	Tyr	aromatic, polar, hydrophobic

[0065] Further variants include those in which instead of the naturally occurring amino acid the amino acid which appears in the sequence is a structural analog thereof. Amino acids used in the sequences may also be modified, e.g. labelled, providing the function of the peptide is not significantly adversely affected. Where the peptide has a sequence that varies from the sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 or a fragment thereof, the substitutions may occur across the full length of the sequence, within the sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 or outside the sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. For example, the variations described herein, such as additions, deletions, substitutions and modifications, may occur within the sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. A variant peptide may comprise or consist essentially of the amino acid sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73 in which one, two, three, four or more amino acid substitutions have been made. A variant peptide may comprise a fragment of the parent protein that is larger than any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. In this embodiment, the variations described herein, such as substitutions and modifications, may occur within and/or outside the sequence of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73.

[0066] The variant peptides described herein are 9 to 30 amino acids in length inclusive. Preferably, they may be from 9 to 20 or more preferably 13 to 17 amino acids in length. The peptides may be the same length as the peptide sequences in any one of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73.

[0067] The peptides may be chemically derived from the polypeptide allergen, for example by proteolytic cleavage or can be derived in an intellectual sense from the polypeptide allergen, for example by making use of the amino acid sequence of the polypeptide allergen and synthesising peptides based on the sequence. Peptides may be synthesised using methods well known in the art.

[0068] The term "peptide" includes not only molecules in which amino acid residues are joined by peptide (-CO-NH-) linkages but also molecules in which the peptide bond is reversed. Such retro-inverso peptidomimetics may be made using methods known in the art, for example such as those described in Meziere et al (1997) J. Immunol.159, 3230-3237. This approach involves making pseudopeptides containing changes involving the backbone, and not the orientation of side chains. Meziere *et al* (1997) show that, at least for MHC, class II and T helper cell responses, these pseudopeptides are useful. Retro-inverse peptides, which contain NH-CO bonds instead of CO-NH peptide bonds, are much more resistant to proteolysis.

[0069] Similarly, the peptide bond may be dispensed with altogether provided that an appropriate linker moiety which retains the spacing between the carbon atoms of the amino acid residues is used; it is particularly preferred if the linker moiety has

substantially the same charge distribution and substantially the same planarity as a peptide bond. It will also be appreciated that the peptide may conveniently be blocked at its N-or C-terminus so as to help reduce susceptibility to exoproteolytic digestion. For example, the N-terminal amino group of the peptides may be protected by reacting with a carboxylic acid and the C-terminal carboxyl group of the peptide may be protected by reacting with an amine. Other examples of modifications include glycosylation and phosphorylation. Another potential modification is that hydrogens on the side chain amines of R or K may be replaced with methylene groups ($-\text{NH}_2 \rightarrow -\text{NH}(\text{Me})$ or $-\text{N}(\text{Me})_2$).

[0070] Analogues of peptides according to the invention may also include peptide variants that increase or decrease the peptide's half-life *in vivo*. Examples of analogues capable of increasing the half-life of peptides used according to the invention include peptoid analogues of the peptides, D-amino acid derivatives of the peptides, and peptide-peptoid hybrids. A further embodiment of the variant polypeptides used according to the invention comprises D-amino acid forms of the polypeptide. The preparation of polypeptides using D-amino acids rather than L-amino acids greatly decreases any unwanted breakdown of such an agent by normal metabolic processes, decreasing the amounts of agent which needs to be administered, along with the frequency of its administration.

[0071] The peptides provided by the present invention may be derived from splice variants of the parent proteins encoded by mRNA generated by alternative splicing of the primary transcripts encoding the parent protein chains. The peptides may also be derived from amino acid mutants, glycosylation variants and other covalent derivatives of the parent proteins which retain at least an MHC-binding property of the allergens. Exemplary derivatives include molecules wherein the peptides of the invention are covalently modified by substitution, chemical, enzymatic, or other appropriate means with a moiety other than a naturally occurring amino acid.

[0072] Variants as described above may be prepared during synthesis of the peptide or by post- production modification, or when the peptide is in recombinant form using the known techniques of site- directed mutagenesis, random mutagenesis, or enzymatic cleavage and/or ligation of nucleic acids.

[0073] In accordance with the invention, the further one or more peptides that the composition may comprise are preferably functional variants of any of SEQ ID NOS: 1 to 73. That is, the peptides are preferably capable of inducing an immune response. In particular, they may be capable of inducing a late phase response in an individual with grass allergy. This may be tested by the ability of the peptide to induce T cell proliferation in a sample of T cells. Methods of testing the induction of T cell proliferation are well known in the art and one such method is exemplified in Example 4. Preferably the one or more further peptides are capable of causing T cell proliferation in at least 20 % of samples of T cells, wherein each sample is obtained from different grass allergic individuals in the population. The compositions of the invention are preferably capable of inducing T cell proliferation in 30 % or more samples of T cells obtained from of a panel of grass allergic individuals. More preferably, the compositions are capable of inducing T cell proliferation in 35% or more, 40 % or more, 45 %, 50 %, 55 %, 60 %, 65 %, 70 %, 75 %, 80 %, 85 %, or 90 % or more of samples obtained from sensitized individuals in a panel.

[0074] The compositions may also be capable of inducing a significant release of one or more cytokines, preferably including one or more of Interferon gamma, Interleukin-10 and Interleukin-13 in samples of T cells obtained from sensitized individuals in a panel. A "significant" release may be determined by criteria similar to that described below in Example 5. Thus, the compositions may be capable of inducing a release of one or more cytokines in 35% or more, 40 % or more, 45 %, 50 %, 55 %, 60 %, 65 %, 70 %, 75 %, 80 %, 85 %, or 90 % or more of samples obtained from sensitized individuals in a panel. The number of individuals in a panel of grass allergic individuals may be any number greater than one, for example at least 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 50, 80, or at least 100 individuals.

[0075] It is preferred if the peptides cause T cell proliferation, but do not lead to the release of histamine from basophils or mast cell preparations from a sensitised individual. There may be some histamine release, but preferably the composition does not cause significant amounts of histamine to be released. Significant histamine release may be considered to be the release of 20% or more of the total available leukocyte histamine when a sample of leukocytes from an individual is stimulated with a composition *in vitro*. A normal individual typically has an approximate leukocyte histamine content of $150\text{ng}/10^7$ cells.

[0076] Suitable variants capable of binding to TCRs may be derived empirically or selected according to known criteria. Within a single peptide there are certain residues which contribute to binding within the MHC antigen binding groove and other residues which interact with hypervariable regions of the T cell receptor (Allen et al (1987) Nature 327: 713-5).

[0077] Within the residues contributing to T cell receptor interaction, a hierarchy has been demonstrated which pertains to dependency of T cell activation upon substitution of a given peptide residue. Using peptides which have had one or more T cell

receptor contact residues substituted with a different amino acid, several groups have demonstrated profound effects upon the process of T cell activation. Evavold & Allen (1991) Nature 252: 1308-10) demonstrated the dissociation of T cell proliferation and cytokine production. In this *in vitro* model, a T cell clone specific for residues 64-76 of haemoglobin (in the context of I-E^K), was challenged with a peptide analogue in which a conservative substitution of aspartic acid for glutamic acid had been made. This substitution did not significantly interfere with the capacity of the analogue to bind to I-E^K.

[0078] Following *in vitro* challenge of a T cell clone with this analogue, no proliferation was detected although IL-4 secretion was maintained, as was the capacity of the clone to help B cell responses. In a subsequent study the same group demonstrated the separation of T cell-mediated cytotoxicity from cytokine production. In this instance, the former remained unaltered while the latter was impaired. The efficacy of altered peptide ligands *in vivo* was initially demonstrated in a murine model of EAE (experimental allergic encephalomyelitis) by McDevitt and colleagues (Smilek et al (1991) Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 88 : 9633-9637). In this model EAE is induced by immunisation with the encephalitogenic peptide Ac1-11 of MBP (myelin basic protein). Substitution at position four (lysine) with an alanine residue generated a peptide which bound well to its restricting element (A α ^UA β ^U), but which was non-immunogenic in the susceptible PL/JxSJLF1 strain and which, furthermore prevented the onset of EAE when administered either before or after immunisation with the encephalitogenic peptide. Thus, residues can be identified in peptides which affect the ability of the peptides to induce various functions of T-cells.

[0079] Advantageously, peptides may be designed to favour T-cell proliferation and induction of desensitisation. Metzler and Wraith have demonstrated improved tolerogenic capacity of peptides in which substitutions increasing peptide-MHC affinity have been made (Metzler & Wraith(1993) Int Immunol ~ : 1159-65). That an altered peptide ligand can cause long-term and profound anergy in cloned T cells was demonstrated by Sloan-Lancaster et al (1993) Nature 363: 156-9.

[0080] The compositions of the invention may be capable of inducing a late phase response in an individual that is sensitised to the allergens. The term "late phase response" includes the meaning as set forth in Allergy and Allergic Diseases (1997) A. B. Kay (Ed.), Blackwell Science, pp 1113-1130. The late phase response may be any late phase response (LPR). Preferably, the peptides may be capable of inducing a late asthmatic response (LAR) or a late rhinitic response, or a late phase skin response or a late phase ocular response. Whether or not a particular peptide can give rise to a LPR can be determined using methods well known in the art; a particularly preferred method is that described in Cromwell O, Durham SR, Shaw RJ, Mackay J and Kay AB. Provocation tests and measurements of mediators from mast cells and basophils in asthma and allergic rhinitis. In: Handbook of Experimental Immunology (4) Chapter 127, Editor: Weir DM, Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1986.

[0081] Thus, preferably, the individual peptides described herein are able to induce a LPR in an individual who has been sensitised to the allergens. Whether or not an individual has been sensitised to the allergens may be determined by well known procedures such as skin prick testing with solutions of allergen extracts, induction of cutaneous LPRs, clinical history, allergen challenge and radioallergosorbent test (RAST) for measurement of allergen specific IgE. Whether or not a particular individual is expected to benefit from treatment may be determined by the physician based, for example, on such tests.

[0082] Desensitising or tolerising an individual to the allergens means inhibition or dampening of allergic tissue reactions induced by the allergens in appropriately sensitised individuals. It has been shown that T cells can be selectively activated, and then rendered unresponsive. Moreover the anergising or elimination of these T-cells leads to desensitisation of the patient for a particular allergen. The desensitisation manifests itself as a reduction in response to an allergen or allergen-derived peptide, or preferably an elimination of such a response, on second and further administrations of the allergen or allergen-derived peptide. The second administration may be made after a suitable period of time has elapsed to allow desensitisation to occur; this is preferably any period between one day and several weeks. An interval of around two weeks is preferred.

[0083] Although the compositions of the invention may be able to induce a LPR in a grass allergic individual, it should be appreciated that when a composition is used to treat a patient it is preferable that a sufficiently low concentration of the composition is used such that no observable LPR will occur but the response will be sufficient to partially desensitise the T cells such that the next (preferably higher) dose may be given, and so on. In this way the dose is built up to give full desensitisation but often without ever inducing a LPR in the patient. Although, the composition or peptide is able to do so at a higher concentration than is administered.

[0084] The compositions of the invention may be capable of inducing a late phase response in 50 % or more of a panel of grass allergic individuals from the population. More preferably, the compositions are capable of inducing a LPR in 55% or more, 60 % or more, 65 % or more, 70% or more, 75% or more, 80% or more, 85% or more, or 90 % or more of sensitized individuals in a panel. Whether or not the compositions are able to induce a LPR in a certain percentage of a panel of subjects can be determined by methods which are well known in the art.

[0085] It will be understood that the peptides described herein comprise a T cell epitope that consists of a core 9 amino acids which are the minimal essential sequence required for MHC class II binding. However, the peptides may also comprise additional residues flanking the core 9 amino acids. The peptides may therefore comprise a region containing a T cell epitope, in which some residues may be modified without affecting the function of the epitope. Accordingly, functional variants of the peptides as defined above include peptides which are altered to improve their solubility relative to the native sequence of the peptides. Improved solubility is advantageous for the tolerisation of subjects to allergens from which the peptides of the invention derive, since administration of poorly soluble agents to subjects causes undesirable, non-tolerising inflammatory responses. The solubility of the peptides may be improved by altering the residues which flank the region containing a T cell epitope. A peptide described herein may be engineered to be more soluble such that it comprises:

1. i) N terminal to the residues of the peptide which flank a T cell epitope: one to six contiguous amino acids corresponding to the one to six contiguous amino acids immediately N terminal to said residues in the sequence of the protein from which the peptide derives; and/or
2. ii) C terminal to the residues of the peptide which flank a T cell epitope: one to six contiguous amino acids corresponding to the one to six contiguous amino acids immediately C terminal to the said residues in the sequence of the protein from which the peptide derives; or
3. iii) both N and C terminal to the residues of the peptide which flank a T cell epitope, at least one amino acid selected from arginine, lysine, histidine, glutamate and aspartate.

[0086] Optionally, the peptides may additionally be engineered to be more soluble such that:

1. i) any cysteine residues in the native sequence of the peptide are replaced with serine or 2-aminobutyric acid; and/or
2. ii) any hydrophobic residues in the upto three amino acids at the N or C terminus of the native sequence of the peptide, which are not comprised in a T cell epitope, are deleted; and/or
3. iii) any two consecutive amino acids comprising the sequence Asp-Gly in the upto four amino acids at the N or C terminus of the native sequence of the peptide, which are not comprised in a T cell epitope, are deleted; and/or
4. iv) one or more positively charged residues are added at the N- and/or C-terminus.

[0087] Examples of peptides engineered to improve solubility are Rye 09B and Tim07B as described in Example 8. The variants with improved solubility are shown in Table 8. Thus, peptides Rye 09B1 (SEQ ID NO: 91), KPEVKYAVFEAALTCAIT; Rye 09B2 (SEQ ID NO: 92), KKPEVKYAVFEAALTCAIT, Tim 07B1, (SEQ ID NO: 93), KKIPAGELQIIDKIDA, Tim 07B2 (SEQ ID NO: 94), KKIPAGELQIIDKIDAK are preferred examples of variants with improved solubility. SEQ ID NO:s 91 to 94 may therefore preferentially be used as substitutes for the above native peptides in a composition of the invention.

[0088] Polypeptides may be present in a substantially isolated form. They may be mixed with carriers or diluents which will not interfere with their intended use and still be regarded as substantially isolated. They may also be in a substantially purified form, in which case they will generally comprise at least 90%, e.g. at least 95%, 98% or 99%, of the proteins of the preparation.

Formulations and compositions

[0089] Whilst it may be possible for the compositions according to the invention to be presented in raw form, it is preferable to present them as a pharmaceutical formulation. Thus, according to a further aspect of the invention, the present invention provides a composition of the invention which is a pharmaceutical formulation, suitable for use in preventing or treating allergy to grass, comprising one or more pharmaceutically acceptable carriers or diluents and optionally one or more other therapeutic ingredients. The carrier (s) must be 'acceptable' in the sense of being compatible with the other ingredients of the formulation and not deleterious to the recipient thereof. Typically, carriers for injection, and the final formulation, are sterile and pyrogen free. Preferably, the carrier or diluent is thioglycerol.

[0090] Formulation of a composition comprising the peptides described herein can be carried out using standard pharmaceutical formulation chemistries and methodologies all of which are readily available to the reasonably skilled artisan.

[0091] For example, compositions containing one or more peptides described herein can be combined with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable excipients or vehicles. Auxiliary substances, such as wetting or emulsifying agents, pH buffering

substances and the like, may be present in the excipient or vehicle. These excipients, vehicles and auxiliary substances are generally pharmaceutical agents that do not induce an immune response in the individual receiving the composition, and which may be administered without undue toxicity. Pharmaceutically acceptable excipients include, but are not limited to, liquids such as water, saline, polyethyleneglycol, hyaluronic acid, glycerol, thioglycerol and ethanol. Pharmaceutically acceptable salts can also be included therein, for example, mineral acid salts such as hydrochlorides, hydrobromides, phosphates, sulfates, and the like; and the salts of organic acids such as acetates, propionates, malonates, benzoates, and the like. A thorough discussion of pharmaceutically acceptable excipients, vehicles and auxiliary substances is available in Remington's Pharmaceutical Sciences (Mack Pub. Co., N.J. 1991).

[0092] Such compositions may be prepared, packaged, or sold in a form suitable for bolus administration or for continuous administration. Injectable compositions may be prepared, packaged, or sold in unit dosage form, such as in ampoules or in multidose containers containing a preservative. Compositions include, but are not limited to, suspensions, solutions, emulsions in oily or aqueous vehicles, pastes, and implantable sustained-release or biodegradable formulations. Such compositions may further comprise one or more additional ingredients including, but not limited to, suspending, stabilizing, or dispersing agents. In one embodiment of a composition for parenteral administration, the active ingredient is provided in dry (for e.g., a powder or granules) form for reconstitution with a suitable vehicle (e. g., sterile pyrogen-free water) prior to parenteral administration of the reconstituted composition. The pharmaceutical compositions may be prepared, packaged, or sold in the form of a sterile injectable aqueous or oily suspension or solution. This suspension or solution may be formulated according to the known art, and may comprise, in addition to the active ingredient, additional ingredients such as the dispersing agents, wetting agents, or suspending agents described herein. Such sterile injectable formulations may be prepared using a non-toxic parenterally-acceptable diluent or solvent, such as water or 1,3-butane diol, for example. Other acceptable diluents and solvents include, but are not limited to, Ringer's solution, isotonic sodium chloride solution, and fixed oils such as synthetic mono- or di-glycerides. Other parentally-administrable compositions which are useful include those which comprise the active ingredient in microcrystalline form, in a liposomal preparation, or as a component of a biodegradable polymer systems. Compositions for sustained release or implantation may comprise pharmaceutically acceptable polymeric or hydrophobic materials such as an emulsion, an ion exchange resin, a sparingly soluble polymer, or a sparingly soluble salts.

[0093] Alternatively, the peptides described herein may be encapsulated, adsorbed to, or associated with, particulate carriers. Suitable particulate carriers include those derived from polymethyl methacrylate polymers, as well as PLG microparticles derived from poly(lactides) and poly(lactide-co-glycolides). See, e.g., Jeffery et al. (1993) Pharm. Res. 10:362-368. Other particulate systems and polymers can also be used, for example, polymers such as polylysine, polyarginine, polyornithine, spermine, spermidine, as well as conjugates of these molecules.

[0094] The formulation of any of the peptides mentioned herein will depend upon factors such as the nature of the substance and the method of delivery. Any such substance may be administered in a variety of dosage forms. It may be administered orally (e.g. as tablets, troches, lozenges, aqueous or oily suspensions, dispersible powders or granules), topically, parenterally, subcutaneously, by inhalation, intravenously, intramuscularly, intrastemally, transdermally, intradermally, sublingually, intranasally, buccally or by infusion techniques. The substance may also be administered as suppositories. A physician will be able to determine the required route of administration for each particular individual.

[0095] The compositions or formulations described herein will comprise a suitable concentration of each peptide to be effective without causing adverse reaction. Typically, the concentration of each peptide in the composition will be in the range of 0.03 to 200 nmol/ml. More preferably in the range of 0.3 to 200 nmol/ml, 3 to 180 nmol/ml, 10 to 150 nmol/ml, 5 to 200nmol/ml or 30 to 120 nmol/ml. The composition or formulations should have a purity of greater than 95% or 98% or a purity of at least 99%.

[0096] An adjuvant may be used in combination with the polypeptides described herein. The adjuvant is preferably administered in an amount which is sufficient to augment the effect of the polypeptides or vice versa. The adjuvant or other therapeutic agent may be an agent that potentiates the effects of the polypeptides described herein. For example, the other agent may be an immunomodulatory molecule or an adjuvant which enhances the response to the peptide.

[0097] In one embodiment, therefore, the compositions described herein are used for therapy in combination with one or more other therapeutic agents. The agents may be administered separately, simultaneously or sequentially. They may be administered in the same or different compositions. Accordingly, in a method described herein, the subject may also be treated with a further therapeutic agent.

[0098] A composition may therefore be formulated which comprises peptides described herein and also one or more other therapeutic molecules. A composition of the invention may alternatively be used simultaneously, sequentially or separately with

one or more other therapeutic compositions as part of a combined treatment.

[0099] Non-limiting examples of adjuvants include vitamin D, rapamycin and glucocorticoid steroids such as dexamethasone, fluticasone, budesonide, mometasone, beclomethasone, hydrocortisone, cortisone acetate, prednisone, prednisolone, methylprednisolone, betamethasone and triamcinolone. A preferred glucocorticoid is dexamethasone.

Therapeutic methods and individual to be treated

[0100] The present disclosure relates to peptides that are capable of desensitising or tolerising human individuals to the allergens described above and are therefore useful in the prevention or treatment of grass allergy. The peptides may be used in the prevention or treatment of allergy to grass pollen. Described herein are compositions for use in preventing or treating allergy to grass by tolerisation. The compositions of the invention may be used to reduce allergic symptoms or improve the condition of an allergic individual. Further described herein is a method of tolerising or desensitizing a grass allergic individual comprising administering in combination the polypeptides described herein.

[0101] The individual to be treated or provided with the composition or formulation of the invention is preferably human. It will be appreciated that the individual to be treated may be known to be sensitised to the allergens, at risk of being sensitised or suspected of being sensitised. The individual can be tested for sensitisation using techniques well known in the art and as described herein. Alternatively, the individual may have a family history of allergy to grass. It may not be necessary to test an individual for sensitisation to grass because the individual may display symptoms of allergy when exposed to grass. By exposure is meant proximity to, for example, a grass plant, or a substance or product derived from a grass plant, or a substance or product containing or comprising either of the above. The substance or product derived from a grass plant is typically grass pollen. By proximity is meant 10 metres or less, 5 metres or less, 2 metres or less, 1 metre or less, or 0 metres from the items described above. Symptoms of allergy can include itchy eyes, runny nose, breathing difficulties, red itchy skin or rash.

[0102] The individual to be treated may be of any age. However, preferably, the individual may be in the age group of 1 to 90, 5 to 60, 10 to 40, or more preferably 18 to 35.

[0103] Preferably, the individual to be treated is from a population that has MHC allele frequencies within the range of frequencies that are representative of the Caucasian population. Reference population allele frequencies for 11 common DRB1 allele families are shown in Table A (Data from HLA Facts Book, Parham and Barber).

Table A

DRB1	1	3	4	7	8	11	12	13	14	15	16
%	6.4	14.7	15.7	8.8	3.4	8.3	3.9	14.7	2.9	17.6	2.5
Reference population %	9.4	11.1	12.8	13.2	3.7	13.4	2.3	10.2	3.2	10.7	3.6

[0104] Reference frequencies were obtained by analysis of multiple studies reporting frequencies and the figures shown are mean values. Preferably therefore, the individual to be treated is from a population that has equivalent MHC allele frequencies as the reference population for the alleles referred to Table A (such as for at least 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or all of the alleles), for example within the ranges of those figures plus or minus 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15 or 20%.

[0105] Preferably the individual is from a population where the allele frequencies of the following DRB1 alleles is:

4 - at least 9%

7 - at least 10%

11 - at least 8%.

[0106] The individual may have had allergy to grass for at least 2 weeks, 1 month, 6 months, 1 year or 5 years. The individual may suffer from a rash, nasal congestion, nasal discharge and/or coughing caused by the allergy. The individual may or may not have been administered with other compositions/compounds which treat grass allergy. The individual may live in a geographical region which has:

- a temperate climate, and/or:
- a typical soil pH in the range of about 3.5, 4 or 4.5 to about 5.5, 6, 7 or 8; and/or
- a mean annual precipitation no less than about 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 or 20cm per year and no greater than about 180cm, 250cm, 300cm, 400cm or 500cm per year; and/or
- an annual minimum temperature of no less than about -5°C, -4°C, -3°C, -2°C, -1°C, 0°C, 1°C, 2°C, 3°C, 4°C or 5°C and/or
- an annual maximum temperature of no greater than about 35°C, about 30°C, about 29°C, about 28°C, about 27°C, about 26°C about 25°C, about 24°C, about 23°C or about 22°C; and/or
- lies between the latitudes of about 30° north and about 30° south.

[0107] The individual typically suffers from allergy to grass in a particular season. The season typically corresponds to the flowering season of grass, which is typically summer, preferably early summer (for example from May to June in the Northern hemisphere) or late summer (for example August to October in the Northern hemisphere). The grass allergic individual is typically allergic to grass pollen.

Delivery methods

[0108] Once formulated the compositions of the invention can be delivered to a subject *in vivo* using a variety of known routes and techniques. For example, a composition can be provided as an injectable solution, suspension or emulsion and administered via parenteral, subcutaneous, epidermal, intradermal, intramuscular, intraarterial, intraperitoneal, intravenous injection using a conventional needle and syringe, or using a liquid jet injection system. Compositions can also be administered topically to skin or mucosal tissue, such as nasally, intratracheally, intestinal, rectally or vaginally, or provided as a finely divided spray suitable for respiratory or pulmonary administration. Other modes of administration include oral administration, suppositories, sublingual administration, and active or passive transdermal delivery techniques.

[0109] Where a peptide described herein is to be administered, it is preferred to administer the peptide to a site in the body where it will have the ability to contact suitable antigen presenting cells, and where it, or they, will have the opportunity to contact T cells of the individual.

Delivery regimes

[0110] Administration of the peptides (the composition containing a plurality of peptides) may be by any suitable method as described above. Suitable amounts of the peptide may be determined empirically, but typically are in the range given below. A single administration of each peptide may be sufficient to have a beneficial effect for the patient, but it will be appreciated that it may be beneficial if the peptide is administered more than once, in which case typical administration regimes may be, for example, once or twice a week for 2-4 weeks every 6 months, or once a day for a week every four to six months.

[0111] Dosages for administration will depend upon a number of factors including the nature of the composition, the route of administration and the schedule and timing of the administration regime. Suitable doses of a molecule of the invention may be in the order of up to 15µg, up to 20µg, up to 25µg, up to 30µg, up to 50µg, up to 100µg, up to 500 µg or more per administration. Suitable doses may be less than 15µg, but at least 1ng, or at least 2ng, or at least 5ng, or at least 50ng, or at least 100ng, or at least 500ng, or at least 1µg, or at least 10µg. The dose used may be higher, for example, up to 1 mg, up to 2 mg, up to 3 mg, up to 4 mg, up to 5 mg or higher. Such doses may be provided in a liquid formulation, at a concentration suitable to allow an appropriate volume for administration by the selected route.

[0112] The invention is illustrated by the following Examples:

Example 1

MHC Class II binding search

[0113] The aim of this study is to identify a distinct panel of peptides with strong affinities for the eight most common human MHC

Class II HLA-DRB1* allotypes. In order to identify binding peptides in the major grass allergens Rye Lol p 1, Rye Lol p Va, p Vb, p 5a and p 5b, Bermuda Cyn d 1 and Timothy Phl p 5, an *in silico* approach known as "peptide threading" was employed using the commercially available EpiMatrix algorithm (EpiVax Inc.) This is a bioinformatic analysis of peptides from a sequence for the potential to be accommodated within the binding groove of MHC class II HLA-DR molecules. EpiMatrix is a matrix-based algorithm that ranks 9 amino acid long segments, overlapping by 8 amino acids, from any polypeptide sequence by estimated probability of binding to each of the selected MHC molecules. (De Groot et al., AIDS Research and Human Retroviruses 13:539-41 (1997)). The procedure for developing matrix motifs was published by Schafer et al, 16 Vaccine 1998 (1998). In this Example, binding potential for HLA DR1, DR3, DR4, DR7, DR8, DR11, DR13 and DR15 is assessed. Putative MHC ligands are selected by scoring each 9-mer frame in a protein sequence. This score is derived by comparing the sequence of the 9-mer to the matrix of amino acid sequences known to bind to each MHC allele. Retrospective studies have demonstrated that EpiMatrix accurately predicts published MHC ligands (Jesdale et al., in Vaccines '97 (Cold Spring Harbor Press, Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y., 1997)). Successful prediction of peptides which bind to multiple MHC molecules has also been confirmed.

[0114] Estimated probability of binding to a selected MHC molecule is calculated by EpiMatrix as follows. The peptides are scored by estimating the relative promotion or inhibition of binding for each amino acid, compared to known MHC binders for a given MHC allele. This information is summed across the peptide and a summary score (EMX score) is assigned to the entire peptide. After comparing the EMX score to the scores of known MHC ligands, EpiMatrix arrives at an "estimated binding probability" (abbreviated as EBP, but not strictly a probability). The EBP describes the proportion of peptides with EpiMatrix scores as high or higher that will bind to a given MHC molecule. EBPs range from 100% (highly likely to bind) to less than 1% (very unlikely to bind).

[0115] The polypeptide sequences analysed by EpiMatrix are shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Ber01 ori	SGKAFGAMAKKGQEDKLRKA
Ber02 ori	PKDSDEFIPMKSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLKGP
Ber03 ori	RLTSEGGAHVLVQDDVIPANWKPDVYTSK
Bio01 ori	QKLIKINAGFKA AVAA
Bio02 ori	AYVATL TEALRVIA GTL
Bio03 ori	KFIPTLVAAVKQAYAAKQAT
Bio04 ori	TALKKAVTAMSEAEKEA
Bio05 ori	NDKFTVFESAFNKALNE
Rye01 ori	LDAKSTWYGKPTGAGPKDNG
Rye02 ori	GHAFGSMAKKGEEQNVRSA G
Rye03 ori	GSNPNYLAILVKYVDG DGDV
Rye04 ori	KESWGAVWRIDTPDKLTGPF
Rye05 ori	DVNAGFKA AVAAAA NAPPAD
Rye06 ori	GATPEAKYDAFVTALTEALR
Rye07 ori	GELQIVDKIDAAFKIAATAANAAPTNDKF
Rye08 ori	GAYETYKFIPSLEAAVKQAY
Rye09 ori	PEVKYAVFEAALTKAITAMTQAQKAGKPA
Tim10 ori	PEVKYTVFETALKKAITAMSEAQ

[0116] Based on the results of the EpiMatrix analysis of these sequences, core peptides were identified which were predicted to have good MHC binding properties. The selected peptides are shown in Table 2. Peptides highlighted in grey and marked * are not selected peptides. These correspond to the original sequences analysed in EpiMatrix, from which the subsequent selected peptides derive. For example, Ber01 derives from Ber01 ori.

Table 2

Group 1 peptides

SEQ ID NO:	Peptide name	Peptide Sequence	Allergen Group	Protein of origin	
95	Ber01 ori	SGKAFGAMAKKGQEDKL RKA	1	Ber Cyn d1	*
1	Ber01	SGKAFGAMAKKGQED	1	Ber Cyn d1	
96	Ber02 ori	PKDSDEFIPMKSSWGAIW RIDPKKPLKGP	1	Ber Cyn d1	*
2	Ber02	FIPMKSSWGA	1	Ber Cyn d1	
3	Ber02A	WGAIWRIDPKKPL	1	Ber Cyn d1	
4	Ber02B	KDSDEFIPMKSSWGAIWR	1	Ber Cyn d1	
5	Ber02C	KSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK	1	Ber Cyn d1	
6	Ber02D	MKSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK	1	Ber Cyn d1	
7	Ber02E	MKSSWGAIWRIDPPKPLK	1	Ber Cyn d1	
97	Ber03 ori	RLTSEGGAEVQDDVIPA NWKPDIVYTSK	1	Ber Cyn d1	*
8	Ber03A	IPANWKPDIVYTSK	1	Ber Cyn d1	
9	Ber04	KATFYGSDPRGAAP	1	Ber Cyn d1	
10	Ber05	AYHFDLSGKAFG	1	Ber Cyn d1	
98	Rye01 ori	LDAKSTWYGKPTGAGPK DNG	1	Rye Lol p1	*
11	Rye01	LDAKSTWYGKPTGAG	1	Rye Lol p1	

12	Rye01A	KWLDAKSTWYGKPTGAG	1	Rye Lol p1	
99	Rye02 ori	GHAFGSMAKKGEEONVR SAG	1	Rye Lol p1	*
13	Rye02	FGSMAKKGEEQNVRSA	1	Rye Lol p1	
14	Rye02A	HAFGMAKKGEEQNVRSA G	1	Rye Lol p1	
100	Rye03 ori	GSNPNYLAHLVKYVDGDG DV	1	Rye Lol p1	*
15	Rye03A	SNPNYLAILVKYVD	1	Rye Lol p1	
101	Rye04 ori	KESWGAVWRIDTPDKET GPP	1	Rye Lol p1	*
16	Rye04	WGAVWRIDTPDKL	1	Rye Lol p1	
17	Rye04A	KESWGAVWRIDTPDKL	1	Rye Lol p1	
18	Rye04B	KESWGAVWRIDTPDKLG P	1	Rye Lol p1	
19	Rye12	APYHFDLSGHAFGS	1	Rye Lol p1	

Group 5 peptides

102	Bio02 ori	AYVATETEALRVIAGTL	5	Rye Lol p 5b	*
28	Bio02A	KYDAYVATLTEALR	5	Rye Lol p 5b	
103	Bio03 ori	KFIPTLVAAVKQAYAAKQ AT	5	Rye Lol p 5b	*
29	Bio03A	KFIPTLVAAVKQAYAAKQ	5	Rye Lol p 5b	
30	Bio03B	YKFIPTLVAAVKQAYAAK Q	5	Rye Lol p 5b	
104	Bio04 ori	TALKKAVTAMSEAEKEA	5	Rye Lol p 5b	*
31	Bio04A	LKKAVTAMSEAEK	5	Rye Lol p 5b	
32	Bio04B	PETALKKAVTAMSEAEK	5	Rye Lol p 5b	
105	Bio05 ori	NDKFTVFESAFNKALNE	5	Rye Lol p Va	*
33	Bio05B	KFTVFESAFNKALNE	5	Rye Lol p Va	

106	Rye05 ori	DVNAGFKAAVAAAANAPPA	5	Rye Lol p Va *
34	Rye05A	FKA AVAAAANAPPADKFK	5	Rye Lol p Va
35	Rye05C	NAGFKAAVAAAANAPPK	5	Rye Lol p Va
107	Rye06 ori	GATPEAKYDAFVTALTEALR	5	Rye Lol p Va *
36	Rye06A	KYDAFVTALTEALR	5	Rye Lol p Va
37	Rye06B	PEAKYDAFVTALTEALR	5	Rye Lol p Va
108	Rye07 ori	GELQIVDKIDAAFKAATAA	5	Rye Lol p Va *
38	Rye07A	NAAPTNDK	5	Rye Lol p Va
39	Rye07B	KIPTGELQIVDKIDA	5	Rye Lol p Va
40	Rye07G	FKIAATAANAAPTNDK	5	Rye Lol p Va
41	Rye07H	AFKIAATAANAAPTNDK	5	Rye Lol p Va
109	Rye08 ori	GAYETYKFIPSLEAAVKQAY	5	Rye Lol p Va *
42	Rye08	YKFIPSLEAAVKQAY	5	Rye Lol p Va
43	Rye08A	ETYKFIPSLEAAVKQAY	5	Rye Lol p Va
44	Rye08B	DSYKFIPTLVAVK	5	Rye Lol p Va
110	Rye09 ori	PEVKYAVFEAALTKAITAMT	5	Rye Lol p Va *
45	Rye09A	QAQKAGKPA	5	Rye Lol p Va
46	Rye09B	LTKAITAMTQAQKAGK	5	Rye Lol p Va
47	Rye09D	PEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT	5	Rye Lol p Va
48	Rye11	KYAVFEAALTKAITAMT	5	Rye Lol p Va
49	Rye13	DKFKIFEAAFSESSK	5	Rye Lol p Va
50	Rye14	TPLRRTSSRSSRP	5	Rye Lol p Va
51	Rye15	DVAYKAAEAHPRGQ	5	Rye Lol p Va
51	Rye15	ALRVIAGTLEVHA	5	Rye Lol p Vb

52	Rye16	FENTFNNAIKVSLG	5	Rye Lol p Vb
111	Tim10 ori	PEVKYTVFETALKKAITAMS	5	Tim Phl p 5 *
53	Tim10B	EAQ	5	Tim Phl p 5
54	Tim10C	KYTVFETALKKAITAMSE	5	Tim Phl p 5
55	Tim10D	LKKAITAMS	5	Tim Phl p 5
55	Tim10D	PETALKKAITAMS	5	Tim Phl p 5

Tim = Timothy grass; Rye = Rye grass; Cyn = Bermuda grass

[0117] Any peptides indicated above which have an N terminal glutamate (E) or glutamine (Q) residue, for example Rye 08A, may have this residue replaced with pyroglutamate to improve stability during manufacture, without affecting function of the peptide. The data from further testing of these peptides is typically obtained using peptides where such replacement has taken place.

[0118] A further EpiMatrix analysis was performed on the entire sequences of three known Timothy grass sequences: Timothy Grass Phl p 1 (NCBI Accession no. 1N10A), Timothy Grass Phl p Va (NCBI Accession no. Q40962), and Timothy Grass Phl p Vb (Accession no. Q40963). This analysis identified further core peptides (and their flanking sequences) which are predicted to have good MHC class-II binding. These sequences are shown below in Tables 3A-C. In each table:

"Residues in main sequence" gives the location of the peptide within the sequences that were analysed. The core peptide (underscored middle amino acids in bold) defines the actual binding sequence that was identified during the analysis. The

stabilizing flanks (N-terminal and C-terminal, not bold) were included for use with the core sequence and are typically required to aid manufacture of the peptides. "Number of hits" refers to the number of high predicted binding affinities for all MHC types tested within the sequence. The "EpiMatrix Cluster Score" is derived from the number of hits normalized for the length of the cluster. Cluster Score is thus the excess or shortfall in predicted aggregate MHC binding properties relative to a random peptide standard. A score above 10 is considered to indicate broad MHC binding properties.

Table 3

A) INI0A – PhI p 1

RESIDUES IN MAIN SEQUENCE (INCLUDING FLANKS)	SEQUENCE	Hydro- phobicity	EpiMatrix HITS (EXCLUDING FLANKS)	EpiMatrix CLUSTER SCORE (EXCLUDING FLANKS)	SEQ ID NO
120 – 142	GDE QKLS AGLELEQFRVK CKY	-1.15	10	13.23	20
157 – 175	NPN YLALL VKVNGDGDDV	0.19	8	14.11	21
191 – 209	KES WGAT WRIDTPDKLTGP	-0.85	8	13.79	22
229 – 241	PEG WKAD TSYESK	-1.77	6	12.78	23

B) Q40962 – PhI p Va

RESIDUES IN MAIN SEQUENCE (INCLUDING FLANKS)	SEQUENCE	Hydro- phobicity	EpiMatrix HITS (EXCLUDING FLANKS)	EpiMatrix CLUSTER SCORE (EXCLUDING FLANKS)	SEQ ID NO
42 – 60	IEK INAG FKAALAGAGVQP	-0.41	8	13.04	56
55 – 78	GAG VQPAD KYRTFVATFGPASNK A	-0.32	12	17.23	57
98 – 122	ALT SKLDA AYKLAYKTAEATPE AK	-0.38	11	14.26	58
164 – 184	IEK VDAAF KVAATAANAAAPAN	0.37	9	12.44	59
206 – 226	YES YKFIP ALEAAVKQAYAAAT	-0.04	8	14.18	60
232 – 253	EVKYTVFETALKKAITAMSEAO	-0.06	12	17.18	61

C) Q40963 – PhI p Vb

RESIDUES IN MAIN SEQUENCE (INCLUDING FLANKS)	SEQUENCE	Hydro- phobicity	EpiMatrix HITS (EXCLUDING FLANKS)	EpiMatrix CLUSTER SCORE (EXCLUDING FLANKS)	SEQ ID NO
49 – 69	DIN VGFKAA VAAAASVPAADK	0.63	13	21.17	62
115 – 138	FDS FVASL TEALRVIAGALEV HAV	1.10	11	15.59	63
158 – 176	IDK IDAAF KVAATAAAATAP	0.66	8	13.93	64

206 – 232	IPS LEAAVKQ AYAAATVAAAPQ VKYAVF	0.69	11	12.1	65
229 – 247	YAV FEAAL TKAITAMSEVO	0.66	9	14.1	66

Example 2

Homology search

[0119] The sequences of each of the peptides identified above as MHC Class II-binding were used to probe the sequence of alternative proteins in the grass allergen group from which the parent sequence derived. For example, peptide Rye01 is from Lol p 1, therefore the sequence of Rye01 was used to probe for conserved sequences in Group 1 from other grass species, in particular Timothy. The results of this analysis are shown below for the residues of Rye Lol p 1 as indicated, compared with corresponding sequences from Timothy Phl p 1 and Bermuda Cyn d 1:

Rye 19-38:	LDAKSTWYGKPTGAGPKDNG (RYE 01 ori)
Timothy	LDAKSTWYGKPTGAGPKDNG
Rye 109-128:	GHAFGSMAKKGEEQNVRASAG (Rye 02 ori)
Timothy	
Cyn d 1 109-128:	GHAFGAMAKKGDEQKLRSAG SGKAFGAMAKKGQEDKLRKA
Rye 154-173:	GSNPNYLAILVKYVDGDDV (Rye03 ori)
Timothy	GSNPNYLALLVKYVNGDDV
Rye 190-209:	KESWGAVWRIDTPDKLTGPF (Rye04 ori)
Timothy	
Cyn d 1 181-209	GKDKWIELKESWGAIWRIDTPDKLTGPF PKDSDEFIPMKSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK
Cyn d 1 217-241	EGGAHLVQDDVIPANWKPDVTYSK EGGKTAEADVIPEGWKADTSYESK
Timothy	

[0120] Similarly, shown below are results for the residues of Rye Lol p 5 as indicated, compared with corresponding sequences from Timothy Phl p5 variants as indicated:

Rye 37-56:	DVNAGFKA AVAAAAANAPPAD	(Rye 05 ori)
Phl p 5a	KINAGFKAALAGAGVQPAD	
Phl p Va	KINAGFKAALAGAGVQPAD	
Phl p 5	KINDGFKAALAAAAGVPPAD	
Phl p Vb	DINVGFKAAVAAAAASVPAAD	
Phl p Vb	DINVGFKAAVAAAAASVPAAD	
Rye 100-119:	GATPEAKYDAFVTALTEALR	(Rye 06 ori)
Phl p 5a	GATPEAKYDAYVATLSEALR	
Phl p Va	GATPEAKYDAYVATLSEALR	
Phl p 5	GATPEAKYDAYVATLSEALR	
Phl p Vb	GATPEAKFDSFVASLTEALR	
Phl p Vb	GATPEAKFDSFVASLTEALR	
Rye 145-164:	GELQVVDKIDAAFKIAATAA	(from Rye 07 ori)
Phl p 5a	GELQVIEKDAAFKVAATAA	

Phl p Va	GELQVIEKVDAAFKVAATAA	
Phl p 5	GELQFIEKVDSALKVAATAA	
Phl p Vb	GELQIIDKIDAAFKVAATAA	
Phl p Vb	GELQIIDKIDAAFKVAATAA	
Rye 154-173:	DAAFKIAATAANAAPTNDKF	(from Rye 07 ori)
Phl p 5a	DAAFKVAATAANAAPANDKF	
Phl p Va	DAAFKVAATAANAAPANDKF	
Phl p 5	DSALKVAATAANAAAANDKF	
Phl p Vb	DAAFKVAATAAATAPADDKF	
Phl p Vb	DAAFKVAATAAATAPADDKF	
Rye 190-209:	GAYETYKFIPSLEAAVKQAY	(Rye 08 ori)
Phl p 5a	GAYESYKFIPALEAAVKQAY	
Phl p Va	GAYESYKFIPALEAAVKQAY	
Phl p 5	GAYESYKFIPALEAAVKQAY	
Phl p Vb	GAYDTYKCIPSLEAAVKQAY	
Phl p Vb	GAYDTYKCIPSLEAAVKQAY	
Rye 217-236:	PEVKYAVFEAALTKAITAMT	(from Rye 09 ori)
Phl p 5a	PEVKYTVFETALKKAITAMS	
Phl p Va	PEVKYTVFETALKKAITAMS	
Phl p 5	PEVKYTVFETALKKAITAMS	
Phl p Vb	PEVKYTVFETALKKAITAMS	
Phl p Vb	AEVKYAVFEAALTKAITAMS	
Rye 226-245:	AALTKAITAMTQAQKAGKPA	(from Rye 09 ori)
Phl p 5a	TALKKAITAMSEAQAQKAAKPA	
Phl p Va	TALKKAITAMSEAQAQKAAKPA	
Phl p 5	TALKKAITAMSEAQAQKAAKPA	
Phl p Vb	AALTKAITAMSEVQKVSQPA	
Phl p Vb	AALTKAITAMSEVQKVSQPA	

[0121] Based on the sequences from Timothy grass proteins which were highly conserved with the Rye sequences selected in Example 1, additional peptides derived from these sequences were predicted as having good MHC binding properties. These additional peptides are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Group 1 peptides				
SEQ ID NO:	Peptide name	Peptide Sequence	Group	Protein
24	Tim02	FGAMAKKKGDEQKLRSAG	1	Tim Phl p 1
25	Tim02A	HAFGAMAKKKGDEQKLRSAG	1	Tim Phl p 1
26	Tim03A	SNPNYLALLVKYVNGD	1	Tim Phl p 1
27	Tim04A	WGAIWRIDTPDKL	1	Tim Phl p 1

<i>Group 5 peptides</i>				
67	Tim05A	FKA AVAAASVPAADKFK	5	Tim Phl p 5
68	Tim06A	KFDSFVASLLEALR	5	Tim Phl p 5
69	Tim07B	KIPAGELQIIDKIDA	5	Tim Phl p 5
70	Tim07G	FKVAATAANAAPANDK	5	Tim Phl p 5
71	Tim08	YKFIPALEAAVKQAY	5	Tim Phl p 5
72	Tim08A	PEESYKFIPALEAAVKQAY	5	Tim Phl p 5
73	Tim09A	LTKAITAMSEVQKVVSQ	5	Tim Phl p 5

Example 3***In vitro binding analysis***

[0122] The peptides identified as being potential MHC Class II-binding are pre-screened for solubility in an aqueous, acidic milieu and the peptides are tested in an in vitro MHC Class II binding assay.

Methods

[0123] The assay employed is a competitive MHC class II binding assay, wherein each peptide is analysed for its ability to displace a known control binder from each of the human MHC class II allotypes investigated. The allotypes and control peptides used in this study are typically those shown below.

Allotype	Control Peptide	Sequence
DRB1 *0301	Myco. tuberculosis/leprae hsp 65 2-16	AKTIAYDEEARRGLE
DRB1 *1101	Influenza haemagglutinin 307-319	PKYVKQNTLKLAT
DRB1 *1501	Human myelin basic protein 85-99	ENPVVHFFKNMTPR
Control peptides used in the in vitro binding assays		

[0124] Each of the peptides from Tables 2 to 4 (excluding those marked *) are analysed in the competition assay and screened for relative binding compared to the control peptides. Due to the nature of the competitive assay the data for each peptide is determined as a ratio of its own IC₅₀ to that of the control peptide. Thus, a peptide that has an IC₅₀ value that is parity to the control peptide has an identical binding affinity, while peptides with a ratio less than one have a higher affinity and those with a ratio greater than one have a lower affinity.

[0125] Solubility in aqueous solution is an essential criterion for a peptide to be an effective therapeutic agent. Therefore, as a consequence of the solubility screen very hydrophobic peptides with a high frequency of large hydrophobic amino acid residues in multiple binding registers will be eliminated. This is a characteristic of promiscuous HLA-DRB1* binders. Peptides which bind to one or more of the MHC Class II allotypes are identified. It would be expected that such peptides would have the ability to bind similar allotypes that have not been tested through the homology of MHC structures.

Example 4

[0126] The following method is applied to the same peptides as in Example 3.

Cell proliferation assay

[0127] The cell proliferation assay is performed on PBMC's (140×10^6 cells required for all parameters to be tested). Proliferation is measured by the incorporation of the radiolabelled compound 3H-thymidine. In more detail, 100µl of the appropriate antigen or peptide concentration is distributed into the appropriate wells of 96 well plates. The plates are then placed into a humidified 5% CO₂ incubator set at 37°C for a maximum of 4 hours. PBMC's isolated as described above are prepared to a concentration of 2×10^6 cells/ml in complete medium at room temperature. 100µl of cell solution is then distributed into each of the wells of the 96 well plates containing antigen/peptide. The plates are then incubated for 6 to 8 days. The cultures are pulsed with tritiated thymidine solution by adding 10µl of tritiated thymidine stock solution (1.85MBq/ml in serum-free RPMI medium) to each well. The plates are then returned to the incubator for between 8 and 16 hours. Cultures are then harvested using a Canberra Packard FilterMate 196 cell harvester. Dried filter mats are counted using an appropriate beta scintillation counter.

[0128] Counts from wells containing peptide are compared statistically to wells containing media alone (12 wells per group). The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test is used. The same statistical test is used for all subjects. A statistically significant difference between media only wells and peptide-stimulated wells is considered a positive stimulation of PBMC's by the peptide.

Example 5

[0129] 59 peptides identified by the EpiMatrix analysis of Example 1 that encompassed one or more epitopes predicted to bind to at least 5/8 MHC Class II alleles (HLA DR01, 03, 04, 07, 08, 11, 13, 15) were selected for further studies. In many cases the epitopes were predicted to bind all 8 of these alleles. Some sequences had two or more overlapping epitopes or non-overlapping but close epitopes binding to the same or different MHC Class II alleles. The selected peptides are shown in Tables 5A and 5B below.

[0130] 44 peptides were tested for activity in the *in vitro* T cell cytokine release assay described using peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) from 48 grass allergic individuals. Peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) were isolated from heparinised blood by Ficoll density gradient centrifugation. Results are shown in Table 5A. Another group of 15 peptides were tested in 28 grass allergic subjects. Results are shown in Table 5B. The subjects were from Hamilton and surrounding area in Ontario, Canada. The peptides were tested for stimulation of production of Interferon gamma (IFN-gamma), Interleukin-10 (IL-10) and Interleukin-13 (IL-13) in the supernatants of the PBMC cultures.

Cytokine release assay

[0131] Cytokine secretion profiles from PBMC's were analysed in response to the peptide stimulation. Supernatants from the cytokine release assay were tested for the presence of 3 cytokines, IFN-γ, IL-10 and IL-13, using ELISA assays. The presence of all 3 cytokines was assayed using a multiplex bead array (Luminex Corporation). The cytokine release assay typically required 40×10^6 PBMC's per subject. In more detail, 250µl of a 200µg/ml solution of the appropriate antigen or peptide concentration was distributed into the appropriate wells of 48 well plates. Plates were then incubated in a humidified 5% CO₂ incubator at 37°C for a maximum of 4 hours. 250µl of a 5×10^6 cell/ml PBMC suspension is then added to each well and the plates returned to the incubator for 5 days. Following stimulation, samples of culture supernatant were harvested for testing by multiplex bead assay according to standard protocols. Typically, the samples were harvested into 3 aliquots and frozen until the ELISA assays were performed.

[0132] A positive result for stimulation of cytokine secretion was taken where the reading was greater than four times the control well, where no peptide was added. Peptides giving a positive result for one or more cytokines in more than 18 out of the 48 subjects in the first group or 9 out of the 28 subjects in the second group were deemed to be particularly useful in the treatment of grass allergy. 20 of the 44 peptides tested in the first group of 48 subjects, and 8 of the 15 peptides tested in the second group of 28 subjects fulfilled the above criteria.

[0133] Table 5A shows the number of positives for the three cytokines out of the group of 48, and Table 5B shows the number of positives for the three cytokines out of the group of 28. Preferred peptides fulfilling the criteria defined above are highlighted in bold.

Table 5A

Peptide	IFN-γ +ve/48	IL-13 +ve/48	IL-10 +ve/48	>18/48 +ve for one or more cytokine?
Ber01	35	22	34	Yes

Peptide	IFN- γ +ve/48	IL-13 +ve/48	IL-10 +ve/48	>18/48 +ve for one or more cytokine?
Ber02	26	21	15	Yes
Ber02A	17	15	7	No
Ber02B	22	17	3	Yes
Ber02C	29	18	9	Yes
Ber03A	8	7	23	Yes
Bio02A	15	12	31	Yes
Bio03A	26	19	9	Yes
Bio04A	28	16	37	Yes
Bio04B	22	16	27	Yes
Bio05B	8	8	34	Yes
Rye01	12	5	2	No
Rye01A	2	4	4	No
Rye02	4	5	1	No
Rye02A	12	6	1	No
Rye03A	3	5	0	No
Rye04	6	3	1	No
Rye04A	8	4	2	No
Rye05A	13	10	3	No
Rye05C	20	19	12	Yes
Rye06A	11	15	5	No
Rye06B	11	7	5	No
Rye07A	8	3	25	Yes
Rye07B	10	3	1	No
Rye07G	7	3	2	No
Rye07H	10	8	4	No
Rye08	9	6	2	No
Rye08A	18	9	32	Yes
Rye09A	6	5	11	No
Rye09B	28	24	16	Yes
Tim02	16	6	3	No
Tim02A	6	9	2	No
Tim03A	9	9	4	No
Tim04A	16	4	31	Yes
Tim05A	15	12	9	No
Tim06A	17	11	11	No
Tim07B	23	18	41	Yes
Tim07G	19	20	10	Yes
Tim08	16	17	14	No
Tim08A	21	10	8	Yes
Tim10B	16	24	22	Yes
Tim10C	6	4	3	No
Tim10D	28	8	3	Yes

Table 5B

Peptide	IFN- γ +ve/28	IL-13 +ve/28	IL-10 +ve/28	$\geq 9/28$ +ve for one or more cytokine?
Bio02D	21	8	21	Yes
Bio02E	13	2	24	Yes
Bio04	12	5	8	Yes
Bio05	11	5	1	Yes
Bio03B	13	8	4	Yes
Rye04B	3	6	0	No
Rye07A	1	4	1	No
Rye08B	2	3	1	No
Rye09D	6	4	13	Yes
Rye11	4	10	3	Yes
Rye12	10	8	5	Yes
Rye13	6	1	0	No
Rye14	5	3	0	No
Rye15	1	0	1	No
Rye16	4	3	4	No

Example 6***Ranking criteria for individual grass peptides***

[0134] The 28 peptides which were selected as being particularly useful in the treatment of grass allergy on the basis of the criteria used in Example 5 were further evaluated in order to compare their characteristics. This involved calculation of the cumulative response observed to all 3 cytokines for each peptide i.e the total score (sum of the number of responders for the three cytokines). Pharmaceutical development aspects for each peptide were also considered on the basis of physical and chemical properties, in particular solubility, pI and hydrophobicity index (GRAVY). Epimatrix software was also used to predict binding strength to MHC class II HLA DR alleles, with values shown as high (1%) medium (5%) and low (10%) affinity for each specific MHC class II HLA DR allele shown.

[0135] The results of this analysis for 14 particularly preferred peptides are shown in Table 6. These particularly preferred peptides are allocated an internal ranking order of 1 to 14 which corresponds to the Inventors evaluation of their relative utility for the treatment of grass allergy. The 14 peptides were ranked according principally to the total score (sum of the number of responders for the three cytokines) with some weighting placed on the IFN-gamma response. Account was also taken of pharmaceutical development aspects and MHC coverage, as outlined above.

Table 6

Peptide	Total score	Pi	GRAVY	Epimatrix analysis of MHC binding affinity			Solubility mg/ml	RANK
				1%	5%	10%		
Ber01	91	8.22	-0.94	08,11	01,08,15	03,04,08	>20	1
Ber02	62	8.75	-0.26		01, 04, 08, 11, 13	11,15	>20	5
Ber02B	42	6.12	-0.75		01, 04, 08, 11, 13	11,15	>20	13
Ber02C	56	10.46	-0.941	03,07,08	01, 11	04,13,15	>20	6
Bio02A	58	6.07	-0.157	01,04,07	08, 11, 13	03,15	>20	8
Bio03A	54	10.00	0.344	03	01, 03, 04, 08, 11, 13, 15		>20	7
Bio04A	81	8.50	-0.377	04	01, 03, 04, 08, 11,13		>20	3

Peptide	Total score	Pi	GRAVY	Epimatrix analysis of MHC binding affinity			Solubility mg/ml	RANK
				1%	5%	10%		
Rye05C	51	10.00	0.176	01,04	03, 08, 11, 13	04,15	10	11
Rye08A	58	6.24	-0.194	01,03,04, 11	13, 15	07	>20	9
Rye09B	68	6.56	0.447	01,07	01,04, 11, 15	03,08, 13	5	4
Tim04A	51	5.96	-0.408	03,04,07	01, 11	08, 15	2	12
Tim07B	82	4.56	0.107		03, 11, 15	01, 13	0.56	2
Tim07G	49	8.59	-0.062		01, 04, 05, 15	03, 07, 11	>20	14
Tim10B	62	8.43	-0.017	04	01, 03, 04, 08, 11, 13		1.65	10

[0136] The order of ranking for particularly preferred grass peptides is thus: 1, Ber01, (SEQ ID NO:1), Cyn d 1; 2, Tim07B (SEQ ID NO: 69), Phl p 5; 3, Bio04A (SEQ ID NO: 31), Lol p 5; 4, Rye09B (SEQ ID NO: 46), Lol p 5; 5, Ber02 (SEQ ID NO: 2), Cyn d 1; 6, Ber02C (SEQ ID NO: 5), Cyn d 1; 7, Bio03A (SEQ ID NO: 29), Lol p 5; 8, Bio02A (SEQ ID NO: 28), Lol p 5; 9, Rye08A, (SEQ ID NO: 43), Lol p 5; 10, Tim10B, (SEQ ID NO: 53), Phl p 5; 11, Rye05C (SEQ ID NO: 35), Lol p 5; 12, Tim04A (SEQ ID NO: 27), Phl p 1; 13, Ber02B (SEQ ID NO:4), Cyn d 1; 14, Tim07G (SEQ ID NO: 70), Phl p 5.

[0137] Surprisingly, the top ranked peptide, Ber01 and also 3 other peptides in the top 14 (Ber02, Ber02C and Ber02B) were derived from the Bermuda grass allergen Cyn d 1. Bermuda grass is a warm season perennial species adapted to tropical and subtropical climates. It grows best under extended periods of high temperatures, mild winters and moderate to high rainfall. Temperature is the main environmental factor that limits its adaptability to tropical and subtropical areas of the world. The northern limits of Bermuda grass extend into the transitional zone of the United States where low temperatures seldom drop below 10°F. For this reason it would not be expected that Bermuda grass allergens would be the major allergens recognised by subjects in Canada. Furthermore, Perennial ryegrass, although present, is not the most common grass in Canada and 6 of the top 14 peptides (Bio02A, Bio03A, Bio04A, Rye05C, Rye08A, Rye09B) were derived from Perennial rye allergens.

[0138] The following is a summary of grass types prevalent in Canada. Almost all forage grasses in Canada are improved cultivars of European species. Different grasses are adapted to grow in different areas of Canada, depending on soil and climate conditions. Timothy (*Phleum pratense*) is the most widely grown grass outside dry parts of the region, and is a dominant forage grass in eastern Canada. Crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*) is a dominant forage grass in western Canada. Orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Russian wild ryegrass (*Elymus junceus*) are dominant forage grasses in British Columbia. Bromegrass (*Bromus inermis*) is grown in eastern Canada and on the Prairies. Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) is commonly grown in many areas. In terms of prairie grasses, 3-awn grass (*Aristida longiseta*) is found in arid regions of British Columbia, and wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*) in eastern Canadian lakes. Certain genera (eg, *Arctagrostis* and *Arctophila*) are native to the Canadian Arctic. Turf grasses are developed from species that show desirable characteristics, eg, density of growth, fast growth after seeding, ability to remain green, etc. In Canada cold-hardiness and frequently drought resistance are also important. Popular Canadian lawn grass mixtures often include species of *Poa* (eg, Kentucky bluegrass, roughstalk bluegrass) and *Festuca* (especially creeping red fescue, chewing fescue), although other useful species have been developed.

[0139] Based on the prevalence of grass types in Canada, the observation that grass allergic individuals of Canadian origin are highly responsive to peptides from Bermuda grass and Perennial rye is unexpected. Such peptides therefore have the potential to have broad utility in treatment of grass allergic individuals worldwide. Also, the peptides which were found to induce high levels of response (ie a high total score) are commonly derived from allergen proteins conventionally described as "minor allergens", e.g Lol p 5 and Phl p 5. The major Timothy and Perennial Rye allergens recognized by IgE antibodies in grass allergic subjects are, respectively, Phl p 1 and Lol p 1. The induction of antibodies to these major allergens in allergic individuals is a T cell dependent process and so it would be expected that the peptides inducing high levels of T cell response would be mainly from Phl p 1 and Lol p 1.

[0140] The determination of the top 14 T cell stimulatory peptides from the group of 59 peptides tested in Example 5, and particularly identifying the top 8 peptides which can be used most optimally in combination involved a narrow and specific selection. A narrow subset of combinations were identified from a massive number of initially possible combinations of peptides. The total number of possible combinations for selecting 8 peptides from the top 14 ranked peptides is 3003. This number of combinations (3003) represents a very small proportion of the possible combinations of 8 peptides out of the original group of 73 peptides (13,442,126,049). The possibility of identifying the top eight ranked peptides by chance is therefore miniscule.

Example 7**Combinations of grass peptides**

[0141] Peptide combinations based on selections from the top 8 ranked peptides in Table 6 were investigated with a view to identifying optimal vaccines for the treatment of grass allergy. Cytokine assays were performed as in Example 5 for each mix. The results for ten optimal combinations are listed in Table 7. Combination 1 is the most optimal combination and comprises all 8 top ranked peptides. It should be noted that these specific combinations represent a miniscule proportion of the number of possible combinations of peptides originally screened in Examples 1 and 2.

[0142] Optimal grass vaccine mixes were selected on the basis of showing a significant release of IFN- γ , IL-10 and IL-13 in a large proportion of the study group of 48 allergic individuals. As such, providing preferred individual grass peptides in combination increases MHC coverage and provides an optimised product of general utility as a grass vaccine. Optimal grass vaccine mixes were also selected on the basis of manufacturing considerations, including physical and chemical characteristics of each peptide in the combination.

Table 7

Peptide combination	IL-10 +ve/48	IL-13 +ve/48	IFN- γ 10 +ve/48
1	47	41	48
2	47	41	48
3	47	39	48
4	46	39	48
5	44	39	47
6	41	39	46
7	47	40	48
8	46	40	48
9	44	40	48
10	40	40	48

[0143] Combinations:

- 1: Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C; Bio02A; Bio03A; Rye09B; Tim07B; Bio04A
- 2: Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C; Bio02A; Bio03A; Rye09B; Tim07B
- 3: Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C; Rye09B; Tim07B; Bio04A
- 4: Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C; Rye09B; Tim07B
- 5: Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C; Rye09B; Bio04A
- 6: Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C; Rye09B
- 7: Ber01; Ber02C; Bio03A; Rye09B; Tim07B; Bio04A
- 8: Ber01; Ber02C; Rye09B; Tim07B
- 9: Ber01; Ber02C; Bio03A; Rye09B; Bio04A
- 10: Ber01; Ber02C; Bio03A; Rye09B

[0144] Combination 1 is the most optimal combination based on cytokine release characteristics and comprises all 8 top ranked peptides. This combination provides peptides derived from three grass allergens, Cyn d1 (Ber01; Ber02; Ber02C), Lol p 5 (Bio03A; Rye09B; Bio04A) and Phl p 5 (Tim07B). The combination therefore accounts for regional variations in exposure to specific allergens, even though the data from the Canadian study group suggests this may not be an important factor.

[0145] It should be noted that each specific optimal combination represents a miniscule proportion of the number of possible combinations of peptides originally screened in the Examples. As outlined above, for example, the eight peptide mix of combination 1 represents one out of 13,442,126,049 potential combinations of the 73 peptides screened in Examples 1 and 2.

The optimal combinations each provide a significant release of IFN- γ , IL-10 and IL-13 in $\geq 39/48$ individuals.

[0146] It is noteworthy that high MHC coverage is maintained in Combinations 2 to 10 despite significant variation both in the number of peptides and in which specific peptides are included from the top 8 identified in Example 6. It can be seen that even selecting a mix of 4 peptides (Combination 10) still gives 100% coverage for IFN- γ response and 83% coverage for IL-10/IL-13 response. Combination 10 is based on 2 peptides from Bermuda grass and 2 peptides from Perennial Rye grass. The coverage obtained with such a mix is surprising, given both the lack of prevalence of these grasses in Canada, and the fact that peptides from Lol p 1, a major allergen recognised by IgE antibodies in grass allergic individuals are not included.

Example 8

Improving solubility

[0147] Two of the top 8 peptides, Rye09B and Tim07B, were identified as having solubility characteristics which could be improved (see Table 6). To improve solubility, various analogues were designed utilising one or more lysine residues at the N- or C- terminus of the peptide. The peptides were assessed in the Epimatrix software to ensure that the modifications had not affected the T cell epitope within the peptide and had not created a neoepitope. Two variant peptides were selected for Rye09B (Rye09B1 & Rye09B2) and Tim07B (Tim07B1 & Tim07B2). The sequences are shown in Table 8 together with the solubility values. The variants of Rye09B are twice as soluble as the native peptide. The variants of Tim07B are more than twenty times as soluble as the native peptide. In addition to improved solubility, both variants also retained their ability to induce T cell cytokine release when tested in a group of 10 subjects. These variants of Rye09B and Tim07B therefore are preferred alternatives to the native peptides, for example in any mix of grass peptides for therapeutic vaccine use.

Table 8

Peptide	Sequence	Solubility(mg/ml)	SEQ ID NO:
Rye09B1	KPEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT	10	91
Rye09B2	KKPEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT	10	92
Tim07B1	KKIPAGELQIIDKIDA	20	93
Tim07B2	KKIPAGELQIIDKIDAK	20	94

Example 9

Selection of a preferred grass vaccine

[0148] During trial manufacturing, one peptide from the top ranked peptides present in Combination 1 above (Bio03A) was found to be difficult to manufacture due to having a string of 5 contiguous hydrophobic amino acids. When assessing the impact of not including Bio03A in a grass vaccine, the overall coverage of the remaining seven top ranked peptides present in Combination 1 was analysed for the 48 subjects. In this seven peptide mix (Ber01, Ber02, Ber02C, Bio02A, Rye09B, Tim07B and Bio04A) Tim07B and Rye07B are optionally substituted for the variants Tim07B1 and Rye07B1 having improved solubility.

[0149] With the 8 peptides present, including Bio03A, 47/48 subjects (IL-10), 41/48 subjects (IL-13) and 48/48 subjects (IFN- γ) subjects showed positive cytokine responses. In comparison, with seven peptides present, excluding Bio03A, 47/48 subjects (IL-10), 40/48 subjects (IL-13) and 48/48 subjects (IFN- γ) showed positive cytokine responses. Therefore it was concluded that there would be little impact of not including Bio03A in a grass vaccine for manufacture.

[0150] The response properties of the above peptide combinations was compared with whole grass pollen extract containing Timothy, Perennial Rye, and Bermuda grass pollens (Greer Laboratories) and a further positive control, the mitogen SEB. The whole grass pollen extract induced cytokine responses in 11/48 (IL-10), 42/48 (IL-13) and 43/48 (IFN- γ) whilst the other positive control, the mitogen SEB, induced responses in 47/48 (IL-10), 48/48 (IL-13) and 48/48 (IFN- γ). The seven peptide mix thus provides strong cytokine responses in similar percentages of the population as for whole grass allergen.

[0151] The selection of the peptides Ber01, Ber02, Ber02C, Bio02A, Rye09B, Tim07B and Bio04A for a preferred seven peptide grass vaccine was also based on homology considerations. When these seven peptide sequences are compared between different grasses, there is considerable homology in many cases increasing the probability that grass-allergic individuals will respond to the peptides. This means that the peptides have utility even in those subjects whose dominant allergic response is to a grass other than Bermuda, Timothy or Perennial rye. Homologous sequences from other grasses for the above seven peptides are shown as SEQ ID NOs 74 to 90 above. For example, the Ber01 peptide contains the 9 mer epitope FGAMAKKGQ which has close homologues in many other common grasses.

[0152] Furthermore, the seven vaccine peptides are derived from both group 1 and group 5 allergens from the three most prevalent grasses (Timothy, Perennial Rye and Bermuda grasses) and include epitopes with complete or significant homology to the other common grasses (Orchard, Velvet, Kentucky blue and Canary). The seven peptide sequences therefore maximise the breadth of coverage of grass pollen allergic individuals making the vaccine suitable for treating all grass pollen allergic individuals.

Example 10

Histamine release assay

[0153] The purpose of this assay was to identify whether the preferred seven peptide combination of Example 9 was capable of activating blood basophils (as a surrogate for tissue mast cells) resulting in histamine release that may result in allergic reactions during therapy. A combination of peptides that induces histamine release frequently may be considered unsuitable for use as a peptide vaccine.

[0154] Histamine release requires the crosslinking of adjacent specific IgE molecules on the surface of the basophil. The peptides being evaluated were small (10 to 18 amino acids in length) and should not, therefore, possess significant tertiary structure that would enable them to retain the conformation of an IgE-binding epitope of the whole molecule. Furthermore, peptide monomers in solution, even if they are bound by IgE, should not be able to crosslink adjacent IgE molecules. Histamine release from peripheral blood basophils isolated from peripheral whole blood obtained from grass allergic subjects was evaluated. Peripheral blood basophils were used as a surrogate for tissue mast cells which were not practical to assay. The assay required 3×10^6 peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) per subject. PBMCs were incubated *in vitro* with the seven grass peptides from Example 9 in combination. Histamine release in response to whole Grass pollen allergen extract containing Timothy, Perennial Rye, and Bermuda grass pollens (Greer Laboratories) was included as a control. A positive control, representing total histamine release, generated by freeze/thawing the cells twice was also included in each assay.

[0155] Histamine concentrations were measured by ELISA and results expressed as a percentage of the positive control (% positive control). The assay was performed using the Immuntotech Histamine Release Immunoassay kit according to the manufacturer's instructions. Following the *in vitro* challenge of PBMCs with peptides, peptide mixes, whole allergen or buffer in microtitre plate wells, supernatants were removed and the histamine in the samples converted to acyl histamine. Acylated samples were tested by a competitive acyl histamine ELISA.

[0156] Peptides were assayed for their ability to induce histamine release over a 5 log₁₀ range (1 to 10,000 ng/mL). The concentration range assayed was selected based on theoretical *in vivo* doses of peptide that may be achieved during therapy. Based on delivery of peptides by intradermal injection, high local peptide concentrations of up to 10 µg/mL per peptide could be present. Although unlikely, there is a risk that the full dose may be injected into the bloodstream. In this unlikely event, the maximum clinical dose of 20 µg (12 nmole) of each peptide entering a blood volume of 5 litres, would result in a theoretical maximum blood concentration of 4.0 ng/mL. This is at the lower end of the histamine release assay dose range and 2000 times lower than the top concentration used in the assay.

[0157] A whole grass allergen preparation containing Timothy, Perennial Rye and Bermuda grass pollens (Greer Laboratories) was used as a control for histamine release over a 5 log₁₀ range from 10 to 100,000 ng/mL. A negative control for spontaneous histamine release was generated by incubating cells in buffer only.

[0158] Single measurements were performed for each dilution. After completion of the ELISA, individual histamine levels were determined by interpolation from the standard curve generated in the ELISA assay. Results from samples were adjusted to allow for dilution. Where two or more consecutive dilutions of a peptide/allergen preparation elicited >15% of the total histamine release

seen in the freeze thawed positive control (>15% of positive control), or where a single value of >15% of positive control was achieved at the highest concentration tested (10 µg/mL for peptides), this was considered a "positive histamine release".

[0159] A total of 45 histamine release assays were completed during the study. Of these, 3 assays were rejected, due to unacceptably high levels (>15%) of histamine release in the medium plus buffer negative control wells or no response at all in the positive control wells. Therefore a total of 42 subjects were included in the analysis. The study findings are summarised in Table 9.

Protein Concentration (µg/mL)	Subjects with positive histamine release (>=15%)	Mean histamine release (% pos control) n=42	Range (% pos control)
Seven peptide combination * (10)	0/42	0	0-4
Whole grass (100)	32/42	41	2-152
Whole grass (0.01)	21/42	24	0-84
* Seven peptide combination: Ber01, Ber02, Ber02C, Bio02A, Rye09B1, Tim07B1 and Bio04A.			

[0160] The whole grass allergen preparation induced 15% or higher histamine release in 32/42 (76%) of subjects at 100 ug/mL. Even at the lowest concentration of 10 ng/mL, the whole allergen induced high levels of histamine release in 21/42 individuals (50%).

[0161] In contrast, the seven peptide combination failed to elicit significant histamine release in any of the 42 subjects tested, even at the highest concentration for which data is shown, where each peptide was present at 10 µg/mL. This is a concentration 1000 fold higher than the concentration of whole allergen still giving very high levels of histamine release in over half of the subjects (10 ng/mL). The seven peptide combination therefore has negligible potential for causing IgE mediated reactions even in highly sensitive individuals.

[0162] Given the large excess of peptide dose tested in this assay compared to likely concentrations of the peptides following clinical dosing of a grass vaccine, it is not anticipated that administration of the seven peptide combination would cause significant histamine release either by IgE-mediated or direct peptide-mediated basophil or mast cell activation and degranulation. The histamine release data indicate that the seven peptide combination does not induce the activation of basophils and therefore has a very low potential for inducing IgE-mediated acute allergic reactions in grass allergic individuals, either systemically or locally in the skin.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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Patentkrav

1. En sammensætning egnet til anvendelse ved forebyggelse eller behandling af allergi over for græs, hvilken sammensætning omfatter:

- 5 (a) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KIPAGELQIIDKIDA, eller en variant deraf,
- (b) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen SGKAFGAMAKKGQED, eller en variant deraf, og
- (c) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen LKKAVTAMSEAEK, eller en
- 10 variant deraf,
- hvor varianten er et længere polypeptid med en længde på op til 30 aminosyrer, der omfatter sekvensen anført i (a), (b) eller (c).

2. Sammensætningen ifølge krav 1, omfattende mindst en af de nævnte

15 polypeptid-varianter med en længde på op til 20 aminosyrer.

3. Sammensætningen ifølge krav 1, omfattende mindst en af de nævnte

20 polypeptid-varianter med en længde på op til 17 aminosyrer.

4. Sammensætningen ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, hvor (a)

 er polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KKIPAGELQIIDKIDA.

25 5. Sammensætningen ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, som yderligere omfatter:

(d) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen PEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT, eller en variant deraf,

(e) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen FIPMKSSWGA, eller en variant deraf, og

5 (f) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK, eller en variant deraf,

hvor varianten er et længere polypeptid med en længde på op til 30 aminosyrer, der omfatter sekvensen anført i (d), (e) eller (f).

10

6. Sammensætningen ifølge krav 5, hvor (d) er polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KPEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT.

15 7. Sammensætningen ifølge krav 1, der omfatter:

(a) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KKIPAGELQIIDKIDA,

(b) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen SGKAFGAMAKKGQED,

(c) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen LKKAVTAMSEAEK,

(d) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KPEVKYAVFEAALTKAIT,

20 (e) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen FIPMKSSWGA,

(f) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KSSWGAIWRIDPKKPLK, og

(g) polypeptidet bestående af sekvensen KYDAYVATLTEALR.

8. Sammensætningen ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, som er en opløsning, hvor hvert polypeptid forekommer i en koncentration i området fra 0,03 til 200 nmol / ml.

5

9. Sammensætningen ifølge krav 8, hvor hvert polypeptid forekommer i en koncentration i området fra 5 til 200 nmol / ml.

10

10. Sammensætningen ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, som er en farmaceutisk formulering omfattende en farmaceutisk acceptabel bærer eller et farmaceutisk acceptabelt fortyndingsmiddel.

15

11. Den farmaceutiske formulering ifølge krav 10, som er formuleret til oral indgivelse, topisk indgivelse, nasal indgivelse, subkutan indgivelse, sublingual indgivelse, intradermal indgivelse, buccal indgivelse, epidermal indgivelse eller indgivelse via et patch, eller formuleret til indgivelse ved inhalation eller ved injektion.

20

12. Den farmaceutiske formulering ifølge krav 10 eller 11, til anvendelse i en fremgangsmåde til forebyggelse eller behandling af allergi over for græs.

25

13. Den farmaceutiske formulering til anvendelse ifølge krav 12, hvor fremgangsmåden er til forebyggelse eller behandling af allergi over for græs i et menneske.

30

14. Den farmaceutiske formulering til anvendelse ifølge krav 13, hvor mennesket er allergisk over for græs.

5

15. Den farmaceutiske formulering til anvendelse ifølge krav 14, hvor det nævnte menneske:

- er sensibiliseret til et eller flere græspollenallergener;
- har en familiehistorie i hvilken der optræder allergi over for græs; eller
- udviser symptomer på allergi ved udsættelse for græs.

10