Rapid assessment of the BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV
Introduction

The emergence of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in humans and spread of the associated disease, COVID-19, has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO). In the UK, the deployment of a PHE in-house real-time PCR assay in PHE, PHE collaborating laboratories as well as in Devolved Administrations is being followed up with assessments of commercially developed and provided diagnostic tests for SARS-CoV-2 detection.

This assessment examined the BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV (Cat. MFG0300010) following the instruction for use (IFU) released with kits produced 26/02/20.

The assessment panels

The assessment sample panel consisted of residual nucleic acids extracted from 105 specimens (39 SARS-CoV-2 detected and 66 SARS-CoV-2 not detected), tested as part of clinical service provision. The residual nucleic acids had previously been tested with validated commercial assays as part of the clinical service provided by the Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory (RIPL) at PHE Porton. These samples were initially tested using either the Roche Ltd cobas® SARS-CoV-2 Test (n=86) or the CerTest BIOTEC ViaSure SARS-CoV-2 assay (VS-NCO296T) (n=19).

Statistical assessment of panel sizes determined that when the measured specificity for 100 samples at 10% prevalence would yield a true specificity of the test is at least 96.4%.

Performing and analysing the assay

Nucleic acid extracts were aliquoted and added to aliquoted RT-PCR mastermix according to the manufacturer’s instructions, including the appropriate controls. Amplification was performed using the Applied Biosystems ViiA7 Fast instrument according to the manufacturer’s instructions. The BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV is a multiplex RT-qPCR detecting SARS-CoV-2 RNA in the FAM channel and a human sample adequacy control in the VIC/HEX channel. The assay detects a region within the SARS-CoV-2 ORF1ab gene.
Results

During an initial assessment of the BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV (Cat. MFG0300010), evidence of repeated PCR contamination was observed. Positive RT-qPCR amplification signals occurred in known negative samples and no-template controls.

This contamination occurred despite using kits of different lot numbers and was not resolved either by using different equipment and laboratory facilities that had not been previously utilised in the assessment or when different laboratory personnel conducted the testing. The assessment at this site was therefore suspended.

The assessment was relocated to another PHE site and was undertaken using kits bearing a different lot number. The PCR contamination issue was not observed following these changes.

Compared with results obtained with either the Roche COBAS SARS-CoV-2 or the CerTest BIOTEC ViaSure SARS-CoV-2 assay (VS-NCO296T), the following was found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samples (n)</th>
<th>True positive</th>
<th>False positive</th>
<th>True negative</th>
<th>False negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV (Cat. MFG0300010)</td>
<td>105≠</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2Ω</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

≠ The sample panel consisted of 19 nucleic acid extracts tested using CerTest BIOTEC ViaSure SARS-CoV-2 assay (19 SARS-CoV-2 not detected) and 86 (39 SARS-CoV-2 detected and 47 not detected) tested using the Roche Ltd cobas® SARS-CoV-2 Test

Ω SARS-CoV-2 RNA was detected in 2 samples when tested with the BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV but not when tested with the Roche Ltd cobas® SARS-CoV-2 Test

The BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV assay demonstrated assay performance of:

- sensitivity – 97.4% (86.5 to 99.9%; 95% CI)
- specificity – 96.9% (89.5 to 99.6%; 95% CI)
Validation of protocol modifications

It was noted during the assessment that the BGI Real-Time Fluorescent RT-PCR kit for detecting 2019-nCoV assay includes a sample adequacy control, but not an extraction or inhibition control. Implementation of this test would require local validation of nucleic acid extraction procedures.

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Public Health England
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG
Tel: 020 7654 8000

www.gov.uk/phe
Twitter: @PHE_uk
www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland

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Prepared by: NIS Laboratories, National Infection Service, Public Health England
Queries about our assessments of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) diagnostics should be sent to labvalidation.cov@phe.gov.uk

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Published February 2021
PHE gateway number: GW-1955

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