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Comparison of phenotypic traits and genetic relatedness of Salmonella enterica subspecies arizonae isolates from a colony of ridgenose rattlesnakes with osteomyelitis


Abstract. Reptiles are well-known sources of human Salmonella infections; however, little is known about the ability of Salmonella to cause disease in reptiles. Thirty-seven isolates of Salmonella enterica subspecies arizonae (S. arizonae) were obtained from retrospective and prospective studies of a closed colony of ridgenose rattlesnakes (Crotalus willardi) with osteomyelitis. All isolates (N = 7) from bone lesions were of a single serotype, 56:z4,z23, and this serotype was found on only 1 occasion among 8 other serotypes isolated from 21 cloacal and intestinal samples. The remainder (N = 7) of serotype 56:z4,z23 isolates were from other extraintestinal sites, including liver, ovary, blood, and testis. S. arizonae isolates were susceptible to most antimicrobials, and plasmid profiles did not correlate with serotype or antimicrobial resistance. Isolates of the 56:z4,z23 serotype (N = 14) formed a tight cluster with 95% similarity by XbaI macrorestriction analysis. Individual isolates of serotypes, 56:z4,z23, 38:(k)-z35, and 48:i-z invaded HeLa cells but an isolate of serotype 50:r-z did not. The same individual isolates of serotype 56:z4,z23 and 48:i-z also invaded viper heart cells. The Salmonella InvA gene was detected by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) in all S. arizonae serotypes tested, including 5 serotype 56:z4,z23 isolates and individual isolates of serotypes 48:i-z and 50:r-z. A source or possible explanation for increased virulence of S. arizonae serotype 56:z4,z23 in this unique host has not been found.

Contact with reptiles is a well-known risk factor for Salmonella infections especially in children and immunosuppressed individuals.6,23 More than 1,000 of the nearly 2,500 serotypes of Salmonella are isolated primarily from cold-blooded animals and the environment. Salmonella isolates from reptiles belong to subgroups II, IIIA, IIIB, IV, and V (Salmonella enterica subspecies salamae, arizonae, diarizonae, houtenae, and Salmonella bongori, respectively).5

Although reptiles are known sources of Salmonella, very little is known about the ability of Salmonella to cause disease in reptiles. Salmonella has been isolated from diseased reptiles and is regarded as an opportunistic pathogen.2,10,19,20 Whether some Salmonella isolates have a greater degree of adaptation to, or virulence for, particular species of cold-blooded animals is not known. Among reptiles, there have been a disproportionately greater number of S. enterica subspecies arizonae (henceforth referred to as S. arizonae) isolations reported from snakes when compared with terrapins or lizards.11

The association of a single serotype (56:z4,z23) of S. arizonae with osteomyelitis in a colony of ridgenose rattlesnakes was previously reported.21 The snakes were individually housed in a single collection with little opportunity for direct contact. Some had been caught in the wild years earlier and some were born on site. The source of infection was not known. It was questioned whether this serotype was of increased virulence for ridgenose rattlesnakes and whether it came from a point source of contamination or represented exposure to genotypically diverse strains from multiple sources. The purpose of the present study was to characterize the S. arizonae isolates from these snakes with in vitro tests to further differentiate extraintestinal from intestinal isolates and assess virulence and genetic relatedness.

Salmonella arizonae isolates used in this study are listed in Table 1. Serotyping was performed at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory, Ames, IA. All but 1 isolate of serotype 56:z4,z23 were from extraintestinal sites. All but 1 extraintestinal isolate were serotype 56:z4,z23, and all S. arizonae isolates from bone lesions were serotype 56:z4,z23.

Antimicrobial susceptibility tests were performed using a fully automated microbroth dilution system18 according to the manufacturer’s instructions and interpreted according to the National Committee for Clinical Laboratory Standards guidelines for broth microdilution methods.18

Plasmid DNA was isolated using the lysis in solution method as previously described.7 Plasmids were separated in 0.8% agarose by electrophoresis at 10 V/cm for 30 minutes and stained with ethidium bromide for visualization. Molecular weights were determined by comparison with a standard of supercoiled DNA size markers (plasmids <15 kb) and plasmids of known sizes isolated from Escherichia coli V517 (plasmids >15 kb).17

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Cell invasion assays were performed using HeLa cells as previously described. Briefly, the cells were exposed to bacteria at a multiplicity of infection of 100:1, incubated for 1 hour, washed 3 times, treated with gentamicin for 1 hour, washed 3 times, and lysed. On the basis of preliminary experiments, a countable range of viable bacteria were best obtained by plating 0.01-ml samples from a 1:10 dilution of cell lysate. Four cell lysate replicates and 4 dilution sample replicates were used in each experiment. Two intestinal isolates collected from a colony of ridgenose rattlesnakes with osteomyelitis.

The distribution of colony forming units (CFUs) was tested for normality by visualization and use of the Shapiro-Wilk statistic. Non-normally distributed data were converted to ranks and the total CFU for each experiment, cell lysate replicate, and plate count replicate within a bacterial isolate were compared using a mixed model procedure. In the model, CFU was the dependent variable, and bacterial isolate, interaction between experiment and bacterial isolate and replicate nested within experiment and bacterial isolate as the independent variables. Experiment was considered a random factor in the model. All statistical analyses were done using commercial software. A $P$ value of 0.05 was used to identify statistical significance. Macrogen restriction profiles (MRPs) of each isolate were generated by pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) as previously described. One millimeter slices from each sample plug were digested with 10 U XbaI.

### Table 1. Salmonella enterica subspecies arizonae isolates collected from a colony of ridgenose rattlesnakes with osteomyelitis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolate</th>
<th>Animal ID</th>
<th>Body site</th>
<th>Serotype</th>
<th>Isolate</th>
<th>Animal ID</th>
<th>Body site</th>
<th>Serotype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-2589</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>ovary</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
<td>00-4244</td>
<td>1414</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95-2685</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>rib</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
<td>00-4245</td>
<td>1463</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1129</td>
<td>1147</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>48:i-z</td>
<td>00-4246</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>50:r-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1130</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>50:r-z</td>
<td>00-4247</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>61:i-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1131</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>48:i-z</td>
<td>00-4248</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>50:r-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1132</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
<td>00-4274</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>Rough O:k-z35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1133</td>
<td>1005</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
<td>00-4275</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>65:l,v-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1134</td>
<td>1414</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
<td>00-4276</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>48:i-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1135</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>48:i-z</td>
<td>00-4277</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>50:k-z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-1136</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>50:r-z</td>
<td>00-4370</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>vertebra</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-1118</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>liver</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
<td>00-4371</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>rib</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-1119</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>testes</td>
<td>48:i-z</td>
<td>00-4372</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>gonad</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
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<td>00-1120</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>rib</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
<td>00-4373</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>rib</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-1121†</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>48:i-z</td>
<td>01-3416</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>blood</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-4241</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>6,14:z,10-z</td>
<td>01-3424</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>liver</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-4241†</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
<td>01-3425</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>testes</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-4242</td>
<td>1462</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
<td>01-3426</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>rib</td>
<td>56:z,4,z23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00-4243</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>cloaca</td>
<td>38:(k)-z35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Knoxville Zoological Park, Knoxville, TN.
† Separate colony type from same specimen.
² Separate colony type from same specimen.

### Table 2. Median and range of colony forming units (CFU) obtained in cell invasion assays for each bacterium over all experiments, and replicates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bacterial isolate†</th>
<th>HeLa cell line</th>
<th>Viper heart cell line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escherichia coli HB 101</td>
<td>0 (0-0)/16+</td>
<td>1.5 (0-12)/48+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonella arizonae 38:(k)-z35</td>
<td>11 (0-34)/64+</td>
<td>not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonella arizonae 48:i-z</td>
<td>16 (0-51)/64+</td>
<td>359 (219-518)/48+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonella arizonae 50:r-z</td>
<td>0 (0-5)/64+</td>
<td>not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonella arizonae 56:z,4,z23</td>
<td>32 (3-255)/64+</td>
<td>143 (21-334)/48+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonella Choleraesuis</td>
<td>8 (2-16)/12+</td>
<td>51 (43-70)/16+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmonella Typhimurium</td>
<td>5 (1-10)/16+</td>
<td>8 (5-26)/32+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of CFU with different letter in the same column are significantly different ($P < 0.05$).
† A single bacterial strain was used in all experiments. Salmonella arizonae O groups 38, 48, 50 and 56 were represented by isolates 00-4243, 00-1119, 00-1136, and 00-1118, respectively.
‡ Median (range)/number of observations (total number of observations from all plate count, cell lysate and experiment replications).
Fragments were separated in 1.0% agarose using an electrophoresis apparatus with a linearly ramped pulse time of 2.16–35.07 seconds (6.0 V/cm gradient), at an angle of 120°, with a total run time of 14 hours at 14 C. A standard reference strain of Salmonella Newport (strain AM01144, kindly provided by Barbara Gillespie, University of Tennessee) was included in multiple locations on each gel. Gels were stained with ethidium bromide for visualization. Relatedness of MRP band patterns was determined by generating unweighted pair group method with arithmetic averages clusters based on the Dice coefficients of each band pattern.

Detection of a 521-bp Salmonella invA gene sequence in selected S. arizonae isolates was performed by polymerase chain reaction (PCR). DNA was prepared by boiling cultures diluted 1:1 with 0.2% Triton X-100 for 5 minutes. Reactions were conducted in a total volume containing 50 μl of each primer (f = tgttagcgtcctttgacc; r = ctgactgcaccttgcgtag), 10 μl reaction buffer (12.5 mM MgCl₂), 5 μl deoxyribonucleoside triphosphate (dNTP) solution (2.5 mM each dNTP), 32 μl H₂O, and 1 μl DNA solution. Polymerase chain reaction products along with standard weight markers were separated in 1.5 agarose by electrophoresis at 17 V/cm for 1 hour and stained with ethidium bromide for visualization.

All isolates were susceptible to the antimicrobials tested except for 3 serotype 48:i-z isolates that had intermediate susceptibility to enrofloxacin (MIC = 1 μg/ml). These isolates (2 from an antemortem cloacal swab and 1 from testicular tissue taken at necropsy) were from a single snake. Estimated MIC₉₀ values for the S. arizonae isolates were amikacin, ≤2; amoxicillin/clavulanic acid, ≤8; ampicillin, ≤0.25; carbenicillin, ≤2; ceftazidime, ≤8; cefotiofur, ≤1; cephalexin, ≤2; chloramphenicol, ≤4; ciprofloxacin, ≤0.5; enrofloxacin, ≤0.25; gentamicin, ≤0.5; nitrofurantoin, ≤32; piperacillin, ≤8; tetracycline, ≤1; ticarcillin, ≤16; tobramycin, ≤0.5; trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole, ≤10. Slight variation was observed in MIC values for chloramphenicol. Two isolates (14%) of serotype 56:Z4-Z23 and 11 isolates (50%) of other serotypes had MIC values equal to or greater than the MIC₉₀ for chloramphenicol. Host-specific standards for performance and interpretation of antimicrobial susceptibility tests on S. arizonae isolates from rattlesnakes are lacking; therefore, results of these tests may not be suitable for making therapeutic choices. Human Salmonella infections often fail to respond clinically to treatment with first- or second-generation cephalosporins or aminoglycosides, despite the isolates appearing susceptible in vitro.

Plasmids were detected in 21 of 32 isolates examined. Twelve different plasmid profiles were recognized, with plasmid sizes ranging from 2 to 77 kb. Up to 5 plasmids were seen in a single isolate. There was no apparent correlation between possession of plasmids, serotype, and antimicrobial resistance profiles. Three of 4 S. arizonae isolates, including serotype 56:z4,z23, invaded HeLa cells as well or better than a wild-type S. Typhimurium isolate (Table 2). One intestinal isolate of serotype 50:r-z and the E. coli strain tested as a negative control did not invade HeLa cells. Although it is possible that some of the cell-associated bacteria observed in this assay were externally attached, isolates had similar growth rates and were equally susceptible to gentamicin, as determined in preliminary experiments, suggesting that internalization had occurred.

It is not known if HeLa cell invasion is related to extraintestinal spread of S. arizonae in the snake species Crotalus willardi. Live animals and fresh tissues from this rare venomous species are not readily available for study. There are few established cell lines from snakes, none from this species, and none from tissues (e.g., intestinal epithelial or macrophage derived) that are suitable to study extraintestinal bacterial spread. The extraintestinal S. arizonae isolate of serotype 56:z4,z23 and an intestinal isolate of serotype 48:i-z also invaded viper heart cells. Although it may be an artifact of the assay procedure, both isolates and the positive S. Typhimurium control, had up to 5 times

![Figure 1. Amplification of a 521-bp invA sequence in Salmonella arizonae isolates. Polymerase chain reaction products separated in 1.5% agarose and stained with ethidium bromide for visualization. Lane M = 100-bp ladder; lane 1 = 00-1118; lane 2 = 00-1119; lane 3 = 95-2589; lane 4 = 95-2685; lane 5 = 00-4245; lane 6 = 00-4373; lane 7 = 96-1130; lane 8 = Salmonella Typhimurium DT104 (positive control); lane 9 = Escherichia coli pcd1 (negative control); lane 10 = E. coli pcd5 (negative control); lane 11 = E. coli pcd2 (negative control). Location of the invA DNA fragment on the gel is indicated with an arrow. A DNA fragment of 521 bp was amplified using primers specific for the invA gene.](image-url)
Figure 2. Relatedness of pulsed-field gel electrophoresis profiles of *S. arizonae* isolates from ridgenose rattlesnakes. Similarity scale (percent) is indicated at the top of the dendrogram. *Salmonella arizonae* serotype and *S.* Newport control strain are designated in the column to the right.
more bacteria associated with viper heart cells than had been observed with HeLa cells.

As has been reported for a few other isolates in the literature,\(^4\) the *Salmonella invA* gene was present in all *S. arizonae* isolates examined (Fig. 1). A search for other genetic markers that may be associated with invasion and intracellular survival in serotype 56:z4,z23 has not been performed.

Relatedness of 34 *S. arizonae* isolates from 16 snakes, based on PFGE MRPs, is illustrated by the dendrogram in Fig. 2. Isolates of serotype 56:z4,z23 formed a cluster at 95% similarity that was distinctly different from all other *Salmonella*. *Salmonella arizonae* serotypes 38:(k)-z35 and 48:i-z also showed a tendency to cluster but had 1 or more isolates with dissimilar MRPs. Three isolates (00-4274, 00-4275, and 00-4277) repeatedly failed to yield macrorestriction fragments presumably due to ineffective DNA extraction or degradation during the procedure. Recent technical improvements in the PFGE method may overcome the problem with these isolates.\(^1,13\) Correlations between PFGE macrorestriction patterns and serotypes have been reported for several *Salmonella* spp. implicated in human salmonellosis.\(^14\) However, PFGE has also been useful for distinguishing strains within a variety of different *Salmonella* serotypes.\(^11,15\) Although 3 of the snakes that these isolates were obtained from were wild-caught, they had been in the present collection for more than 5 years and had limited opportunity for contact with each other or with other snakes in the collection. The native habitat and breeding range (mountainous desert regions of southwestern United States and northern Mexico) of this snake species is also quite limited. It is tempting to speculate that limited diversity among isolates of the 56:z4,z23 serotype could reflect a special host–parasite relationship. Additional isolates and analytical procedures must be performed before conclusions can be drawn regarding diversity within the *S. arizonae* 56:z4,z23 serotype.

This is an infrequently encountered *Salmonella* serotype. Review of a database\(^6\) representing more than 200,000 *Salmonella* isolates from animals revealed a history of only 3 other isolates of serotype 56:z4,z23.\(^21\) Several snakes remaining in the present collection have bone lesions that have yet to be cultured. Additional isolates from bone lesions and of this serotype are being sought for further comparisons. This study confirms that isolates of *S. arizonae* serotype 56:z4,z23 have the potential to invade cells and supports further study to determine if this serotype has other extraintestinal survival advantages in *C. willardi*.

Acknowledgements. We thank Bern Tryon, the Knoxville Zoological Garden, Mary Jean Bryant, Rebekah Duckett, Kathleen Ferris, Barbara Gillespie, Mary Anne Barnhill, Dr. Vina Dedericht, Dr. Ed Licky, Dr. Alan Matthew, Dr. Robert Donnell, and The University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine Center of Excellence Summer Fellowship Program.

Sources and manufacturers

- a. Vit ek AMS with GNS-VB susceptibility card, bioMerieux, St. Louis, MO.
- b. ATCC, no. CCL-140, American Type Culture Collection, Rockville, MD.
- c. SeaKem Gold, FMC BioProducts, Rockland, ME.
- d. CHEF Mapper System and Molecular Analyst Software, Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA.
- e. National Veterinary Services Laboratory, Ames, IA.

References

Clinical coccidiosis in a boar stud

Michael J. Yaeger, Andrew Holtcamp, Julie A. Jarvinen

Abstract. This report describes an outbreak of coccidiosis in a boar stud. A live, untreated, adult boar with a history of diarrhea was submitted to the Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, Ames, IA. For a 3-month period, approximately 40% of the boars in this stud had developed gray to brown diarrhea that lasted 1–3 days. Affected boars did not lose condition, and antibiotic therapy did not appear to affect the clinical course of the disease. At necropsy, the distal ileum was palpably thickened and covered by a thick, yellow-green, fibrinous exudate. Microscopic changes in the ileum consisted of an erosive enteritis associated with the presence of numerous coccidia within mid to superficial villus enterocytes. The mucosa was covered by a fibrinous exudate admixed with numerous nonsporulated coccidian oocysts. A light growth of Salmonella enterica serovar Derby was isolated from the small intestine of this animal, but laboratory tests were negative for Lawsonia and Brachyspira spp. Individual or paired fecal samples were obtained from 6 additional boars experiencing similar clinical signs. Numerous Eimeria spinosa oocysts were identified in these samples. Neither Salmonella nor Brachyspira spp. were cultured from submitted fecal samples. Necropsy of a live boar and examination of feces from 6 additional animals confirmed that the mild, sporadic, transient diarrhea in this boar stud was due to coccidiosis.

The principal agents identified in adult swine with diarrhea include Lawsonia intracellularis, Salmonella spp., Brachyspira spp., and transmissible gastroenteritis. 5 Coccidiosis is primarily a disease of suckling and recently weaned pigs. 6 Reports of clinical coccidiosis in grow/finish and adult swine are rare. 2 This report describes an outbreak of clinical coccidiosis in a boar stud due to Eimeria spinosa.

A live, untreated, adult boar was submitted to the Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, Ames, IA (ISU VDL), from a boar stud experiencing an ongoing problem with diarrhea. Clinical signs were initially observed in 3% of the boars. For a 3-month period, approximately 40% of the boars developed gray to brown diarrhea that lasted 1–3 days. Affected boars did not lose condition. Treatment with 400 g/ton chlorotetracycline or 100 g/ton of tylosin in the feed did not appear to affect the clinical course of disease. This boar was reported to be exhibiting clinical signs typical of the herd problem and was available, in part, because of poor semen quality.

The animal was from a 250-boar stud. Boars were housed in large gestation crates, arranged in 6 rows in a single barn. Crates were on slatted floors with a single common water trough per row located at the end of each crate. The lip of the trough was even with the surface of the slatted flooring and walkway. The boars had access to a clean collection pen 1–2 times per week. The entire barn was washed once per week with water and the aisles were scraped and swept daily. New boars were introduced every 60 to 90 days.

At necropsy the boar was in good flesh. The wall of approximately 70–80 centimeters of the distal ileum...