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(71) Applicant: **JANSSEN SCIENCES IRELAND UNLIMITED COMPANY** [IE/IE]; Barnahely, Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork (IE).

(72) Inventors: **HORTON, Helen**; c/o Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, Turnhoutseweg 30, 2340 Beerse (BE). **STRICKLAND, Ian**; c/o Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, Turnhoutseweg 30, 2340 Beerse (BE). **BODEN, Daniel**; c/o Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, Turnhoutseweg 30, 2340 Beerse (BE).

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(54) Title: LIPID NANOPARTICLE OR LIPOSOME DELIVERY OF HEPATITIS B VIRUS (HBV) VACCINES

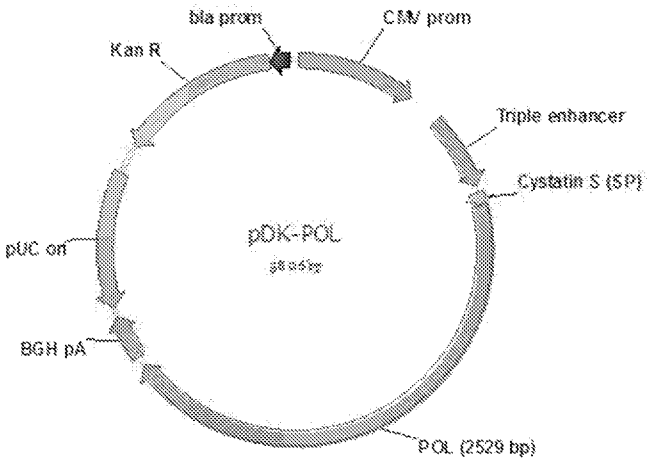


FIG. 1A

(57) Abstract: Pharmaceutical compositions containing hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccines and lipids are described. Methods of inducing an immune response against HBV or treating an HBV-induced disease, particularly in individuals having chronic HBV infection, using the disclosed pharmaceutical compositions are also described.

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# TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Lipid Nanoparticle or Liposome Delivery of Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) Vaccines

## CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 62/863,958 filed on June 20, 2019, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

## REFERENCE TO SEQUENCE LISTING SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY

This application contains a sequence listing, which is submitted electronically via EFS-Web as an ASCII formatted sequence listing with a file name "065814.11214/7WO1 Sequence Listing" and a creation date of June 11, 2020 and having a size of 45.4 kb. The sequence listing submitted via EFS-Web is part of the specification and is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a small 3.2-kb hepatotropic DNA virus that encodes four open reading frames and seven proteins. Approximately 240 million people have chronic hepatitis B infection (chronic HBV), characterized by persistent virus and subvirus particles in the blood for more than 6 months (Cohen et al. J. Viral Hepat. (2011) 18(6), 377-83). Persistent HBV infection leads to T-cell exhaustion in circulating and intrahepatic HBV-specific CD4+ and CD8+ T-cells through chronic stimulation of HBV-specific T-cell receptors with viral peptides and circulating antigens. As a result, T-cell polyfunctionality is decreased (i.e., decreased levels of IL-2, tumor necrosis factor (TNF)-α, IFN-γ, and lack of proliferation).

A safe and effective prophylactic vaccine against HBV infection has been available since the 1980s and is the mainstay of hepatitis B prevention (World Health Organization, Hepatitis B: Fact sheet No. 204 [Internet] 2015 March.). The World Health Organization recommends vaccination of all infants, and, in countries where there is low or intermediate hepatitis B endemicity, vaccination of all children and adolescents (<18 years of age), and of people of certain at risk population categories. Due to vaccination, worldwide infection rates have dropped dramatically. However, prophylactic vaccines do not cure established HBV infection.

Chronic HBV is currently treated with IFN-α and nucleoside or nucleotide analogs, but there is no ultimate cure due to the persistence in infected hepatocytes of an intracellular viral replication intermediate called covalently closed circular DNA (cccDNA), which plays a fundamental role as a template for viral RNAs, and thus new virions. It is thought that induced virus-specific T-cell and B-cell responses can effectively eliminate cccDNA-carrying hepatocytes. Current therapies targeting the HBV polymerase suppress viremia, but offer limited effect on cccDNA that resides in the nucleus and related production of circulating antigen. The most rigorous form of a cure may be elimination of HBV cccDNA from the organism, which has neither been observed as a naturally occurring outcome nor as a result of any therapeutic intervention. However, loss of HBV surface antigens (HBsAg) is a clinically credible equivalent of a cure, since disease relapse can occur only in cases of severe immunosuppression, which can then be prevented by prophylactic treatment. Thus, at least from a clinical standpoint, loss of HBsAg is associated with the most stringent form of immune reconstitution against HBV.

For example, immune modulation with pegylated interferon (pegIFN)-α has proven better in comparison to nucleoside or nucleotide therapy in terms of sustained off-treatment response with a finite treatment course. Besides a direct antiviral effect, IFN-α is reported to exert epigenetic suppression of cccDNA in cell culture and humanized mice, which leads to reduction of virion productivity and transcripts (Belloni et al. J. Clin. Invest. (2012) 122(2), 529-537). However, this therapy is still fraught with side-effects and overall responses are rather low, in part because IFN-α has only poor modulatory influences on HBV-specific T-cells. In particular, cure rates are low (< 10%) and toxicity is high. Likewise, direct acting HBV antivirals, namely the HBV polymerase inhibitors entecavir and tenofovir, are effective as monotherapy in inducing viral suppression with a high genetic barrier to emergence of drug resistant mutants and consecutive prevention of liver disease progression. However, cure of chronic hepatitis B, defined by HBsAg loss or seroconversion, is rarely achieved with such HBV polymerase inhibitors. Therefore, these antivirals in theory need to be administered indefinitely to prevent reoccurrence of liver disease, similar to antiretroviral therapy for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Therapeutic vaccination has the potential to eliminate HBV from chronically infected patients (Michel et al. J. Hepatol. (2011) 54(6), 1286-1296). Many strategies have been explored, but to date therapeutic vaccination has not proven successful.

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, there is an unmet medical need in the treatment of hepatitis B virus (HBV), particularly chronic HBV, for a finite well-tolerated treatment with a higher cure rate. The invention satisfies this need by providing pharmaceutical compositions or compositions and methods for inducing an immune response against hepatitis B viruses (HBV) infection. The immunogenic compositions/combinations and methods of the invention can be used to provide therapeutic immunity to a subject, such as a subject having chronic HBV infection.

In a general aspect, the application relates to pharmaceutical compositions comprising one or more polynucleotides encoding HBV antigens for use in treating an HBV infection in a subject in need thereof.

In one embodiment, a pharmaceutical composition of the application comprises:

i) at least one of:

a) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 95%, such as at least 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and

b) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having an amino acid sequence that is at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen does not have reverse transcriptase activity and RNase H activity; and

ii) a cationic lipid, such as those described herein.

In one embodiment, the truncated HBV core antigen consists of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, and the HBV polymerase antigen comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7.

In one embodiment, the pharmaceutical composition comprises at least one of the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising the first polynucleotide sequence encoding the truncated HBV core antigen, and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising the second polynucleotide sequence encoding the HBV polymerase antigen. In certain embodiments, the first

non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the truncated HBV core antigen, and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the HBV polymerase antigen, preferably, the signal sequence independently comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15, more preferably, the signal sequence is encoded by the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 8 or SEQ ID NO: 14, respectively.

In certain embodiments, the first polynucleotide sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence having at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.

In certain embodiments, the second polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

In certain embodiments, examples of lipids, pharmaceutical compositions comprising the lipids, methods of making the lipids or formulating pharmaceutical compositions comprising the lipids and nucleic acid molecules, and methods of using the pharmaceutical compositions for treating or preventing diseases are described in U.S. or International Patent Application Publications, such as US2017/0190661, US2006/0008910, US2015/0064242, US2005/0064595, WO/2019/036030, US2019/0022247, WO/2019/036028, WO/2019/036008, WO/2019/036000, US2016/0376224, US2017/0119904, WO/2018/200943, WO/2018/191657, WO/2018/118102, US20180169268 , WO2018118102 , WO2018119163, US2014/0255472, and US2013/0195968, the relevant content of each of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

In one embodiment, a pharmaceutical composition of the application comprises:

a) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 95%, such as at least 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4;

b) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having an amino acid sequence that is at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen does not have reverse transcriptase activity and RNase H activity;

c) a cationic lipid, and

d) at least one selected from the group consisting of anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, polymer conjugated lipids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and a combination thereof,

wherein the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated or encompassed in a lipid nanoparticle or a liposome comprising the cationic lipid and the at least one other lipid selected from the group consisting of anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, polymer conjugated lipids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and the combination thereof.

Preferably, the pharmaceutical composition comprises a) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding an truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and b) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7, encapsulated or encompassed in the lipid nanoparticle or the liposome.

Preferably, the pharmaceutical composition comprises a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a polynucleotide sequence having at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, and a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising the polynucleotide sequence having at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

More preferably, the pharmaceutical composition comprises a) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3; b) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 5 or 6; and c) the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are fully

encompassed in a lipid nanoparticle or a liposome comprising a cationic lipid and at least one other lipid selected from the group consisting of anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, polymer conjugated lipids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and the combination thereof.

In an embodiment, each of the first and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is a DNA molecule, preferably the DNA molecule is a DNA plasmid or a linear closed miniDNA.

In another embodiment, each of the first and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is an RNA molecule, preferably an mRNA or a self-replicating RNA molecule.

In some embodiments, each of the first and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is independently formulated with a lipid nanoparticle (LNP).

In some embodiments, each of the first and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is independently formulated with a liposome.

In another general aspect, the application relates to a kit comprising a pharmaceutical composition of the application.

The application also relates to a pharmaceutical composition or kit of the application for use in inducing an immune response against hepatitis B virus (HBV); and use of a pharmaceutical composition, composition or kit of the application in the manufacture of a medicament for inducing an immune response against hepatitis B virus (HBV). The use can further comprise a combination with another immunogenic or therapeutic agent, preferably another HBV antigen or another HBV therapy. Preferably, the subject has chronic HBV infection.

The application further relates to a pharmaceutical composition or kit of the application for use in treating an HBV-induced disease in a subject in need thereof; and use of pharmaceutical composition or kit of the application in the manufacture of a medicament for treating an HBV-induced disease in a subject in need thereof. The use can further comprise a combination with another therapeutic agent, preferably another anti-HBV antigen. Preferably, the subject has chronic HBV infection, and the HBV-induced disease is selected from the group consisting of advanced fibrosis, cirrhosis, and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

The application also relates to a method of inducing an immune response against an HBV or a method of treating an HBV infection or an HBV-induced disease,

comprising administering to a subject in need thereof a pharmaceutical composition according to embodiments of the invention.

Other aspects, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following disclosure, including the detailed description of the invention and its preferred embodiments and the appended claims.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing summary, as well as the following detailed description of preferred embodiments of the present application, will be better understood when read in conjunction with the appended drawings. It should be understood, however, that the application is not limited to the precise embodiments shown in the drawings.

**FIG. 1A** and **FIG. 1B** show schematic representations of DNA plasmids according to embodiments of the application; **FIG. 1A** shows a DNA plasmid encoding an HBV core antigen according to an embodiment of the application; **FIG. 1B** shows a DNA plasmid encoding an HBV polymerase (pol) antigen according to an embodiment of the application; the HBV core and pol antigens are expressed under control of a CMV promoter with an N-terminal cystatin S signal peptide that is cleaved from the expressed antigen upon secretion from the cell; transcriptional regulatory elements of the plasmid include an enhancer sequence located between the CMV promoter and the polynucleotide sequence encoding the HBV antigen and a bGH polyadenylation sequence located downstream of the polynucleotide sequence encoding the HBV antigen; a second expression cassette is included in the plasmid in reverse orientation including a kanamycin resistance gene under control of an Ampr (bla) promoter; an origin of replication (pUC) is also included in reverse orientation.

**FIG. 2A** and **FIG. 2B**. show the schematic representations of the expression cassettes in adenoviral vectors according to embodiments of the application; **FIG. 2A** shows the expression cassette for a truncated HBV core antigen, which contains a CMV promoter, an intron (a fragment derived from the human ApoAI gene - GenBank accession X01038 base pairs 295 – 523, harboring the ApoAI second intron), a human immunoglobulin secretion signal, followed by a coding sequence for a truncated HBV core antigen and a SV40 polyadenylation signal; **FIG. 2B** shows the expression cassette for a fusion protein of a truncated HBV core antigen operably linked to an HBV polymerase antigen, which is otherwise identical to the expression cassette for the truncated HBV core antigen except the HBV antigen.

**FIG. 3** shows ELISPOT responses of Balb/c mice immunized with different DNA plasmids expressing HBV core antigen or HBV pol antigen, as described in Example 3; peptide pools used to stimulate splenocytes isolated from the various vaccinated animal groups are indicated in gray scale; the number of responsive T-cells are indicated on the y-axis expressed as spot forming cells (SFC) per $10^6$ splenocytes.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Various publications, articles and patents are cited or described in the background and throughout the specification; each of these references is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety. Discussion of documents, acts, materials, devices, articles or the like which has been included in the present specification is for the purpose of providing context for the invention. Such discussion is not an admission that any or all of these matters form part of the prior art with respect to any inventions disclosed or claimed.

Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood to one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention pertains. Otherwise, certain terms used herein have the meanings as set forth in the specification. All patents, published patent applications and publications cited herein are incorporated by reference as if set forth fully herein.

It must be noted that as used herein and in the appended claims, the singular forms "a," "an," and "the" include plural reference unless the context clearly dictates otherwise.

Unless otherwise indicated, the term "at least" preceding a series of elements is to be understood to refer to every element in the series. Those skilled in the art will recognize, or be able to ascertain using no more than routine experimentation, many equivalents to the specific embodiments of the invention described herein. Such equivalents are intended to be encompassed by the invention.

Throughout this specification and the claims which follow, unless the context requires otherwise, the word "comprise", and variations such as "comprises" and "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or step or group of integers or steps but not the exclusion of any other integer or step or group of integer or step. When used herein the term "comprising" can be substituted with the term "containing" or "including" or sometimes when used herein with the term "having".

When used herein "consisting of" excludes any element, step, or ingredient not specified in the claim element. When used herein, "consisting essentially of" does not exclude materials or steps that do not materially affect the basic and novel characteristics of the claim. Any of the aforementioned terms of "comprising", "containing", "including", and "having", whenever used herein in the context of an aspect or embodiment of the application can be replaced with the term "consisting of" or "consisting essentially of" to vary scopes of the disclosure.

As used herein, the conjunctive term "and/or" between multiple recited elements is understood as encompassing both individual and combined options. For instance, where two elements are conjoined by "and/or," a first option refers to the applicability of the first element without the second. A second option refers to the applicability of the second element without the first. A third option refers to the applicability of the first and second elements together. Any one of these options is understood to fall within the meaning, and therefore satisfy the requirement of the term "and/or" as used herein. Concurrent applicability of more than one of the options is also understood to fall within the meaning, and therefore satisfy the requirement of the term "and/or."

Unless otherwise stated, any numerical value, such as a concentration or a concentration range described herein, are to be understood as being modified in all instances by the term "about." Thus, a numerical value typically includes ± 10% of the recited value. For example, a concentration of 1 mg/mL includes 0.9 mg/mL to 1.1 mg/mL. Likewise, a concentration range of 1 mg/mL to 10 mg/mL includes 0.9 mg/mL to 11 mg/mL. As used herein, the use of a numerical range expressly includes all possible subranges, all individual numerical values within that range, including integers within such ranges and fractions of the values unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

The phrases "percent (%) sequence identity" or "% identity" or "% identical to" when used with reference to an amino acid sequence describe the number of matches ("hits") of identical amino acids of two or more aligned amino acid sequences as compared to the number of amino acid residues making up the overall length of the amino acid sequences. In other terms, using an alignment, for two or more sequences the percentage of amino acid residues that are the same (e.g. 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 97%, 98%, 99%, or 100% identity over the full-length of the amino acid sequences) may be determined, when the sequences are compared and

aligned for maximum correspondence as measured using a sequence comparison algorithm as known in the art, or when manually aligned and visually inspected. The sequences which are compared to determine sequence identity may thus differ by substitution(s), addition(s) or deletion(s) of amino acids. Suitable programs for aligning protein sequences are known to the skilled person. The percentage sequence identity of protein sequences can, for example, be determined with programs such as CLUSTALW, Clustal Omega, FASTA or BLAST, e.g. using the NCBI BLAST algorithm (Altschul SF, et al (1997), *Nucleic Acids Res.* 25:3389-3402).

As used herein, the terms and phrases "in combination," "in combination with," "co-delivery," and "administered together with" in the context of the administration of two or more therapies or components to a subject refers to simultaneous administration or subsequent administration of two or more therapies or components, such as two vectors, e.g., DNA plasmids, peptides, or a pharmaceutical composition and an adjuvant. "Simultaneous administration" can be administration of the two or more therapies or components at least within the same day. When two components are "administered together with" or "administered in combination with," they can be administered in separate compositions sequentially within a short time period, such as 24, 20, 16, 12, 8 or 4 hours, or within 1 hour, or they can be administered in a single composition at the same time. "Subsequent administration" can be administration of the two or more therapies or components in the same day or on separate days. The use of the term "in combination with" does not restrict the order in which therapies or components are administered to a subject. For example, a first therapy or component (e.g. first liposome-encapsulated DNA plasmid encoding an HBV antigen) can be administered prior to (e.g., 5 minutes to one hour before), concomitantly with or simultaneously with, or subsequent to (e.g., 5 minutes to one hour after) the administration of a second therapy or component (e.g., second liposome-encapsulated DNA plasmid encoding an HBV antigen). In some embodiments, a first therapy or component (e.g. first liposome-encapsulated DNA plasmid encoding an HBV antigen) and a second therapy or component (e.g., second liposome-encapsulated DNA plasmid encoding an HBV antigen) are administered in the same composition. In other embodiments, a first therapy or component (e.g. first liposome-encapsulated DNA plasmid encoding an HBV antigen) and a second therapy or component (e.g., second liposome-encapsulated DNA plasmid encoding an

HBV antigen) are administered in separate compositions, such as two separate compositions.

As used herein, a "non-naturally occurring" nucleic acid or polypeptide, refers to a nucleic acid or polypeptide that does not occur in nature. A "non-naturally occurring" nucleic acid or polypeptide can be synthesized, treated, fabricated, and/or otherwise manipulated in a laboratory and/or manufacturing setting. In some cases, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid or polypeptide can comprise a naturally-occurring nucleic acid or polypeptide that is treated, processed, or manipulated to exhibit properties that were not present in the naturally-occurring nucleic acid or polypeptide, prior to treatment. As used herein, a "non-naturally occurring" nucleic acid or polypeptide can be a nucleic acid or polypeptide isolated or separated from the natural source in which it was discovered, and it lacks covalent bonds to sequences with which it was associated in the natural source. A "non-naturally occurring" nucleic acid or polypeptide can be made recombinantly or via other methods, such as chemical synthesis.

As used herein, "subject" means any animal, preferably a mammal, most preferably a human, to whom will be or has been treated by a method according to an embodiment of the application. The term "mammal" as used herein, encompasses any mammal. Examples of mammals include, but are not limited to, cows, horses, sheep, pigs, cats, dogs, mice, rats, rabbits, guinea pigs, non-human primates (NHPs) such as monkeys or apes, humans, etc., more preferably a human.

As used herein, the term "operably linked" refers to a linkage or a juxtaposition wherein the components so described are in a relationship permitting them to function in their intended manner. For example, a regulatory sequence operably linked to a nucleic acid sequence of interest is capable of directing the transcription of the nucleic acid sequence of interest, or a signal sequence operably linked to an amino acid sequence of interest is capable of secreting or translocating the amino acid sequence of interest over a membrane.

In an attempt to help the reader of the application, the description has been separated in various paragraphs or sections, or is directed to various embodiments of the application. These separations should not be considered as disconnecting the substance of a paragraph or section or embodiments from the substance of another paragraph or section or embodiments. To the contrary, one skilled in the art will understand that the description has broad application and encompasses all the

combinations of the various sections, paragraphs and sentences that can be contemplated. The discussion of any embodiment is meant only to be exemplary and is not intended to suggest that the scope of the disclosure, including the claims, is limited to these examples. For example, while embodiments of HBV vectors of the application (e.g., plasmid DNA or viral vectors) described herein may contain particular components, including, but not limited to, certain promoter sequences, enhancer or regulatory sequences, signal peptides, coding sequence of an HBV antigen, polyadenylation signal sequences, etc. arranged in a particular order, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the concepts disclosed herein may equally apply to other components arranged in other orders that can be used in HBV vectors of the application. The application contemplates use of any of the applicable components in any combination having any sequence that can be used in HBV vectors of the application, whether or not a particular combination is expressly described. The invention generally relates to a pharmaceutical composition comprising one or more HBV antigens and one or more lipids.

**Hepatitis B Virus (HBV)**

As used herein "hepatitis B virus" or "HBV" refers to a virus of the hepadnaviridae family. HBV is a small (e.g., 3.2 kb) hepatotropic DNA virus that encodes four open reading frames and seven proteins. The seven proteins encoded by HBV include small (S), medium (M), and large (L) surface antigen (HBsAg) or envelope (Env) proteins, pre-Core protein, core protein, viral polymerase (Pol), and HBx protein. HBV expresses three surface antigens, or envelope proteins, L, M, and S, with S being the smallest and L being the largest. The extra domains in the M and L proteins are named Pre-S2 and Pre-S1, respectively. Core protein is the subunit of the viral nucleocapsid. Pol is needed for synthesis of viral DNA (reverse transcriptase, RNaseH, and primer), which takes place in nucleocapsids localized to the cytoplasm of infected hepatocytes. PreCore is the core protein with an N-terminal signal peptide and is proteolytically processed at its N and C termini before secretion from infected cells, as the so-called hepatitis B e-antigen (HBeAg). HBx protein is required for efficient transcription of covalently closed circular DNA (cccDNA). HBx is not a viral structural protein. All viral proteins of HBV have their own mRNA except for core and polymerase, which share an mRNA. With the exception of the protein pre-Core, none of the HBV viral proteins are subject to post-translational proteolytic processing.

The HBV virion contains a viral envelope, nucleocapsid, and single copy of the partially double-stranded DNA genome. The nucleocapsid comprises 120 dimers of core protein and is covered by a capsid membrane embedded with the S, M, and L viral envelope or surface antigen proteins. After entry into the cell, the virus is uncoated and the capsid-containing relaxed circular DNA (rcDNA) with covalently bound viral polymerase migrates to the nucleus. During that process, phosphorylation of the core protein induces structural changes, exposing a nuclear localization signal enabling interaction of the capsid with so-called importins. These importins mediate binding of the core protein to nuclear pore complexes upon which the capsid disassembles and polymerase/rcDNA complex is released into the nucleus. Within the nucleus the rcDNA becomes deproteinized (removal of polymerase) and is converted by host DNA repair machinery to a covalently closed circular DNA (cccDNA) genome from which overlapping transcripts encode for HBeAg, HBsAg, Core protein, viral polymerase and HBx protein. Core protein, viral polymerase, and pre-genomic RNA (pgRNA) associate in the cytoplasm and self-assemble into immature pgRNA-containing capsid particles, which further convert into mature rcDNA-capsids and function as a common intermediate that is either enveloped and secreted as infectious virus particles or transported back to the nucleus to replenish and maintain a stable cccDNA pool.

To date, HBV is divided into four serotypes (adr, adw, ayr, ayw) based on antigenic epitopes present on the envelope proteins, and into eight genotypes (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H) based on the sequence of the viral genome. The HBV genotypes are distributed over different geographic regions. For example, the most prevalent genotypes in Asia are genotypes B and C. Genotype D is dominant in Africa, the Middle East, and India, whereas genotype A is widespread in Northern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and West Africa.

**HBV Antigens**

As used herein, the terms "HBV antigen," "antigenic polypeptide of HBV," "HBV antigenic polypeptide," "HBV antigenic protein," "HBV immunogenic polypeptide," and "HBV immunogen" all refer to a polypeptide capable of inducing an immune response, e.g., a humoral and/or cellular mediated response, against an HBV in a subject. The HBV antigen can be a polypeptide of HBV, a fragment or epitope thereof, or a combination of multiple HBV polypeptides, portions or derivatives thereof. An HBV antigen is capable of raising in a host a protective

immune response, e.g., inducing an immune response against a viral disease or infection, and/or producing an immunity (i.e., vaccinates) in a subject against a viral disease or infection, that protects the subject against the viral disease or infection. For example, an HBV antigen can comprise a polypeptide or immunogenic fragment(s) thereof from any HBV protein, such as HBeAg, pre-core protein, HBsAg (S, M, or L proteins), core protein, viral polymerase, or HBx protein derived from any HBV genotype, e.g., genotype A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and/or H, or combination thereof.

(1) HBV Core Antigen

As used herein, each of the terms "HBV core antigen," "HBc" and "core antigen" refers to an HBV antigen capable of inducing an immune response, e.g., a humoral and/or cellular mediated response, against an HBV core protein in a subject. Each of the terms "core," "core polypeptide," and "core protein" refers to the HBV viral core protein. Full-length core antigen is typically 183 amino acids in length and includes an assembly domain (amino acids 1 to 149) and a nucleic acid binding domain (amino acids 150 to 183). The 34-residue nucleic acid binding domain is required for pre-genomic RNA encapsidation. This domain also functions as a nuclear import signal. It comprises 17 arginine residues and is highly basic, consistent with its function. HBV core protein is dimeric in solution, with the dimers self-assembling into icosahedral capsids. Each dimer of core protein has four α-helix bundles flanked by an α-helix domain on either side. Truncated HBV core proteins lacking the nucleic acid binding domain are also capable of forming capsids.

In an embodiment of the application, an HBV antigen is a truncated HBV core antigen. As used herein, a "truncated HBV core antigen," refers to an HBV antigen that does not contain the entire length of an HBV core protein, but is capable of inducing an immune response against the HBV core protein in a subject. For example, an HBV core antigen can be modified to delete one or more amino acids of the highly positively charged (arginine rich) C-terminal nucleic acid binding domain of the core antigen, which typically contains seventeen arginine (R) residues. A truncated HBV core antigen of the application is preferably a C-terminally truncated HBV core protein which does not comprise the HBV core nuclear import signal and/or a truncated HBV core protein from which the C-terminal HBV core nuclear import signal has been deleted. In an embodiment, a truncated HBV core antigen comprises a deletion in the C-terminal nucleic acid binding domain, such as a deletion of 1 to 34 amino acid residues of the C-terminal nucleic acid binding domain, e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,

6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, or 34 amino acid residues, preferably a deletion of all 34 amino acid residues. In a preferred embodiment, a truncated HBV core antigen comprises a deletion in the C-terminal nucleic acid binding domain, preferably a deletion of all 34 amino acid residues.

An HBV core antigen of the application can be a consensus sequence derived from multiple HBV genotypes (e.g., genotypes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H). As used herein, "consensus sequence" means an artificial sequence of amino acids based on an alignment of amino acid sequences of homologous proteins, e.g., as determined by an alignment (e.g., using Clustal Omega) of amino acid sequences of homologous proteins. It can be the calculated order of most frequent amino acid residues, found at each position in a sequence alignment, based upon sequences of HBV antigens (e.g., core, pol, etc.) from at least 100 natural HBV isolates. A consensus sequence can be non-naturally occurring and different from the native viral sequences. Consensus sequences can be designed by aligning multiple HBV antigen sequences from different sources using a multiple sequence alignment tool, and at variable alignment positions, selecting the most frequent amino acid. Preferably, a consensus sequence of an HBV antigen is derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D. The term "consensus antigen" is used to refer to an antigen having a consensus sequence.

An exemplary truncated HBV core antigen according to the application lacks the nucleic acid binding function, and is capable of inducing an immune response in a mammal against at least two HBV genotypes. Preferably a truncated HBV core antigen is capable of inducing a T cell response in a mammal against at least HBV genotypes B, C and D. More preferably, a truncated HBV core antigen is capable of inducing a CD8 T cell response in a human subject against at least HBV genotypes A, B, C and D.

Preferably, an HBV core antigen of the application is a consensus antigen, preferably a consensus antigen derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D, more preferably a truncated consensus antigen derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D. An exemplary truncated HBV core consensus antigen according to the application consists of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4. SEQ

ID NO: 2 and SEQ ID NO: 4 are core consensus antigens derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D. SEQ ID NO: 2 and SEQ ID NO: 4 each contain a 34-amino acid C-terminal deletion of the highly positively charged (arginine rich) nucleic acid binding domain of the native core antigen.

In one embodiment of the application, an HBV core antigen is a truncated HBV antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2. In another embodiment, an HBV core antigen is a truncated HBV antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4. In another embodiment, an HBV core antigen further contains a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of a mature HBV core antigen sequence, such as the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4. Preferably, the signal sequence has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15.

(2) HBV Polymerase Antigen

As used herein, the term "HBV polymerase antigen," "HBV Pol antigen" or "HBV pol antigen" refers to an HBV antigen capable of inducing an immune response, e.g., a humoral and/or cellular mediated response, against an HBV polymerase in a subject. Each of the terms "polymerase," "polymerase polypeptide," "Pol" and "pol" refers to the HBV viral DNA polymerase. The HBV viral DNA polymerase has four domains, including, from the N terminus to the C terminus, a terminal protein (TP) domain, which acts as a primer for minus-strand DNA synthesis; a spacer that is nonessential for the polymerase functions; a reverse transcriptase (RT) domain for transcription; and a RNase H domain.

In an embodiment of the application, an HBV antigen comprises an HBV Pol antigen, or any immunogenic fragment or combination thereof. An HBV Pol antigen can contain further modifications to improve immunogenicity of the antigen, such as by introducing mutations into the active sites of the polymerase and/or RNase domains to decrease or substantially eliminate certain enzymatic activities.

Preferably, an HBV Pol antigen of the application does not have reverse transcriptase activity and RNase H activity, and is capable of inducing an immune response in a mammal against at least two HBV genotypes. Preferably, an HBV Pol antigen is capable of inducing a T cell response in a mammal against at least HBV genotypes B, C and D. More preferably, an HBV Pol antigen is capable of inducing a CD8 T cell response in a human subject against at least HBV genotypes A, B, C and D.

Thus, in some embodiments, an HBV Pol antigen is an inactivated Pol antigen. In an embodiment, an inactivated HBV Pol antigen comprises one or more amino acid mutations in the active site of the polymerase domain. In another embodiment, an inactivated HBV Pol antigen comprises one or more amino acid mutations in the active site of the RNaseH domain. In a preferred embodiment, an inactivated HBV pol antigen comprises one or more amino acid mutations in the active site of both the polymerase domain and the RNaseH domain. For example, the "YXDD" motif in the polymerase domain of an HBV pol antigen that can be required for nucleotide/metal ion binding can be mutated, e.g., by replacing one or more of the aspartate residues (D) with asparagine residues (N), eliminating or reducing metal coordination function, thereby decreasing or substantially eliminating reverse transcriptase function. Alternatively, or in addition to mutation of the "YXDD" motif, the "DEDD" motif in the RNaseH domain of an HBV pol antigen required for Mg2+ coordination can be mutated, e.g., by replacing one or more aspartate residues (D) with asparagine residues (N) and/or replacing the glutamate residue (E) with glutamine (Q), thereby decreasing or substantially eliminating RNaseH function. In a particular embodiment, an HBV pol antigen is modified by (1) mutating the aspartate residues (D) to asparagine residues (N) in the "YXDD" motif of the polymerase domain; and (2) mutating the first aspartate residue (D) to an asparagine residue (N) and the glutamate residue (E) to a glutamine residue (N) in the "DEDD" motif of the RNaseH domain, thereby decreasing or substantially eliminating both the reverse transcriptase and RNaseH functions of the pol antigen.

In a preferred embodiment of the application, an HBV pol antigen is a consensus antigen, preferably a consensus antigen derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D, more preferably an inactivated consensus antigen derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D. An exemplary HBV pol consensus antigen according to the application comprises an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably at least 98% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7. SEQ ID NO: 7 is a pol consensus antigen derived from HBV genotypes B, C, and D comprising four mutations located in the active sites of the polymerase and RNaseH

domains. In particular, the four mutations include mutation of the aspartic acid residues (D) to asparagine residues (N) in the "YXDD" motif of the polymerase domain; and mutation of the first aspartate residue (D) to an asparagine residue (N) and mutation of the glutamate residue (E) to a glutamine residue (Q) in the "DEDD" motif of the RNaseH domain.

In a particular embodiment of the application, an HBV pol antigen comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. In other embodiments of the application, an HBV pol antigen consists of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. In a further embodiment, an HBV pol antigen further contains a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of a mature HBV pol antigen sequence, such as the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. Preferably, the signal sequence has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15.

(3) Fusion of HBV Core Antigen and HBV Polymerase Antigen

As used herein the term "fusion protein" or "fusion" refers to a single polypeptide chain having at least two polypeptide domains that are not normally present in a single, natural polypeptide.

In an embodiment of the application, an HBV antigen comprises a fusion protein comprising a truncated HBV core antigen operably linked to an HBV Pol antigen, or an HBV Pol antigen operably linked to a truncated HBV core antigen, preferably via a linker.

For example, in a fusion protein containing a first polypeptide and a second heterologous polypeptide, a linker serves primarily as a spacer between the first and second polypeptides. In an embodiment, a linker is made up of amino acids linked together by peptide bonds, preferably from 1 to 20 amino acids linked by peptide bonds, wherein the amino acids are selected from the 20 naturally occurring amino acids. In an embodiment, the 1 to 20 amino acids are selected from glycine, alanine, proline, asparagine, glutamine, and lysine. Preferably, a linker is made up of a majority of amino acids that are sterically unhindered, such as glycine and alanine. Exemplary linkers are polyglycines, particularly (Gly)5, (Gly)8; poly(Gly-Ala), and polyalanines. One exemplary suitable linker as shown in the Examples below is (AlaGly)n, wherein n is an integer of 2 to 5.

Preferably, a fusion protein of the application is capable of inducing an immune response in a mammal against HBV core and HBV Pol of at least two HBV genotypes. Preferably, a fusion protein is capable of inducing a T cell response in a

mammal against at least HBV genotypes B, C and D. More preferably, the fusion protein is capable of inducing a CD8 T cell response in a human subject against at least HBV genotypes A, B, C and D.

In an embodiment of the application, a fusion protein comprises a truncated HBV core antigen having an amino acid sequence at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, a linker, and an HBV Pol antigen having an amino acid sequence at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7.

In a preferred embodiment of the application, a fusion protein comprises a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, a linker comprising (AlaGly)n, wherein n is an integer of 2 to 5, and an HBV Pol antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. More preferably, a fusion protein according to an embodiment of the application comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 16.

In one embodiment of the application, a fusion protein further comprises a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the fusion protein. Preferably, the signal sequence has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15. In one embodiment, a fusion protein comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 17.

Additional disclosure on HBV vaccines that can be used for the present invention are described in U.S. Patent Application No: 16/223,251, filed December 18, 2018, the contents of the application, more preferably the examples of the application, are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties.

**Polynucleotides and Vectors**

In another general aspect, the application provides a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule encoding an HBV antigen useful for an invention according to embodiments of the application, and vectors comprising the non-naturally occurring nucleic acid. A first or second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule can comprise any polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV antigen useful for the application, which can be made using methods known in the art in view of the present disclosure. Preferably, a first or second polynucleotide encodes at least one of a

truncated HBV core antigen and an HBV polymerase antigen of the application. A polynucleotide can be in the form of RNA or in the form of DNA obtained by recombinant techniques (e.g., cloning) or produced synthetically (e.g., chemical synthesis). The DNA can be single-stranded or double-stranded, or can contain portions of both double-stranded and single-stranded sequence. The DNA can, for example, comprise genomic DNA, cDNA, or combinations thereof. The polynucleotide can also be a DNA/RNA hybrid. The polynucleotides and vectors of the application can be used for recombinant protein production, expression of the protein in host cell, or the production of viral particles. Preferably, a polynucleotide is DNA.

In an embodiment of the application, a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprises a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4. In a particular embodiment of the application, a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprises a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4.

Examples of polynucleotide sequences of the application encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4 include, but are not limited to, a polynucleotide sequence at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3. Exemplary non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules encoding a truncated HBV core antigen have the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NOs: 1 or 3.

In another embodiment, a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a coding sequence for a signal sequence that is operably linked to the N-terminus of the HBV core antigen sequence. Preferably, the signal sequence has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15. More preferably,

the coding sequence for a signal sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 8 or SEQ ID NO: 14.

In an embodiment of the application, a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprises a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7. In a particular embodiment of the application, a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprises a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7.

Examples of polynucleotide sequences of the application encoding an HBV Pol antigen comprising the amino acid sequence of at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7 include, but are not limited to, a polynucleotide sequence at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6. Exemplary non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules encoding an HBV pol antigen have the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NOs: 5 or 6.

In another embodiment, a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a coding sequence for a signal sequence that is operably linked to the N-terminus of the HBV pol antigen sequence, such as the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. Preferably, the signal sequence has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15. More preferably, the coding sequence for a signal sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 8 or SEQ ID NO: 14.

In another embodiment of the application, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule encodes an HBV antigen fusion protein comprising a truncated HBV core antigen operably linked to an HBV Pol antigen, or an HBV Pol antigen operably linked to a truncated HBV core antigen. In a particular embodiment, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule of the application encodes a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID

NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, more preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO:4; a linker; and an HBV polymerase antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7. In a particular embodiment of the application, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule encodes a fusion protein comprising a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, a linker comprising (AlaGly)n, wherein n is an integer of 2 to 5; and an HBV Pol antigen comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. In a particular embodiment of the application, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule encodes an HBV antigen fusion protein comprising the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 16.

Examples of polynucleotide sequences of the application encoding an HBV antigen fusion protein include, but are not limited to, a polynucleotide sequence at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, operably linked to a linker coding sequence at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 11, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 11, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 11, which is further operably linked a polynucleotide sequence at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6. In particular embodiments of the application, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule encoding an HBV

antigen fusion protein comprises SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, operably linked to SEQ ID NO: 11, which is further operably linked to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

In another embodiment, a non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule encoding an HBV fusion further comprises a coding sequence for a signal sequence that is operably linked to the N-terminus of the HBV fusion sequence, such as the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 16. Preferably, the signal sequence has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15. More preferably, the coding sequence for a signal sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 8 or SEQ ID NO: 14. In one embodiment, the encoded fusion protein with the signal sequence comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 17.

The application also relates to a vector comprising the first and/or second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules. As used herein, a "vector" is a nucleic acid molecule used to carry genetic material into another cell, where it can be replicated and/or expressed. Any vector known to those skilled in the art in view of the present disclosure can be used. Examples of vectors include, but are not limited to, plasmids, viral vectors (bacteriophage, animal viruses, and plant viruses), cosmids, and artificial chromosomes (e.g., YACs). Preferably, a vector is a DNA plasmid. A vector can be a DNA vector or an RNA vector. One of ordinary skill in the art can construct a vector of the application through standard recombinant techniques in view of the present disclosure.

A vector of the application can be an expression vector. As used herein, the term "expression vector" refers to any type of genetic construct comprising a nucleic acid coding for an RNA capable of being transcribed. Expression vectors include, but are not limited to, vectors for recombinant protein expression, such as a DNA plasmid or a viral vector, and vectors for delivery of nucleic acid into a subject for expression in a tissue of the subject, such as a DNA plasmid or a viral vector. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the design of the expression vector can depend on such factors as the choice of the host cell to be transformed, the level of expression of protein desired, etc.

Vectors of the application can contain a variety of regulatory sequences. As used herein, the term "regulatory sequence" refers to any sequence that allows, contributes or modulates the functional regulation of the nucleic acid molecule, including replication, duplication, transcription, splicing, translation, stability and/or transport of the nucleic acid or one of its derivative (i.e. mRNA) into the host cell or

organism. In the context of the disclosure, this term encompasses promoters, enhancers and other expression control elements (e.g., polyadenylation signals and elements that affect mRNA stability).

In some embodiments of the application, a vector is a non-viral vector. Examples of non-viral DNA vectors include, but are not limited to, DNA plasmids, bacterial artificial chromosomes, yeast artificial chromosomes, closed linear deoxyribonucleic acid, e.g., a linear covalently closed DNA, e.g., a linear covalently closed double stranded DNA molecule, etc. Examples of non-viral RNA vectors include, but are not limited to, RNA replicon, mRNA replicon, modified mRNA replicon or self-amplifying mRNA. Preferably, a non-viral vector is a DNA plasmid.

A "DNA plasmid", which is used interchangeably with "DNA plasmid vector," "plasmid DNA" or "plasmid DNA vector," refers to a double-stranded and generally circular DNA sequence that is capable of autonomous replication in a suitable host cell. DNA plasmids used for expression of an encoded polynucleotide typically comprise an origin of replication, a multiple cloning site, and a selectable marker, which for example, can be an antibiotic resistance gene. Examples of DNA plasmids suitable that can be used include, but are not limited to, commercially available expression vectors for use in well-known expression systems (including both prokaryotic and eukaryotic systems), such as pSE420 (Invitrogen, San Diego, Calif.), which can be used for production and/or expression of protein in Escherichia coli; pYES2 (Invitrogen, Thermo Fisher Scientific), which can be used for production and/or expression in Saccharomyces cerevisiae strains of yeast; MAXBAC® complete baculovirus expression system (Thermo Fisher Scientific), which can be used for production and/or expression in insect cells; pcDNATM or pcDNA3TM (Life Technologies, Thermo Fisher Scientific), which can be used for high level constitutive protein expression in mammalian cells; and pVAX or pVAX-1 (Life Technologies, Thermo Fisher Scientific), which can be used for high-level transient expression of a protein of interest in most mammalian cells. The backbone of any commercially available DNA plasmid can be modified to optimize protein expression in the host cell, such as to reverse the orientation of certain elements (e.g., origin of replication and/or antibiotic resistance cassette), replace a promoter endogenous to the plasmid (e.g., the promoter in the antibiotic resistance cassette), and/or replace the polynucleotide sequence encoding transcribed proteins (e.g., the coding sequence of the antibiotic resistance gene), by using routine techniques and readily available

starting materials. (See e.g., Sambrook et al., Molecular Cloning a Laboratory Manual, Second Ed. Cold Spring Harbor Press (1989)).

Preferably, a DNA plasmid is an expression vector suitable for protein expression in mammalian host cells. Expression vectors suitable for protein expression in mammalian host cells include, but are not limited to, pcDNATM, pcDNA3TM, pVAX, pVAX-1, ADVAX, NTC8454, etc. Preferably, an expression vector is based on pVAX-1, which can be further modified to optimize protein expression in mammalian cells. pVAX-1 is commonly used plasmid in DNA vaccines, and contains a strong human intermediate early cytomegalovirus (CMV-IE) promoter followed by the bovine growth hormone (bGH)-derived polyadenylation sequence (pA). pVAX-1 further contains a pUC origin of replication and kanamycin resistance gene driven by a small prokaryotic promoter that allows for bacterial plasmid propagation.

A vector of the application can also be a viral vector. In general, viral vectors are genetically engineered viruses carrying modified viral DNA or RNA that has been rendered non-infectious, but still contains viral promoters and transgenes, thus allowing for translation of the transgene through a viral promoter. Because viral vectors are frequently lacking infectious sequences, they require helper viruses or packaging lines for large-scale transfection. Examples of viral vectors that can be used include, but are not limited to, adenoviral vectors, adeno-associated virus vectors, pox virus vectors, enteric virus vectors, Venezuelan Equine Encephalitis virus vectors, Semliki Forest Virus vectors, Tobacco Mosaic Virus vectors, lentiviral vectors, etc. Examples of viral vectors that can be used include, but are not limited to, arenavirus viral vectors, replication-deficient arenavirus viral vectors or replication-competent arenavirus viral vectors, bi-segmented or tri-segmented arenavirus, infectious arenavirus viral vectors, nucleic acids which comprise an arenavirus genomic segment wherein one open reading frame of the genomic segment is deleted or functionally inactivated (and replaced by a nucleic acid encoding an HBV antigen as described herein), arenavirus such as lymphocytic choriomeningitidis virus (LCMV), e.g., clone 13 strain or MP strain, and arenavirus such as Junin virus e.g., Candid #1 strain. The vector can also be a non-viral vector.

Preferably, a viral vector is an adenovirus vector, e.g., a recombinant adenovirus vector. A recombinant adenovirus vector can for instance be derived from a human adenovirus (HAdV, or AdHu), or a simian adenovirus such as chimpanzee or

gorilla adenovirus (ChAd, AdCh, or SAdV) or rhesus adenovirus (rhAd). Preferably, an adenovirus vector is a recombinant human adenovirus vector, for instance a recombinant human adenovirus serotype 26, or any one of recombinant human adenovirus serotype 5, 4, 35, 7, 48, etc. In other embodiments, an adenovirus vector is a rhAd vector, e.g. rhAd51, rhAd52 or rhAd53. A recombinant viral vector useful for the application can be prepared using methods known in the art in view of the present disclosure. For example, in view of the degeneracy of the genetic code, several nucleic acid sequences can be designed that encode the same polypeptide. A polynucleotide encoding an HBV antigen of the application can optionally be codon-optimized to ensure proper expression in the host cell (e.g., bacterial or mammalian cells). Codon-optimization is a technology widely applied in the art, and methods for obtaining codon-optimized polynucleotides will be well known to those skilled in the art in view of the present disclosure.

The vector can also be a linear covalently closed double-stranded DNA vector. As used herein, a "linear covalently closed double-stranded DNA vector" refers to a closed linear deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that is structurally distinct from a plasmid DNA. It has many of the advantages of plasmid DNA as well as a minimal cassette size similar to RNA strategies. For example, it can be a vector cassette generally comprising an encoded antigenic sequence, a promoter, a polyadenylation sequence, and telomeric ends. The plasmid-free construct can be synthesized through an enzymatic process without the need for bacterial sequences. Examples of suitable linear covalently closed DNA vectors include, but are not limited to, commercially available expression vectors such as "Doggybone™ closed linear DNA" (dbDNA™) (Touchlight Genetics Ltd.; London, England). See, e.g., Scott et al, *Hum Vaccin Immunother*. 2015 Aug; 11(8): 1972–1982, the entire content of which is incorporated herein by reference. Some examples of linear covalently closed double-stranded DNA vectors, compositions and methods to create and use such vectors for delivering DNA molecules, such as active molecules of this invention, are described in US2012/0282283, US2013/0216562, and US2018/0037943, the relevant content of each of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

A vector of the application, e.g., a DNA plasmid or a viral vector (particularly an adenoviral vector), can comprise any regulatory elements to establish conventional function(s) of the vector, including but not limited to replication and expression of the HBV antigen(s) encoded by the polynucleotide sequence of the vector. Regulatory

elements include, but are not limited to, a promoter, an enhancer, a polyadenylation signal, translation stop codon, a ribosome binding element, a transcription terminator, selection markers, origin of replication, etc. A vector can comprise one or more expression cassettes. An "expression cassette" is part of a vector that directs the cellular machinery to make RNA and protein. An expression cassette typically comprises three components: a promoter sequence, an open reading frame, and a 3'-untranslated region (UTR) optionally comprising a polyadenylation signal. An open reading frame (ORF) is a reading frame that contains a coding sequence of a protein of interest (e.g., HBV antigen) from a start codon to a stop codon. Regulatory elements of the expression cassette can be operably linked to a polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV antigen of interest. As used herein, the term "operably linked" is to be taken in its broadest reasonable context, and refers to a linkage of polynucleotide elements in a functional relationship. A polynucleotide is "operably linked" when it is placed into a functional relationship with another polynucleotide. For instance, a promoter is operably linked to a coding sequence if it affects the transcription of the coding sequence. Any components suitable for use in an expression cassette described herein can be used in any combination and in any order to prepare vectors of the application.

A vector can comprise a promoter sequence, preferably within an expression cassette, to control expression of an HBV antigen of interest. The term "promoter" is used in its conventional sense, and refers to a nucleotide sequence that initiates the transcription of an operably linked nucleotide sequence. A promoter is located on the same strand near the nucleotide sequence it transcribes. Promoters can be a constitutive, inducible, or repressible. Promoters can be naturally occurring or synthetic. A promoter can be derived from sources including viral, bacterial, fungal, plants, insects, and animals. A promoter can be a homologous promoter (i.e., derived from the same genetic source as the vector) or a heterologous promoter (i.e., derived from a different vector or genetic source). For example, if the vector to be employed is a DNA plasmid, the promoter can be endogenous to the plasmid (homologous) or derived from other sources (heterologous). Preferably, the promoter is located upstream of the polynucleotide encoding an HBV antigen within an expression cassette.

Examples of promoters that can be used include, but are not limited to, a promoter from simian virus 40 (SV40), a mouse mammary tumor virus (MMTV)

promoter, a human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) promoter such as the bovine immunodeficiency virus (BIV) long terminal repeat (LTR) promoter, a Moloney virus promoter, an avian leukosis virus (ALV) promoter, a cytomegalovirus (CMV) promoter such as the CMV immediate early promoter (CMV-IE), Epstein Barr virus (EBV) promoter, or a Rous sarcoma virus (RSV) promoter. A promoter can also be a promoter from a human gene such as human actin, human myosin, human hemoglobin, human muscle creatine, or human metalothionein. A promoter can also be a tissue specific promoter, such as a muscle or skin specific promoter, natural or synthetic.

Preferably, a promoter is a strong eukaryotic promoter, preferably a cytomegalovirus immediate early (CMV-IE) promoter. A nucleotide sequence of an exemplary CMV-IE promoter is shown in SEQ ID NO: 18 or SEQ ID NO: 19.

A vector can comprise additional polynucleotide sequences that stabilize the expressed transcript, enhance nuclear export of the RNA transcript, and/or improve transcriptional-translational coupling. Examples of such sequences include polyadenylation signals and enhancer sequences. A polyadenylation signal is typically located downstream of the coding sequence for a protein of interest (e.g., an HBV antigen) within an expression cassette of the vector. Enhancer sequences are regulatory DNA sequences that, when bound by transcription factors, enhance the transcription of an associated gene. An enhancer sequence is preferably located upstream of the polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV antigen, but downstream of a promoter sequence within an expression cassette of the vector.

Any polyadenylation signal known to those skilled in the art in view of the present disclosure can be used. For example, the polyadenylation signal can be a SV40 polyadenylation signal, LTR polyadenylation signal, bovine growth hormone (bGH) polyadenylation signal, human growth hormone (hGH) polyadenylation signal, or human β-globin polyadenylation signal. Preferably, a polyadenylation signal is a bovine growth hormone (bGH) polyadenylation signal or a SV40 polyadenylation signal. A nucleotide sequence of an exemplary bGH polyadenylation signal is shown in SEQ ID NO: 20. A nucleotide sequence of an exemplary SV40 polyadenylation signal is shown in SEQ ID NO: 13.

Any enhancer sequence known to those skilled in the art in view of the present disclosure can be used. For example, an enhancer sequence can be human actin, human myosin, human hemoglobin, human muscle creatine, or a viral enhancer, such

as one from CMV, HA, RSV, or EBV. Examples of particular enhancers include, but are not limited to, Woodchuck HBV Post-transcriptional regulatory element (WPRE), intron/exon sequence derived from human apolipoprotein A1 precursor (ApoAI), untranslated R-U5 domain of the human T-cell leukemia virus type 1 (HTLV-1) long terminal repeat (LTR), a splicing enhancer, a synthetic rabbit β-globin intron, or any combination thereof. Preferably, an enhancer sequence is a composite sequence of three consecutive elements of the untranslated R-U5 domain of HTLV-1 LTR, rabbit β-globin intron, and a splicing enhancer, which is referred to herein as "a triple enhancer sequence." A nucleotide sequence of an exemplary triple enhancer sequence is shown in SEQ ID NO: 10. Another exemplary enhancer sequence is an ApoAI gene fragment shown in SEQ ID NO: 12.

A vector can comprise a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence. Preferably, the polynucleotide sequence encoding the signal peptide sequence is located upstream of the polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV antigen. Signal peptides typically direct localization of a protein, facilitate secretion of the protein from the cell in which it is produced, and/or improve antigen expression and cross-presentation to antigen-presenting cells. A signal peptide can be present at the N-terminus of an HBV antigen when expressed from the vector, but is cleaved off by signal peptidase, e.g., upon secretion from the cell. An expressed protein in which a signal peptide has been cleaved is often referred to as the "mature protein." Any signal peptide known in the art in view of the present disclosure can be used. For example, a signal peptide can be a cystatin S signal peptide; an immunoglobulin (Ig) secretion signal, such as the Ig heavy chain gamma signal peptide SPIgG or the Ig heavy chain epsilon signal peptide SPIgE.

Preferably, a signal peptide sequence is a cystatin S signal peptide. Exemplary nucleic acid and amino acid sequences of a cystatin S signal peptide are shown in SEQ ID NOs: 8 and 9, respectively. Exemplary nucleic acid and amino acid sequences of an immunoglobulin secretion signal are shown in SEQ ID NOs: 14 and 15, respectively.

A vector, such as a DNA plasmid, can also include a bacterial origin of replication and an antibiotic resistance expression cassette for selection and maintenance of the plasmid in bacterial cells, e.g., *E. coli*. Bacterial origins of replication and antibiotic resistance cassettes can be located in a vector in the same orientation as the expression cassette encoding an HBV antigen, or in the opposite

(reverse) orientation. An origin of replication (ORI) is a sequence at which replication is initiated, enabling a plasmid to reproduce and survive within cells. Examples of ORIs suitable for use in the application include, but are not limited to ColE1, pMB1, pUC, pSC101, R6K, and 15A, preferably pUC. An exemplary nucleotide sequence of a pUC ORI is shown in SEQ ID NO: 21.

Expression cassettes for selection and maintenance in bacterial cells typically include a promoter sequence operably linked to an antibiotic resistance gene. Preferably, the promoter sequence operably linked to an antibiotic resistance gene differs from the promoter sequence operably linked to a polynucleotide sequence encoding a protein of interest, e.g., HBV antigen. The antibiotic resistance gene can be codon optimized, and the sequence composition of the antibiotic resistance gene is normally adjusted to bacterial, e.g., E. coli, codon usage. Any antibiotic resistance gene known to those skilled in the art in view of the present disclosure can be used, including, but not limited to, kanamycin resistance gene (Kanr), ampicillin resistance gene (Ampr), and tetracycline resistance gene (Tetr), as well as genes conferring resistance to chloramphenicol, bleomycin, spectinomycin, carbenicillin, etc.

Preferably, an antibiotic resistance gene in the antibiotic expression cassette of a vector is a kanamycin resistance gene (Kanr). The sequence of Kanr gene is shown in SEQ ID NO: 22. Preferably, the Kanr gene is codon optimized. An exemplary nucleic acid sequence of a codon optimized Kanr gene is shown in SEQ ID NO: 23. The Kanr can be operably linked to its native promoter, or the Kanr gene can be linked to a heterologous promoter. In a particular embodiment, the Kanr gene is operably linked to the ampicillin resistance gene (Ampr) promoter, known as the bla promoter. An exemplary nucleotide sequence of a bla promoter is shown in SEQ ID NO: 24.

In a particular embodiment of the application, a vector is a DNA plasmid comprising an expression cassette including a polynucleotide encoding at least one of an HBV antigen selected from the group consisting of an HBV pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence at least 90%, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96, 97%, preferably at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, and a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence at least 95%, such as 95%, 96, 97%, preferably at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%,

99.9% or 100%, identical of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; an upstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising, from 5' end to 3' end, a promoter sequence, preferably a CMV promoter sequence of SEQ ID NO: 18, an enhancer sequence, preferably a triple enhancer sequence of SEQ ID NO: 10, and a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence, preferably a cystatin S signal peptide having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9; and a downstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising a polyadenylation signal, preferably a bGH polyadenylation signal of SEQ ID NO: 20. Such vector further comprises an antibiotic resistance expression cassette including a polynucleotide encoding an antibiotic resistance gene, preferably a $Kan^r$ gene, more preferably a codon optimized $Kan^r$ gene of at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 23, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 23, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 23, operably linked to an Ampr (bla) promoter of SEQ ID NO: 24, upstream of and operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the antibiotic resistance gene; and an origin of replication, preferably a pUC ori of SEQ ID NO: 21. Preferably, the antibiotic resistance cassette and the origin of replication are present in the plasmid in the reverse orientation relative to the HBV antigen expression cassette.

In another particular embodiment of the application, a vector is a viral vector, preferably an adenoviral vector, more preferably an Ad26 or Ad35 vector, comprising an expression cassette including a polynucleotide encoding at least one of an HBV antigen selected from the group consisting of an HBV pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence at least 90%, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96, 97%, preferably at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, and a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence at least 95%, such as 95%, 96, 97%, preferably at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100%, identical of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; an upstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising, from 5' end to 3' end, a promoter sequence, preferably a CMV promoter sequence of SEQ ID NO: 19, an enhancer sequence, preferably an ApoAI gene fragment sequence of SEQ ID NO: 12, and a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence, preferably an

immunoglobulin secretion signal having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 15; and a downstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising a polyadenylation signal, preferably a SV40 polyadenylation signal of SEQ ID NO: 13.

In an embodiment of the application, a vector, such as a plasmid DNA vector or a viral vector (preferably an adenoviral vector, more preferably an Ad26 or Ad35 vector), encodes an HBV Pol antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7. Preferably, the vector comprises a coding sequence for the HBV Pol antigen that is at least 90% identical to the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 5 or 6, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or 6, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or 6.

In an embodiment of the application, a vector, such as a plasmid DNA vector or a viral vector (preferably an adenoviral vector, more preferably an Ad26 or Ad35 vector), encodes a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4. Preferably, the vector comprises a coding sequence for the truncated HBV core antigen that is at least 90% identical to the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.

In yet another embodiment of the application, a vector, such as a plasmid DNA vector or a viral vector (preferably an adenoviral vector, more preferably an Ad26 or Ad35 vector), encodes a fusion protein comprising an HBV Pol antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7 and a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4. Preferably, the vector comprises a coding sequence for the fusion, which contains a coding sequence for the truncated HBV core antigen at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, more preferably SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3, operably linked to a coding sequence for

the HBV Pol antigen at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6, more preferably SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6. Preferably, the coding sequence for the truncated HBV core antigen is operably linked to the coding sequence for the HBV Pol antigen via a coding sequence for a linker at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 11, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 11, preferably 98%, 99% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 11. In particular embodiments of the application, a vector comprises a coding sequence for the fusion having SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3 operably linked to SEQ ID NO: 11, which is further operably linked to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

The polynucleotides and expression vectors encoding the HBV antigens of the application can be made by any method known in the art in view of the present disclosure. For example, a polynucleotide encoding an HBV antigen can be introduced or "cloned" into an expression vector using standard molecular biology techniques, e.g., polymerase chain reaction (PCR), etc., which are well known to those skilled in the art.

**Cells, Polypeptides and Antibodies**

The application also provides cells, preferably isolated cells, comprising any of the polynucleotides and vectors described herein. The cells can, for instance, be used for recombinant protein production, or for the production of viral particles.

Embodiments of the application thus also relate to a method of making an HBV antigen of the application. The method comprises transfecting a host cell with an expression vector comprising a polynucleotide encoding an HBV antigen of the application operably linked to a promoter, growing the transfected cell under conditions suitable for expression of the HBV antigen, and optionally purifying or isolating the HBV antigen expressed in the cell. The HBV antigen can be isolated or collected from the cell by any method known in the art including affinity chromatography, size exclusion chromatography, etc. Techniques used for recombinant protein expression will be well known to one of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure. The expressed HBV antigens can also be studied

without purifying or isolating the expressed protein, e.g., by analyzing the supernatant of cells transfected with an expression vector encoding the HBV antigen and grown under conditions suitable for expression of the HBV antigen.

Thus, also provided are non-naturally occurring or recombinant polypeptides encoding an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2, SEQ ID NO: 4, or SEQ ID NO: 7. As described above and below, isolated nucleic acid molecules encoding these sequences, vectors comprising these sequences operably linked to a promoter, and compositions comprising the polypeptide, polynucleotide, or vector are also contemplated by the application.

In an embodiment of the application, the recombinant polypeptide encodes an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2. Preferably, the non-naturally occurring or recombinant polypeptide encodes an amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2.

In another embodiment of the application, the non-naturally occurring or recombinant polypeptide encodes an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 4. Preferably, the non-naturally occurring or recombinant polypeptide encodes an amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4.

In another embodiment of the application, the non-naturally occurring or recombinant polypeptide encodes an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7, such as 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 95.5%, 96%, 96.5%, 97%, 97.5%, 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9% or 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7. Preferably, the non-naturally occurring or recombinant polypeptide encodes an amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7.

Also provided are antibodies or antigen binding fragments thereof that specifically bind to a non-naturally occurring polypeptide of the application. In an embodiment of the application, an antibody specific to a non-naturally HBV antigen

of the application does not bind specifically to another HBV antigen. For example, an antibody of the application that binds specifically to an HBV Pol antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7 will not bind specifically to an HBV Pol antigen not having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7.

As used herein, the term "antibody" includes polyclonal, monoclonal, chimeric, humanized, Fv, Fab and F(ab')2; bifunctional hybrid (e.g., Lanzavecchia et al., Eur. J. Immunol. 17:105, 1987), single-chain (Huston et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 85:5879, 1988; Bird et al., Science 242:423, 1988); and antibodies with altered constant regions (e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 5,624,821).

As used herein, an antibody that "specifically binds to" an antigen refers to an antibody that binds to the antigen with a KD of $1\times10^{-7}$ M or less. Preferably, an antibody that "specifically binds to" an antigen binds to the antigen with a KD of $1\times10^{-8}$ M or less, more preferably $5\times10^{-9}$ M or less, $1\times10^{-9}$ M or less, $5\times10^{-10}$ M or less, or $1\times10^{-10}$ M or less. The term "KD" refers to the dissociation constant, which is obtained from the ratio of Kd to Ka (i.e., Kd/Ka) and is expressed as a molar concentration (M). KD values for antibodies can be determined using methods in the art in view of the present disclosure. For example, the KD of an antibody can be determined by using surface plasmon resonance, such as by using a biosensor system, e.g., a Biacore® system, or by using bio-layer interferometry technology, such as an Octet RED96 system.

The smaller the value of the KD of an antibody, the higher affinity that the antibody binds to a target antigen.

**Compositions, Pharmaceutical compositions, and Vaccines**

The application also relates to compositions, pharmaceutical compositions, more particularly kits, and vaccines comprising one or more HBV antigens, polynucleotides, and/or vectors encoding one or more HBV antigens according to the application. Any of the HBV antigens, polynucleotides (including RNA and DNA), and/or vectors of the application described herein can be used in the compositions, pharmaceutical compositions or kits, and vaccines of the application.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA) comprising polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, or an HBV polymerase antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90%

identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, a vector comprising the isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule, and/or an isolated or non-naturally occurring polypeptide encoded by the isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA) comprising a polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA) encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA) comprising a polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and an isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA) comprising a polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7. The coding sequences for the truncated HBV core antigen and the HBV Pol antigen can be present in the same isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA), or in two different isolated or non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules (DNA or RNA).

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises a vector, preferably a DNA plasmid or a viral vector (such as an adenoviral vector) comprising a polynucleotide encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises a vector, preferably a DNA plasmid or a viral vector (such as an adenoviral vector), comprising a polynucleotide encoding an HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence

that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises a vector, preferably a DNA plasmid or a viral vector (such as an adenoviral vector), comprising a polynucleotide encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and a vector, preferably a DNA plasmid or a viral vector (such as an adenoviral vector), comprising a polynucleotide encoding an HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7. The vector comprising the coding sequence for the truncated HBV core antigen and the vector comprising the coding sequence for the HBV Pol antigen can be the same vector, or two different vectors.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises a vector, preferably a DNA plasmid or a viral vector (such as an adenoviral vector), comprising a polynucleotide encoding a fusion protein comprising a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, operably linked to an HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, or vice versa. Preferably, the fusion protein further comprises a linker that operably links the truncated HBV core antigen to the HBV Pol antigen, or vice versa. Preferably, the linker has the amino acid sequence of (AlaGly)n, wherein n is an integer of 2 to 5.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and an isolated or non-naturally

occurring HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7.

In an embodiment of the application, a composition comprises an isolated or non-naturally occurring fusion protein comprising a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, operably linked to an HBV Pol antigen comprising an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, preferably 100% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, or vice versa. Preferably, the fusion protein further comprises a linker that operably links the truncated HBV core antigen to the HBV Pol antigen, or vice versa. Preferably, the linker has the amino acid sequence of (AlaGly)n, wherein n is an integer of 2 to 5.

The application also relates to a pharmaceutical composition or a kit comprising polynucleotides expressing a truncated HBV core antigen and an HBV pol antigen according to embodiments of the application. Any polynucleotides and/or vectors encoding HBV core and pol antigens of the application described herein can be used in the pharmaceutical compositions or kits of the application.

In a particular embodiment of the application, a pharmaceutical composition or kit comprises: i) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 95% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; ii) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen does not have reverse transcriptase activity and RNase H activity; wherein the first and/or second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are fully encompassed, either together or separately, in one or more lipid nanoparticle or liposome carriers.

According to embodiments of the application, the polynucleotides in a vaccine combination or kit can be linked or separate, such that the HBV antigens expressed from such polynucleotides are fused together or produced as separate proteins, whether expressed from the same or different polynucleotides. In an embodiment, the first and second polynucleotides are present in separate vectors, e.g., DNA plasmids or viral vectors, used in combination either in the same or separate compositions, such that the expressed proteins are also separate proteins, but used in combination. In another

embodiment, the HBV antigens encoded by the first and second polynucleotides can be expressed from the same vector, such that an HBV core-pol fusion antigen is produced. Optionally, the core and pol antigens can be joined or fused together by a short linker. Alternatively, the HBV antigens encoded by the first and second polynucleotides can be expressed independently from a single vector using a using a ribosomal slippage site (also known as cis-hydrolase site) between the core and pol antigen coding sequences. This strategy results in a bicistronic expression vector in which individual core and pol antigens are produced from a single mRNA transcript. The core and pol antigens produced from such a bicistronic expression vector can have additional N or C-terminal residues, depending upon the ordering of the coding sequences on the mRNA transcript. Examples of ribosomal slippage sites that can be used for this purpose include, but are not limited to, the FA2 slippage site from foot-and-mouth disease virus (FMDV). Another possibility is that the HBV antigens encoded by the first and second polynucleotides can be expressed independently from two separate vectors, one encoding the HBV core antigen and one encoding the HBV pol antigen.

In a preferred embodiment, the first and second polynucleotides are present in separate vectors, e.g., DNA plasmids or viral vectors. Preferably, the separate vectors are present in the same composition.

According to preferred embodiments of the application, a pharmaceutical composition or kit comprises a first polynucleotide present in a first vector, a second polynucleotide present in a second vector. The first and second vectors can be the same or different. Preferably the vectors are DNA plasmids.

In a particular embodiment of the application, the first vector is a first DNA plasmid, the second vector is a second DNA plasmid. Each of the first and second DNA plasmids comprises an origin of replication, preferably pUC ORI of SEQ ID NO: 21, and an antibiotic resistance cassette, preferably comprising a codon optimized Kanr gene having a polynucleotide sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 23, preferably under control of a bla promoter, for instance the bla promoter shown in SEQ ID NO: 24. Each of the first and second DNA plasmids independently further comprises at least one of a promoter sequence, enhancer sequence, and a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence operably linked to the first polynucleotide sequence or the second polynucleotide sequence. Preferably, each of the first and second DNA plasmids comprises an upstream sequence operably linked

to the first polynucleotide or the second polynucleotide, wherein the upstream sequence comprises, from 5' end to 3' end, a promoter sequence of SEQ ID NO: 18 or 19, an enhancer sequence, and a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or 15. Each of the first and second DNA plasmids can also comprise a polyadenylation signal located downstream of the coding sequence of the HBV antigen, such as the bGH polyadenylation signal of SEQ ID NO: 20.

In one particular embodiment of the application, the first vector is a viral vector and the second vector is a viral vector. Preferably, each of the viral vectors is an adenoviral vector, more preferably an Ad26 or Ad35 vector, comprising an expression cassette including the polynucleotide encoding an HBV pol antigen or an truncated HBV core antigen of the application; an upstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising, from 5' end to 3' end, a promoter sequence, preferably a CMV promoter sequence of SEQ ID NO: 19, an enhancer sequence, preferably an ApoAI gene fragment sequence of SEQ ID NO: 12, and a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence, preferably an immunoglobulin secretion signal having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 15; and a downstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising a polyadenylation signal, preferably a SV40 polyadenylation signal of SEQ ID NO: 13.

In another preferred embodiment, the first and second polynucleotides are present in a single vector, e.g., DNA plasmid or viral vector. Preferably, the single vector is an adenoviral vector, more preferably an Ad26 vector, comprising an expression cassette including a polynucleotide encoding an HBV pol antigen and a truncated HBV core antigen of the application, preferably encoding an HBV pol antigen and a truncated HBV core antigen of the application as a fusion protein; an upstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV pol and truncated core antigens comprising, from 5' end to 3' end, a promoter sequence, preferably a CMV promoter sequence of SEQ ID NO: 19, an enhancer sequence, preferably an ApoAI gene fragment sequence of SEQ ID NO: 12, and a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal peptide sequence, preferably an immunoglobulin secretion signal having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 15; and a downstream sequence operably linked to the polynucleotide encoding the HBV antigen comprising a polyadenylation signal, preferably a SV40 polyadenylation signal of SEQ ID NO: 13.

When a pharmaceutical composition of the application comprises a first vector, such as a DNA plasmid or viral vector, and a second vector, such as a DNA plasmid or viral vector, the amount of each of the first and second vectors is not particularly limited. For example, the first DNA plasmid and the second DNA plasmid can be present in a ratio of 10:1 to 1:10, by weight, such as 10:1, 9:1, 8:1, 7:1, 6:1, 5:1, 4:1, 3:1, 2:1, 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, 1:4, 1:5, 1:6, 1:7, 1:8, 1:9, or 1:10, by weight. Preferably, the first and second DNA plasmids are present in a ratio of 1:1, by weight. The pharmaceutical composition of the application can further comprise a third vector encoding a third active agent useful for treating an HBV infection.

Compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application can comprise additional polynucleotides or vectors encoding additional HBV antigens and/or additional HBV antigens or immunogenic fragments thereof, such as an HBsAg, an HBV L protein or HBV envelope protein, or a polynucleotide sequence encoding thereof. However, in particular embodiments, the compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application do not comprise certain antigens.

In a particular embodiment, a composition or pharmaceutical composition or kit of the application does not comprise a HBsAg or a polynucleotide sequence encoding the HBsAg.

In another particular embodiment, a composition or pharmaceutical composition or kit of the application does not comprise an HBV L protein or a polynucleotide sequence encoding the HBV L protein.

In yet another particular embodiment of the application, a composition or pharmaceutical composition of the application does not comprise an HBV envelope protein or a polynucleotide sequence encoding the HBV envelope protein.

Compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application can also comprise a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier. A pharmaceutically acceptable carrier is non-toxic and should not interfere with the efficacy of the active ingredient. Pharmaceutically acceptable carriers can include one or more excipients such as binders, disintegrants, swelling agents, suspending agents, emulsifying agents, wetting agents, lubricants, flavorants, sweeteners, preservatives, dyes, solubilizers and coatings. Pharmaceutically acceptable carriers can include vehicles, such as lipid nanoparticles (LNPs). The precise nature of the carrier or other material can depend on the route of administration, e.g., intramuscular, intradermal, subcutaneous, oral, intravenous, cutaneous, intramucosal (e.g., gut), intranasal or intraperitoneal routes.

For liquid injectable preparations, for example, suspensions and solutions, suitable carriers and additives include water, glycols, oils, alcohols, preservatives, coloring agents and the like. For solid oral preparations, for example, powders, capsules, caplets, gelcaps and tablets, suitable carriers and additives include starches, sugars, diluents, granulating agents, lubricants, binders, disintegrating agents and the like. For nasal sprays/inhalant mixtures, the aqueous solution/suspension can comprise water, glycols, oils, emollients, stabilizers, wetting agents, preservatives, aromatics, flavors, and the like as suitable carriers and additives.

Compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application can be formulated in any matter suitable for administration to a subject to facilitate administration and improve efficacy, including, but not limited to, oral (enteral) administration and parenteral injections. The parenteral injections include intravenous injection or infusion, subcutaneous injection, intradermal injection, and intramuscular injection. Compositions of the application can also be formulated for other routes of administration including transmucosal, ocular, rectal, long acting implantation, sublingual administration, under the tongue, from oral mucosa bypassing the portal circulation, inhalation, or intranasal.

In a preferred embodiment of the application, compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application are formulated for parental injection, preferably subcutaneous, intradermal injection, or intramuscular injection, more preferably intramuscular injection.

According to embodiments of the application, compositions and pharmaceutical compositions for administration will typically comprise a buffered solution in a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, e.g., an aqueous carrier such as buffered saline and the like, e.g., phosphate buffered saline (PBS). The compositions and pharmaceutical compositions can also contain pharmaceutically acceptable substances as required to approximate physiological conditions such as pH adjusting and buffering agents. For example, a composition or pharmaceutical composition of the application comprising plasmid DNA can contain phosphate buffered saline (PBS) as the pharmaceutically acceptable carrier. The plasmid DNA can be present in a concentration of, e.g., 0.5 mg/mL to 5 mg/mL, such as 0.5 mg/mL, 1 mg/mL, 2 mg/mL, 3 mg/mL, 4 mg/mL, or 5 mg/mL, preferably at 1 mg/mL.

Compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application can be formulated as a vaccine (also referred to as an "immunogenic composition") according

to methods well known in the art. Such compositions can include adjuvants to enhance immune responses. The optimal ratios of each component in the formulation can be determined by techniques well known to those skilled in the art in view of the present disclosure.

In a particular embodiment of the application, a composition or pharmaceutical composition is a DNA vaccine. DNA vaccines typically comprise bacterial plasmids containing a polynucleotide encoding an antigen of interest under control of a strong eukaryotic promoter. Once the plasmids are delivered to the cell cytoplasm of the host, the encoded antigen is produced and processed endogenously. The resulting antigen typically induces both humoral and cell-medicated immune responses. DNA vaccines are advantageous at least because they offer improved safety, are temperature stable, can be easily adapted to express antigenic variants, and are simple to produce. Any of the DNA plasmids of the application can be used to prepare such a DNA vaccine.

In other particular embodiments of the application, a composition or pharmaceutical composition is an RNA vaccine. RNA vaccines typically comprise at least one single-stranded RNA molecule encoding an antigen of interest, e.g., a fusion protein or HBV antigen according to the application. Once the RNA is delivered to the cell cytoplasm of the host, the encoded antigen is produced and processed endogenously, inducing both humoral and cell-mediated immune responses, similar to a DNA vaccine. The RNA sequence can be codon optimized to improve translation efficiency. The RNA molecule can be modified by any method known in the art in view of the present disclosure to enhance stability and/or translation, such by adding a polyA tail, e.g., of at least 30 adenosine residues; and/or capping the 5-end with a modified ribonucleotide, e.g., 7-methylguanosine cap, which can be incorporated during RNA synthesis or enzymatically engineered after RNA transcription. An RNA vaccine can also be self-replicating RNA vaccine developed from an alphavirus expression vector. Self-replicating RNA vaccines comprise a replicase RNA molecule derived from a virus belonging to the alphavirus family with a subgenomic promoter that controls replication of the fusion protein or HBV antigen RNA followed by an artificial poly A tail located downstream of the replicase.

In certain embodiments, a further adjuvant can be included in a composition or pharmaceutical composition of the application, or co-administered with a composition or pharmaceutical composition of the application. Use of another adjuvant is optional,

and can further enhance immune responses when the composition is used for vaccination purposes. Other adjuvants suitable for co-administration or inclusion in compositions in accordance with the application should preferably be ones that are potentially safe, well tolerated and effective in humans. An adjuvant can be a small molecule or antibody including, but not limited to, immune checkpoint inhibitors (e.g., anti-PD1, anti-TIM-3, etc.), toll-like receptor agonists (e.g., TLR7 agonists and/or TLR8 agonists), RIG-1 agonists, IL-15 superagonists (Altor Bioscience), mutant IRF3 and IRF7 genetic adjuvants, STING agonists (Aduro), FLT3L genetic adjuvant, and IL-7-hyFc. For example, adjuvants can e.g., be chosen from among the following anti-HBV agents: HBV DNA polymerase inhibitors; Immunomodulators; Toll-like receptor 7 modulators; Toll-like receptor 8 modulators; Toll-like receptor 3 modulators; Interferon alpha receptor ligands; Hyaluronidase inhibitors; Modulators of IL-10; HBsAg inhibitors; Toll like receptor 9 modulators; Cyclophilin inhibitors; HBV Prophylactic vaccines; HBV Therapeutic vaccines; HBV viral entry inhibitors; Antisense oligonucleotides targeting viral mRNA, more particularly anti-HBV antisense oligonucleotides; short interfering RNAs (siRNA), more particularly anti-HBV siRNA; Endonuclease modulators; Inhibitors of ribonucleotide reductase; Hepatitis B virus E antigen inhibitors; HBV antibodies targeting the surface antigens of the hepatitis B virus; HBV antibodies; CCR2 chemokine antagonists; Thymosin agonists; Cytokines, such as IL12; Capsid Assembly Modulators, Nucleoprotein inhibitors (HBV core or capsid protein inhibitors); Nucleic Acid Polymers (NAPs); Stimulators of retinoic acid-inducible gene 1; Stimulators of NOD2; Recombinant thymosin alpha-1; Hepatitis B virus replication inhibitors; PI3K inhibitors; cccDNA inhibitors; immune checkpoint inhibitors, such as PD-L1 inhibitors, PD-1 inhibitors, TIM-3 inhibitors, TIGIT inhibitors, Lag3 inhibitors, CTLA-4 inhibitors; Agonists of co-stimulatory receptors that are expressed on immune cells (more particularly T cells), such as CD27 and CD28; BTK inhibitors; Other drugs for treating HBV; IDO inhibitors; Arginase inhibitors; and KDM5 inhibitors.

In certain embodiments, each of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is independently formulated with a lipid nanoparticle (LNP).

The application also provides methods of making compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application. A method of producing a composition or pharmaceutical composition comprises mixing an isolated polynucleotide encoding an HBV antigen, vector, and/or polypeptide of the

application with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable carriers. One of ordinary skill in the art will be familiar with conventional techniques used to prepare such compositions.

Liposomes and Lipid Nanoparticles

In certain embodiments of the application, the method of administration is a lipid composition, such as a lipid nanoparticle (LNP) or a liposome. Lipid compositions, preferably lipid nanoparticles or liposomes, that can be used to deliver a therapeutic product (such as one or more nucleic acid molecules of the invention), include, but are not limited to, liposomes or lipid vesicles, wherein an aqueous volume is encapsulated by amphipathic lipid bilayers, or wherein the lipids coat an interior that comprises a therapeutic product; or lipid aggregates or micelles, wherein the lipid-encapsulated therapeutic product is contained within a relatively disordered lipid mixture.

The lipid composition can provide the therapeutic product (such as one or more nucleic acid molecules of the invention) with full encapsulation, partial encapsulation, or both. In a preferred embodiment, the therapeutic product is fully encapsulated in the lipid particle (e.g., to form an LNP).

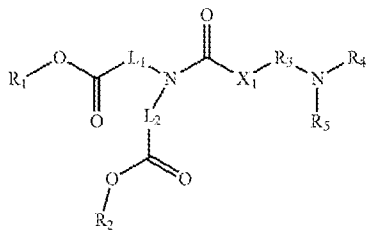
Lipid compositions of this invention can comprise one or more lipids selected from cationic lipids, anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, polymer conjugated lipids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and any combination of the foregoing. The lipids can be saturated or unsaturated. A mixture can comprise both saturated and unsaturated lipids. The lipid compositions can be substantially free of liposomes or can contain liposomes. The use of at least one unsaturated lipid for preparing liposomes is preferred. If an unsaturated lipid has two tails, both tails can be unsaturated, or it can have one saturated tail and one unsaturated tail. The lipids and nucleic acid molecules can be mixed and configured in any suitable structures.

In particular embodiments, the lipid compositions comprise a cationic lipid to encapsulate and/or enhance the delivery of a nucleic acid molecule, such as a DNA or RNA molecule of the invention, into the target cell. The cationic lipid can be any lipid species that carries a net positive charge at a selected pH, such as physiological pH. Without wishing to be bound by the theory, the cationic lipids, such as ionizable amino lipids, promote self-assembly of the components into macromolecular nanoparticles that encapsulate the nucleic acid (DNA and/or RNA). The nucleic acid-containing nanoparticles are efficiently taken up into target cells by endocytosis. Once inside the

endosome, the positively-charged lipid nanoparticles interact with the negatively-charged endosome membrane, causing disruption of the compartment and release of the nucleic acid molecules into the cytoplasm, where the nucleic acid molecules can be expressed.

Several cationic lipids have been described in the literature, many of which are commercially available. For example, suitable cationic lipids for use in the compositions and methods of the invention include 1,2-dioleoyl-3-trimethylammonium-propane (DOTAP), 1,2-DiLinoleyloxy-,N,N-dimethylaminopropane (DLinDMA), and 1,2-Dilinolenyloxy-N,N-dimethylaminopropane (DLenDMA). The pKa of formulated cationic lipids is correlated with the effectiveness of lipid particles for delivery of nucleic acids (see Jayaraman et al, Angewandte Chemie, International Edition (2012), 51(34), 8529-8533; Semple et al, Nature Biotechnology 28, 172-176 (2010)). The preferred range of pKa is ~5 to ~7.

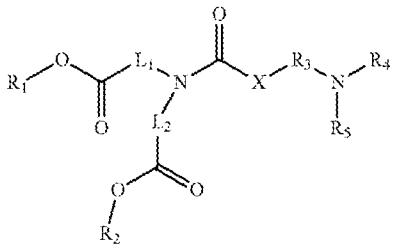
In one embodiment, the cationic lipid is a compound of formula (I):



Formula (I)

Wherein $R_1$ is a substituted alkyl consisting of 10 to 31 carbons, $R_2$ is a linear alkyl, alkenyl or alkynyl consisting of 2 to 20 carbons, $R_3$ is a linear or branched alkane consisting of 1 to 6 carbons, $R_4$ and $R_5$ are the same or different, each a hydrogen or a linear or branched alkyl consisting of 1 to 6 carbons; $L_1$ and $L_2$ are the same or different, each a linear alkane of 1 to 20 carbons or a linear alkene of 2 to 20 carbons, and $X_1$ is S or O; or a salt or solvate thereof. Exemplary compounds of formula (I), their synthesis and uses thereof are described in US2018/0169268, all of which are herein incorporated by reference.

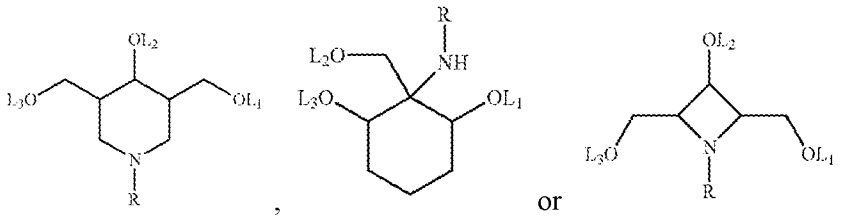
In another embodiment, the cationic lipid is a compound of formula (II):



Formula (II)

wherein $R_1$ is a branched, noncyclic alkyl or alkenyl of 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, or 22 carbons; $L_1$ is linear alkane of 1 to 15 carbons; $R_2$ is a linear alkyl or alkenyl of 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15 carbons or a branched, noncyclic alkyl or alkenyl of 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, or 22 carbons; $L_2$ is a linear alkane of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15 carbons; X is O or S; $R_3$ is a linear alkane of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 carbons; and $R_4$ and $R_5$ are the same or different, each a linear or branched, noncyclic alkyl of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 carbons; or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt or solvate thereof. Exemplary compounds of formula (II), their synthesis and uses thereof are described in US2018/0170866, all of which are herein incorporated by reference.

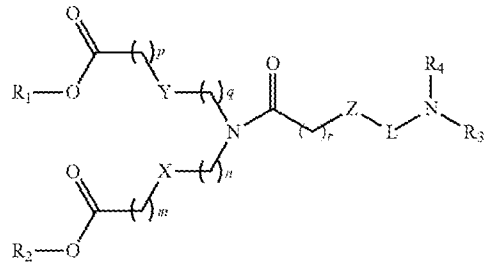
In another embodiment, the cationic lipid is a compound of formula (III), (IV) or (V):



(III) (IV) (V)

Wherein R comprises a biologically active molecule, and $L_1$, $L_2$, and $L_3$ independently for each occurrence comprise a ligand selected from the group consisting of a carbohydrate, a polypeptide, or a lipophile; a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof; or a pharmaceutical composition thereof. Exemplary compounds of formula (III), (IV) and (V), their synthesis and uses thereof are described in US2017/0028074, all of which are herein incorporated by reference.

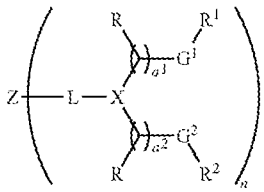
In another embodiment, the cationic lipid is a compound of formula (VI):



Formula (VI)

wherein X is a linear or branched alkylene or alkenylene, monocyclic, bicyclic, or tricyclic arene or heteroarene; Y is a bond, an ethene, or an unsubstituted or substituted aromatic or heteroaromatic ring; Z is S or O; L is a linear or branched alkylene of 1 to 6 carbons; $R_3$ and $R_4$ are independently a linear or branched alkyl of 1 to 6 carbons; $R_1$ and $R_2$ are independently a linear or branched alkyl or alkenyl of 1 to 20 carbons; r is 0 to 6; and m, n, p, and q are independently 1 to 18; wherein when n=q, m=p, and $R_1$=$R_2$, then X and Y differ; wherein when X=Y, n=q, m=p, then $R_1$ and $R_2$ differ; wherein when X=Y, n=q, and $R_1$=$R_2$, then m and p differ; and wherein when X=Y, m=p, and $R_1$=$R_2$, then n and q differ; or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof. Exemplary compounds of formula (VI), their synthesis and uses thereof are described in US2017/0190661, all of which are herein incorporated by reference.

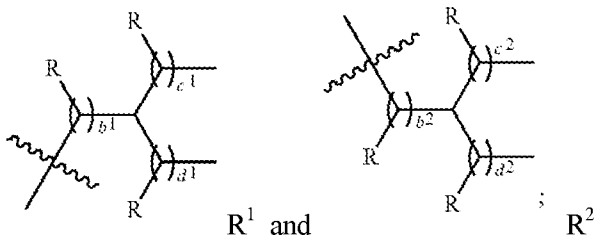
In another embodiment, the cationic lipid is a compound of formula (VII):



Formula (VII)

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt, prodrug or stereoisomer thereof, wherein: one of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —$S(O)_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, SC(=O)—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)—, —C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —OC(=O)$N(R^a)$— or —$N(R^a)$C(=O)O—, and the other of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —$S(O)_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, —SC(=O)—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)—, —C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —OC(=O)$N(R^a)$— or —$N(R^a)$C(=O)O— or a direct bond; L is, at each occurrence, ˜O(C=O)—, wherein ˜ represents a covalent bond to X; X is $CR^a$; Z is alkyl, cycloalkyl or a monovalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is 1; or Z is alkylene, cycloalkylene or a polyvalent

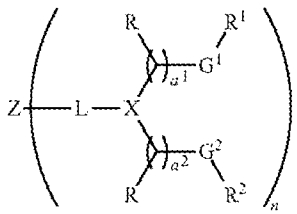
moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is greater than 1; $R^a$ is, at each occurrence, independently H, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ hydroxylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ aminoalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylaminylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxyalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxycarbonyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxy, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyl; R is, at each occurrence, independently either: (a) H or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl; or (b) R together with the carbon atom to which it is bound is taken together with an adjacent R and the carbon atom to which it is bound to form a carbon-carbon double bond; $R^1$ and $R^2$ have, at each occurrence, the following structure, respectively:



$R^1$ and $R^2$;

$a^1$ and $a^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 3 to 12; $b^1$ and $b^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently 0 or 1; $c^1$ and $c^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 5 to 10; $d^1$ and $d^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 5 to 10; y is, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 0 to 2; and n is an integer from 1 to 6, wherein each alkyl, alkylene, hydroxylalkyl, aminoalkyl, alkylaminylalkyl, alkoxyalkyl, alkoxycarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl and alkylcarbonyl is optionally substituted with one or more substituent.

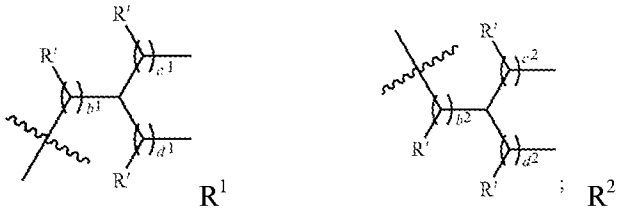
In another embodiment, the cationic lipid is a compound of formula (VIII):



Formula (VIII)

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt, prodrug or stereoisomer thereof, wherein: one of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —$S(O)_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, SC(=O)—, —$N(R^a)C(=O)$—, —$C(=O)N(R^a)$—, —$N(R^a)C(=O)N(R^a)$—, —$OC(=O)N(R^a)$— or —$N(R^a)C(=O)O$—

, and the other of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —$S(O)_y$–, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, —SC(=O)—, —$N(R^a)C(=O)$—, —$C(=O)N(R^a)$—, —$N(R^a)C(=O)N(R^a)$—, —$OC(=O)N(R^a)$— or —$N(R^a)C(=O)O$— or a direct bond; L is, at each occurrence, ˜O(C=O)—, wherein ˜ represents a covalent bond to X; X is $CR^a$; Z is alkyl, cycloalkyl or a monovalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is 1; or Z is alkylene, cycloalkylene or a polyvalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is greater than 1; $R^a$ is, at each occurrence, independently H, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ hydroxylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ aminoalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylaminylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxyalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxycarbonyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxy, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyl; R is, at each occurrence, independently either: (a) H or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl; or (b) R together with the carbon atom to which it is bound is taken together with an adjacent R and the carbon atom to which it is bound to form a carbon-carbon double bond; $R^1$ and $R^2$ have, at each occurrence, the following structure, respectively:



$R^1$ ; $R^2$

R′ is, at each occurrence, independently H or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl; $a^1$ and $a^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 3 to 12; $b^1$ and $b^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently 0 or 1; $c^1$ and $c^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 2 to 12; $d^1$ and $d^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 2 to 12; y is, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 0 to 2; and n is an integer from 1 to 6, wherein $a^1$, $a^2$, $c^1$, $c^2$, $d^1$ and $d^2$ are selected such that the sum of $a^1+c^1+d^1$ is an integer from 18 to 30, and the sum of $a^2+c^2+d^2$ is an integer from 18 to 30, and wherein each alkyl, alkylene, hydroxylalkyl, aminoalkyl, alkylaminylalkyl, alkoxyalkyl, alkoxycarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl and alkylcarbonyl is optionally substituted with one or more substituent.

Exemplary compounds of formula (VII) and (VIII), their synthesis and uses thereof are described in US20190022247, all of which are herein incorporated by reference.

Additional cationic lipids that can be used in compositions of the application include, but are not limited to, those described in WO2019/036030, WO2019/036028,

WO2019/036008, WO2019/036000, US2016/0376224, US2017/0119904, WO2018/200943 and WO2018/191657, the relevant contents on the lipids, their synthesis and uses are herein incorporated by reference in their entireties.

The lipid nanoparticles can be prepared by including multi-component lipid mixtures of varying ratios employing one or more cationic lipids, non-cationic lipids and polyethylene glycol (PEG) – modified, or pegylated, lipids, i.e. the lipid is modified by covalent attachment of a polyethylene glycol. PEG provides the liposomes with a coat which can confer favorable pharmacokinetic characteristics e.g. it can increase stability and prevent non-specific adsorption of the liposomes. In certain embodiments, the PEG has an average molecular mass of 1 kDa to 12 kDa, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12 kDa. For example, it was reported that the length of the PEG can affect in vivo expression of encapsulated RNA, and that PEG with a molecular weight below 1 kDa (e.g. 500 or 750 Da) does not form stable liposomes. See, e.g., US2014/0255472, the relevant content of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The lipid formulations can include anionic lipids. The anionic lipids can be any lipid species that carries a net negative charge at a selected pH, such as physiological pH. The anionic lipids, when combined with cationic lipids, are used to reduce the overall surface charge of LNPs and liposomes and to introduce pH-dependent disruption of the LNP or liposome bilayer structure, facilitating nucleotide release. Several anionic lipids have been described in the literature, many of which are commercially available. For example, suitable anionic lipids for use in the compositions and methods of the invention include 1,2-dioleoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine (DOPE), phosphatidylglycerol, cardiolipin, diacylphosphatidylserine, diacylphosphatidic acid, N-dodecanoyl phosphatidylethanolamines, N-succinyl phosphatidylethanolamines, N-glutarylphosphatidylethanolamines, lysylphosphatidylglycerols, and palmitoyloleyolphosphatidylglycerol (POPG).

The lipid formulations can also include a lipid bilayer stabilizing component. Bilayer stabilizing components can be used to inhibit aggregation of LNPs, but bilayer stabilizing components are not limited to this function. For example, conjugated lipids such as PEG-lipid conjugates and cationic-polymer-lipid conjugates can be used to inhibit the aggregation of LNPs or liposomes. By controlling the composition and concentration of the bilayer stabilizing component, one can control the rate at which

the bilayer stabilizing component exchanges out of the liposome and, in turn, the rate at which the liposome becomes fusogenic. The term "fusogenic" refers to the ability of a liposome or other drug delivery system to fuse with membranes of a cell. For instance, when a polyethyleneglycol-phosphatidylethanolamine conjugate or a polyethyleneglycol-ceramide conjugate is used as the bilayer stabilizing component, the rate at which the liposome becomes fusogenic can be varied, for example, by varying the concentration of the bilayer stabilizing component, by varying the molecular weight of the polyethyleneglycol, or by varying the chain length and degree of saturation of the acyl chain groups on the phosphatidylethanolamine or the ceramide. In addition, other variables including, for example, pH, temperature, ionic strength, etc. can be used to vary and/or control the rate at which the liposome becomes fusogenic. Other methods which can be used to control the rate at which the liposome becomes fusogenic will become apparent to those of skill in the art upon reading this disclosure.

LNPs and liposomes can be prepared using methods known in the art in view of the present disclosure. For example, the LNPs can be prepared using ethanol injection or dilution, thin film hydration, freeze-thaw, French press or membrane extrusion, diafiltration, sonication, detergent dialysis, ether infusion, and reverse phase evaporation. One useful method of preparing liposomes involves mixing (i) an ethanolic solution of the lipids (ii) an aqueous solution of the nucleic acid and (iii) buffer, followed by mixing, equilibration, dilution and purification. Preferred liposomes of the invention, e.g. liposomes with a preferred diameter, are obtainable by this mixing process. To obtain liposomes with the desired diameter(s), mixing can be performed using a process in which two feed streams of aqueous nucleic acid solution are combined in a single mixing zone with one stream of an ethanolic lipid solution, all at the same flow rate e.g. in a microfluidic channel as described below. Further examples, compositions, and methods to create liposomes are described in US 2014/0255472, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Some examples of lipids, lipid compositions, and methods to create lipid carriers for delivering active nucleic acid molecules, such as those of this invention, are described in: US2017/0190661, US2006/0008910, US2015/0064242, US2005/0064595, WO/2019/036030, US2019/0022247, WO/2019/036028, WO/2019/036008, WO/2019/036000, US2016/0376224, US2017/0119904,

WO/2018/200943, WO/2018/191657, US2014/0255472, and US2013/0195968, the relevant content of each of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Liposomes are microscopic vesicles including at least one concentric lipid bilayer. Vesicle-forming lipids are selected to achieve a specified degree of fluidity or rigidity of the final complex. In particular embodiments, liposomes provide a lipid composition that is an outer layer surrounding a porous nanoparticle.

Liposomes can be neutral (cholesterol) or bipolar and include phospholipids, such as phosphatidylcholine (PC), phosphatidylethanolamine (PE), phosphatidylinositol (PI), and sphingomyelin (SM) and other type of bipolar lipids including dioleoylphosphatidylethanolamine (DOPE), with a hydrocarbon chain length in the range of 14-22, and saturated or with one or more double C=C bonds. Examples of lipids capable of producing a stable liposome, alone, or in combination with other lipid components are phospholipids, such as hydrogenated soy phosphatidylcholine (HSPC), lecithin, phosphatidylethanolamine, lysolecithin, lysophosphatidylethanolamine, phosphatidylserine, phosphatidylinositol, sphingomyelin, cephalin, cardiolipin, phosphatidic acid, cerebro sides, distearoylphosphatidylethanolamine (DSPE), dioleoylphosphatidylcholine (DOPC), dipalmitoylphosphatidylcholine (DPPC), palmitoyloleoylphosphatidylcholine (POPC), palmitoyloleoylphosphatidylethanolamine (POPE) and dioleoylphosphatidylethanolamine 4-(N-maleimido-methyl)cyclohexane-1-carboxylate (DOPE-mal). Additional non-phosphorous containing lipids that can become incorporated into liposomes include stearylamine, dodecylamine, hexadecylamine, isopropyl myristate, triethanolamine-lauryl sulfate, alkyl-aryl sulfate, acetyl palmitate, glycerol ricinoleate, hexadecyl stereate, amphoteric acrylic polymers, polyethyloxylated fatty acid amides, DDAB, dioctadecyl dimethyl ammonium chloride (DODAC), 1 ,2-dimyristoyl-3-trimethylammonium propane (DMTAP), DOTAP, DOTMA, DC-Choi, phosphatidic acid (PA), dipalmitoylphosphatidylglycerol (DPPG), dioleoylphosphatidylglycerol, DOPG, and dicetylphosphate. In particular embodiments, lipids used to create liposomes disclosed herein include cholesterol, hydrogenated soy phosphatidylcholine (HSPC) and, the derivatized vesicle-forming lipid PEG-DSPE.

Methods of forming liposomes are described in, for example, US Patent Nos. 4,229,360; 4,224,179; 4,241 ,046; 4,737,323; 4,078,052; 4,235,871 ; 4,501 ,728; and

4,837,028, as well as in Szoka et al., Ann. Rev. Biophys. Bioeng. 9:467 (1980) and Hope et al., Chem. Phys. Lip. 40:89 (1986).

**Methods of Inducing an Immune Response or Treating an HBV Infection**

The application also provides methods of inducing an immune response against hepatitis B virus (HBV) in a subject in need thereof, comprising administering to the subject an immunogenically effective amount of a composition or immunogenic composition of the application. Any of the compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application described herein can be used in the methods of the application.

As used herein, the term "infection" refers to the invasion of a host by a disease-causing agent. A disease-causing agent is considered to be "infectious" when it is capable of invading a host, and replicating or propagating within the host. Examples of infectious agents include viruses, e.g., HBV and certain species of adenovirus, prions, bacteria, fungi, protozoa and the like. "HBV infection" specifically refers to invasion of a host organism, such as cells and tissues of the host organism, by HBV.

The phrase "inducing an immune response" when used with reference to the methods described herein encompasses causing a desired immune response or effect in a subject in need thereof against an infection, e.g., an HBV infection. "Inducing an immune response" also encompasses providing a therapeutic immunity for treating against a pathogenic agent, e.g., HBV. As used herein, the term "therapeutic immunity" or "therapeutic immune response" means that the vaccinated subject is able to control an infection with the pathogenic agent against which the vaccination was done, for instance immunity against HBV infection conferred by vaccination with HBV vaccine. In an embodiment, "inducing an immune response" means producing an immunity in a subject in need thereof, e.g., to provide a therapeutic effect against a disease, such as HBV infection. In certain embodiments, "inducing an immune response" refers to causing or improving cellular immunity, e.g., T cell response, against HBV infection. In certain embodiments, "inducing an immune response" refers to causing or improving a humoral immune response against HBV infection. In certain embodiments, "inducing an immune response" refers to causing or improving a cellular and a humoral immune response against HBV infection.

As used herein, the term "protective immunity" or "protective immune response" means that the vaccinated subject is able to control an infection with the pathogenic agent against which the vaccination was done. Usually, the subject having developed a "protective immune response" develops only mild to moderate clinical symptoms or no symptoms at all. Usually, a subject having a "protective immune response" or "protective immunity" against a certain agent will not die as a result of the infection with said agent.

Typically, the administration of compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application will have a therapeutic aim to generate an immune response against HBV after HBV infection or development of symptoms characteristic of HBV infection, e.g., for therapeutic vaccination.

As used herein, "an immunogenically effective amount" or "immunologically effective amount" means an amount of a composition, polynucleotide, vector, or antigen sufficient to induce a desired immune effect or immune response in a subject in need thereof. An immunogenically effective amount can be an amount sufficient to induce an immune response in a subject in need thereof. An immunogenically effective amount can be an amount sufficient to produce immunity in a subject in need thereof, e.g., provide a therapeutic effect against a disease such as HBV infection. An immunogenically effective amount can vary depending upon a variety of factors, such as the physical condition of the subject, age, weight, health, etc.; the particular application, e.g., providing protective immunity or therapeutic immunity; and the particular disease, e.g., viral infection, for which immunity is desired. An immunogenically effective amount can readily be determined by one of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure.

In particular embodiments of the application, an immunogenically effective amount refers to the amount of a composition or pharmaceutical composition which is sufficient to achieve one, two, three, four, or more of the following effects: (i) reduce or ameliorate the severity of an HBV infection or a symptom associated therewith; (ii) reduce the duration of an HBV infection or symptom associated therewith; (iii) prevent the progression of an HBV infection or symptom associated therewith; (iv) cause regression of an HBV infection or symptom associated therewith; (v) prevent the development or onset of an HBV infection, or symptom associated therewith; (vi) prevent the recurrence of an HBV infection or symptom associated therewith; (vii) reduce hospitalization of a subject having an HBV infection; (viii) reduce

hospitalization length of a subject having an HBV infection; (ix) increase the survival of a subject with an HBV infection; (x) eliminate an HBV infection in a subject; (xi) inhibit or reduce HBV replication in a subject; and/or (xii) enhance or improve the prophylactic or therapeutic effect(s) of another therapy.

An immunogenically effective amount can also be an amount sufficient to reduce HBsAg levels consistent with evolution to clinical seroconversion; achieve sustained HBsAg clearance associated with reduction of infected hepatocytes by a subject's immune system; induce HBV-antigen specific activated T-cell populations; and/or achieve persistent loss of HBsAg within 12 months. Examples of a target index include lower HBsAg below a threshold of 500 copies of HBsAg international units (IU) and/or higher CD8 counts.

As general guidance, an immunogenically effective amount when used with reference to a DNA plasmid can range from about 0.1 mg/mL to 10 mg/mL of DNA plasmid total, such as 0.1 mg/mL, 0.25 mg/mL, 0.5 mg/mL, 0.75 mg/mL 1 mg/mL, 1.5 mg/mL, 2 mg/mL, 3 mg/mL, 4 mg/mL, 5 mg/mL, 6 mg/mL, 7 mg/mL, 8 mg/mL, 9 mg/mL, or 10 mg/mL. Preferably, an immunogenically effective amount of DNA plasmid is less than 8 mg/mL, more preferably less than 6 mg/mL, even more preferably 3-4 mg/mL. An immunogenically effective amount can be from one vector or plasmid, or from multiple vectors or plasmids. As further general guidance, an immunogenically effective amount when used with reference to a peptide can range from about 10 μg to 1 mg per administration, such as 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 9000, or 1000 μg per administration. An immunogenically effective amount can be administered in a single composition, or in multiple compositions, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10 compositions (e.g., tablets, capsules or injectables, or any composition adapted to intradermal delivery, e.g., to intradermal delivery using an intradermal delivery patch), wherein the administration of the multiple capsules or injections collectively provides a subject with an immunogenically effective amount. For example, when two DNA plasmids are used, an immunogenically effective amount can be 3-4 mg/mL, with 1.5-2 mg/mL of each plasmid. It is also possible to administer an immunogenically effective amount to a subject, and subsequently administer another dose of an immunogenically effective amount to the same subject, in a so-called prime-boost regimen. This general concept of a prime-boost regimen is well known to the skilled person in the vaccine field. Further booster administrations can optionally be added to the regimen, as needed.

A pharmaceutical composition comprising two DNA plasmids, e.g., a first DNA plasmid encoding an HBV core antigen and second DNA plasmid encoding an HBV pol antigen, can be administered to a subject by mixing both plasmids and delivering the mixture to a single anatomic site. Alternatively, two separate immunizations each delivering a single expression plasmid can be performed. In such embodiments, whether both plasmids are administered in a single immunization as a mixture of in two separate immunizations, the first DNA plasmid and the second DNA plasmid can be administered in a ratio of 10:1 to 1:10, by weight, such as 10:1, 9:1, 8:1, 7:1, 6:1, 5:1, 4:1, 3:1, 2:1, 1:1, 1:2, 1:3, 1:4, 1:5, 1:6, 1:7, 1:8, 1:9, or 1:10, by weight. Preferably, the first and second DNA plasmids are administered in a ratio of 1:1, by weight.

Preferably, a subject to be treated according to the methods of the application is an HBV-infected subject, particular a subject having chronic HBV infection. Acute HBV infection is characterized by an efficient activation of the innate immune system complemented with a subsequent broad adaptive response (e.g., HBV-specific T-cells, neutralizing antibodies), which usually results in successful suppression of replication or removal of infected hepatocytes. In contrast, such responses are impaired or diminished due to high viral and antigen load, e.g., HBV envelope proteins are produced in abundance and can be released in sub-viral particles in 1,000-fold excess to infectious virus.

Chronic HBV infection is described in phases characterized by viral load, liver enzyme levels (necroinflammatory activity), HBeAg, or HBsAg load or presence of antibodies to these antigens. cccDNA levels stay relatively constant at approximately 10 to 50 copies per cell, even though viremia can vary considerably. The persistence of the cccDNA species leads to chronicity. More specifically, the phases of chronic HBV infection include: (i) the immune-tolerant phase characterized by high viral load and normal or minimally elevated liver enzymes; (ii) the immune activation HBeAg-positive phase in which lower or declining levels of viral replication with significantly elevated liver enzymes are observed; (iii) the inactive HBsAg carrier phase, which is a low replicative state with low viral loads and normal liver enzyme levels in the serum that may follow HBeAg seroconversion; and (iv) the HBeAg-negative phase in which viral replication occurs periodically (reactivation) with concomitant fluctuations in liver enzyme levels, mutations in the pre-core and/or basal core promoter are common, such that HBeAg is not produced by the infected cell.

As used herein, "chronic HBV infection" refers to a subject having the detectable presence of HBV for more than 6 months. A subject having a chronic HBV infection can be in any phase of chronic HBV infection. Chronic HBV infection is understood in accordance with its ordinary meaning in the field. Chronic HBV infection can for example be characterized by the persistence of HBsAg for 6 months or more after acute HBV infection. For example, a chronic HBV infection referred to herein follows the definition published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), according to which a chronic HBV infection can be characterized by laboratory criteria such as: (i) negative for IgM antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen (IgM anti-HBc) and positive for hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), hepatitis B e antigen (HBeAg), or nucleic acid test for hepatitis B virus DNA, or (ii) positive for HBsAg or nucleic acid test for HBV DNA, or positive for HBeAg two times at least 6 months apart.

Preferably, an immunogenically effective amount refers to the amount of a composition or pharmaceutical composition of the application which is sufficient to treat chronic HBV infection.

In some embodiments, a subject having chronic HBV infection is undergoing nucleoside analog (NUC) treatment, and is NUC-suppressed. As used herein, "NUC-suppressed" refers to a subject having an undetectable viral level of HBV and stable alanine aminotransferase (ALT) levels for at least six months. Examples of nucleoside/nucleotide analog treatment include HBV polymerase inhibitors, such as entacavir and tenofovir. Preferably, a subject having chronic HBV infection does not have advanced hepatic fibrosis or cirrhosis. Such subject would typically have a METAVIR score of less than 3 for fibrosis and a fibroscan result of less than 9 kPa. The METAVIR score is a scoring system that is commonly used to assess the extent of inflammation and fibrosis by histopathological evaluation in a liver biopsy of patients with hepatitis B. The scoring system assigns two standardized numbers: one reflecting the degree of inflammation and one reflecting the degree of fibrosis.

It is believed that elimination or reduction of chronic HBV may allow early disease interception of severe liver disease, including virus-induced cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma. Thus, the methods of the application can also be used as therapy to treat HBV-induced diseases. Examples of HBV-induced diseases include, but are not limited to cirrhosis, cancer (e.g., hepatocellular carcinoma), and fibrosis, particularly advanced fibrosis characterized by a METAVIR score of 3 or higher for

fibrosis. In such embodiments, an immunogenically effective amount is an amount sufficient to achieve persistent loss of HBsAg within 12 months and significant decrease in clinical disease (e.g., cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, etc.).

Methods according to embodiments of the application further comprises administering to the subject in need thereof another immunogenic agent (such as another HBV antigen or other antigen) or another anti-HBV agent (such as a nucleoside analog or other anti-HBV agent) in combination with a composition of the application. For example, another anti-HBV agent or immunogenic agent can be a small molecule or antibody including, but not limited to, immune checkpoint inhibitors (e.g., anti-PD1, anti-TIM-3, etc.), toll-like receptor agonists (e.g., TLR7 agonists and/oror TLR8 agonists), RIG-1 agonists, IL-15 superagonists (Altor Bioscience), mutant IRF3 and IRF7 genetic adjuvants, STING agonists (Aduro), FLT3L genetic adjuvant, IL12 genetic adjuvant, IL-7-hyFc; CAR-T which bind HBV env (S-CAR cells); capsid assembly modulators; cccDNA inhibitors, HBV polymerase inhibitors (e.g., entecavir and tenofovir). The one or other anti-HBV active agents can be, for example, a small molecule, an antibody or antigen binding fragment thereof, a polypeptide, protein, or nucleic acid. The one or other anti-HBV agents can e.g., be chosen from among HBV DNA polymerase inhibitors; Immunomodulators; Toll-like receptor 7 modulators; Toll-like receptor 8 modulators; Toll-like receptor 3 modulators; Interferon alpha receptor ligands; Hyaluronidase inhibitors; Modulators of IL-10; HBsAg inhibitors; Toll like receptor 9 modulators; Cyclophilin inhibitors; HBV Prophylactic vaccines; HBV Therapeutic vaccines; HBV viral entry inhibitors; Antisense oligonucleotides targeting viral mRNA, more particularly anti-HBV antisense oligonucleotides; short interfering RNAs (siRNA), more particularly anti-HBV siRNA; Endonuclease modulators; Inhibitors of ribonucleotide reductase; Hepatitis B virus E antigen inhibitors; HBV antibodies targeting the surface antigens of the hepatitis B virus; HBV antibodies; CCR2 chemokine antagonists; Thymosin agonists; Cytokines, such as IL12; Capsid Assembly Modulators, Nucleoprotein inhibitors (HBV core or capsid protein inhibitors); Nucleic Acid Polymers (NAPs); Stimulators of retinoic acid-inducible gene 1; Stimulators of NOD2; Recombinant thymosin alpha-1; Hepatitis B virus replication inhibitors; PI3K inhibitors; cccDNA inhibitors; immune checkpoint inhibitors, such as PD-L1 inhibitors, PD-1 inhibitors, TIM-3 inhibitors, TIGIT inhibitors, Lag3 inhibitors, and CTLA-4 inhibitors; Agonists of co-stimulatory receptors that are expressed on immune cells (more particularly T

cells), such as CD27, CD28; BTK inhibitors; Other drugs for treating HBV; IDO inhibitors; Arginase inhibitors; and KDM5 inhibitors.

Methods of Delivery

Compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application can be administered to a subject by any method known in the art in view of the present disclosure, including, but not limited to, parenteral administration (e.g., intramuscular, subcutaneous, intravenous, or intradermal injection), oral administration, transdermal administration, and nasal administration. Preferably, compositions and pharmaceutical compositions are administered parenterally (e.g., by intramuscular injection or intradermal injection) or transdermally.

In some embodiments of the application in which a composition or pharmaceutical composition comprises one or more DNA plasmids, administration can be by injection through the skin, e.g., intramuscular or intradermal injection, preferably intramuscular injection. Intramuscular injection can be combined with electroporation, i.e., application of an electric field to facilitate delivery of the DNA plasmids to cells. As used herein, the term "electroporation" refers to the use of a transmembrane electric field pulse to induce microscopic pathways (pores) in a bio-membrane. During in vivo electroporation, electrical fields of appropriate magnitude and duration are applied to cells, inducing a transient state of enhanced cell membrane permeability, thus enabling the cellular uptake of molecules unable to cross cell membranes on their own. Creation of such pores by electroporation facilitates passage of biomolecules, such as plasmids, oligonucleotides, siRNAs, drugs, etc., from one side of a cellular membrane to the other. In vivo electroporation for the delivery of DNA vaccines has been shown to significantly increase plasmid uptake by host cells, while also leading to mild-to-moderate inflammation at the injection site. As a result, transfection efficiency and immune response are significantly improved (e.g., up to 1,000 fold and 100 fold respectively) with intradermal or intramuscular electroporation, in comparison to conventional injection.

In a typical embodiment, electroporation is combined with intramuscular injection. However, it is also possible to combine electroporation with other forms of parenteral administration, e.g., intradermal injection, subcutaneous injection, etc.

Administration of a composition, pharmaceutical composition or vaccine of the application via electroporation can be accomplished using electroporation devices that can be configured to deliver to a desired tissue of a mammal a pulse of energy

effective to cause reversible pores to form in cell membranes. The electroporation device can include an electroporation component and an electrode assembly or handle assembly. The electroporation component can include one or more of the following components of electroporation devices: controller, current waveform generator, impedance tester, waveform logger, input element, status reporting element, communication port, memory component, power source, and power switch. Electroporation can be accomplished using an in vivo electroporation device. Examples of electroporation devices and electroporation methods that can facilitate delivery of compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application, particularly those comprising DNA plasmids, include CELLECTRA® (Inovio Pharmaceuticals, Blue Bell, PA), Elgen electroporator (Inovio Pharmaceuticals, Inc.) Tri-GridTM delivery system (Ichor Medical Systems, Inc., San Diego, CA 92121) and those described in U.S. Patent No. 7,664,545, U.S. Patent No. 8,209,006, U.S. Patent No. 9,452,285, U.S. Patent No. 5,273,525, U.S. Patent No. 6,110,161, U.S. Patent No. 6,261,281, U.S. Patent No. 6,958,060, and U.S. Patent No. 6,939,862, U.S. Patent No. 7,328,064, U.S. Patent No. 6,041,252, U.S. Patent No. 5,873,849, U.S. Patent No. 6,278,895, U.S. Patent No. 6,319,901, U.S. Patent No. 6,912,417, U.S. Patent No. 8,187,249, U.S. Patent No. 9,364,664, U.S. Patent No. 9,802,035, U.S. Patent No. 6,117,660, and International Patent Application Publication WO2017172838, all of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entireties. Other examples of in vivo electroporation devices are described in International Patent Application entitled "Method and Apparatus for the Delivery of Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) Vaccines," filed on the same day as this application with the Attorney Docket Number 688097-405WO, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties. Also contemplated by the application for delivery of the compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application are use of a pulsed electric field, for instance as described in, e.g., U.S. Patent No. 6,697,669, which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

In other embodiments of the application in which a composition or pharmaceutical composition comprises one or more DNA plasmids, the method of administration is transdermal. Transdermal administration can be combined with epidermal skin abrasion to facilitate delivery of the DNA plasmids to cells. For example, a dermatological patch can be used for epidermal skin abrasion. Upon

removal of the dermatological patch, the composition or pharmaceutical composition can be deposited on the abraised skin.

Methods of delivery are not limited to the above described embodiments, and any means for intracellular delivery can be used. Other methods of intracellular delivery contemplated by the methods of the application include, but are not limited to, liposome encapsulation, lipid nanoparticles (LNPs), etc.

Adjuvants

In some embodiments of the application, a method of inducing an immune response against HBV further comprises administering an adjuvant. The terms "adjuvant" and "immune stimulant" are used interchangeably herein and are defined as one or more substances that cause stimulation of the immune system. In this context, an adjuvant is used to enhance an immune response to HBV antigens and antigenic HBV polypeptides of the application.

According to embodiments of the application, an adjuvant can be present in a pharmaceutical composition or composition of the application, or administered in a separate composition. An adjuvant can be, e.g., a small molecule or an antibody. Examples of adjuvants suitable for use in the application include, but are not limited to, immune checkpoint inhibitors (e.g., anti-PD1, anti-TIM-3, etc.), toll-like receptor agonists (e.g., TLR7 and/or TLR8 agonists), RIG-1 agonists, IL-15 superagonists (Altor Bioscience), mutant IRF3 and IRF7 genetic adjuvants, STING agonists (Aduro), FLT3L genetic adjuvant, IL12 genetic adjuvant, and IL-7-hyFc. Examples of adjuvants can e.g., be chosen from among the following anti-HBV agents: HBV DNA polymerase inhibitors; Immunomodulators; Toll-like receptor 7 modulators; Toll-like receptor 8 modulators; Toll-like receptor 3 modulators; Interferon alpha receptor ligands; Hyaluronidase inhibitors; Modulators of IL-10; HBsAg inhibitors; Toll like receptor 9 modulators; Cyclophilin inhibitors; HBV Prophylactic vaccines; HBV Therapeutic vaccines; HBV viral entry inhibitors; Antisense oligonucleotides targeting viral mRNA, more particularly anti-HBV antisense oligonucleotides; short interfering RNAs (siRNA), more particularly anti-HBV siRNA; Endonuclease modulators; Inhibitors of ribonucleotide reductase; Hepatitis B virus E antigen inhibitors; HBV antibodies targeting the surface antigens of the hepatitis B virus; HBV antibodies; CCR2 chemokine antagonists; Thymosin agonists; Cytokines, such as IL12; Capsid Assembly Modulators, Nucleoprotein inhibitors (HBV core or capsid protein inhibitors); Nucleic Acid Polymers (NAPs); Stimulators of retinoic acid-

inducible gene 1; Stimulators of NOD2; Recombinant thymosin alpha-1; Hepatitis B virus replication inhibitors; PI3K inhibitors; cccDNA inhibitors; immune checkpoint inhibitors, such as PD-L1 inhibitors, PD-1 inhibitors, TIM-3 inhibitors, TIGIT inhibitors, Lag3 inhibitors, and CTLA-4 inhibitors; Agonists of co-stimulatory receptors that are expressed on immune cells (more particularly T cells), such as CD27, CD28; BTK inhibitors; Other drugs for treating HBV; IDO inhibitors; Arginase inhibitors; and KDM5 inhibitors.

Compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application can also be administered in combination with at least one other anti-HBV agent. Examples of anti-HBV agents suitable for use with the application include, but are not limited to small molecules, antibodies, and/or CAR-T therapies which bind HBV env (S-CAR cells), capsid assembly modulators, TLR agonists (e.g., TLR7 and/or TLR8 agonists), cccDNA inhibitors, HBV polymerase inhibitors (e.g., entecavir and tenofovir), and/or immune checkpoint inhibitors, etc.

The at least one anti-HBV agent can e.g., be chosen from among HBV DNA polymerase inhibitors; Immunomodulators; Toll-like receptor 7 modulators; Toll-like receptor 8 modulators; Toll-like receptor 3 modulators; Interferon alpha receptor ligands; Hyaluronidase inhibitors; Modulators of IL-10; HBsAg inhibitors; Toll like receptor 9 modulators; Cyclophilin inhibitors; HBV Prophylactic vaccines; HBV Therapeutic vaccines; HBV viral entry inhibitors; Antisense oligonucleotides targeting viral mRNA, more particularly anti-HBV antisense oligonucleotides; short interfering RNAs (siRNA), more particularly anti-HBV siRNA; Endonuclease modulators; Inhibitors of ribonucleotide reductase; Hepatitis B virus E antigen inhibitors; HBV antibodies targeting the surface antigens of the hepatitis B virus; HBV antibodies; CCR2 chemokine antagonists; Thymosin agonists; Cytokines, such as IL12; Capsid Assembly Modulators, Nucleoprotein inhibitors (HBV core or capsid protein inhibitors); Nucleic Acid Polymers (NAPs); Stimulators of retinoic acid-inducible gene 1; Stimulators of NOD2; Recombinant thymosin alpha-1; Hepatitis B virus replication inhibitors; PI3K inhibitors; cccDNA inhibitors; immune checkpoint inhibitors, such as PD-L1 inhibitors, PD-1 inhibitors, TIM-3 inhibitors, TIGIT inhibitors, Lag3 inhibitors, and CTLA-4 inhibitors; Agonists of co-stimulatory receptors that are expressed on immune cells (more particularly T cells), such as CD27, CD28; BTK inhibitors; Other drugs for treating HBV; IDO inhibitors; Arginase inhibitors; and KDM5 inhibitors. Such anti-HBV agents can be administered

with the compositions and pharmaceutical compositions of the application simultaneously or sequentially.

Methods of Prime/Boost Immunization

Embodiments of the application also contemplate administering an immunogenically effective amount of a composition or therapeutic combination to a subject, and subsequently administering another dose of an immunogenically effective amount of a composition or therapeutic combination to the same subject, in a so-called prime-boost regimen Thus, in an embodiment, a composition or therapeutic combination of the application is a primer vaccine used for priming an immune response. In another embodiment, a composition or therapeutic combination of the application is a booster vaccine used for boosting an immune response. The priming and boosting vaccines of the application can be used in the methods of the application described herein. This general concept of a prime-boost regimen is well known to the skilled person in the vaccine field. Any of the compositions and therapeutic combinations of the application described herein can be used as priming and/or boosting vaccines for priming and/or boosting an immune response against HBV.

In some embodiments of the application, a composition or therapeutic combination of the application can be administered for priming immunization. The composition or therapeutic combination can be re-administered for boosting immunization. Further booster administrations of the composition or vaccine combination can optionally be added to the regimen, as needed. An adjuvant can be present in a composition of the application used for boosting immunization, present in a separate composition to be administered together with the composition or therapeutic combination of the application for the boosting immunization, or administered on its own as the boosting immunization. In those embodiments in which an adjuvant is included in the regimen, the adjuvant is preferably used for boosting immunization.

An illustrative and non-limiting example of a prime-boost regimen includes administering a single dose of an immunogenically effective amount of a composition or therapeutic combination of the application to a subject to prime the immune response; and subsequently administering another dose of an immunogenically effective amount of a composition or therapeutic combination of the application to boost the immune response, wherein the boosting immunization is first administered about two to six weeks, preferably four weeks after the priming immunization is

initially administered. Optionally, about 10 to 14 weeks, preferably 12 weeks, after the priming immunization is initially administered, a further boosting immunization of the composition or therapeutic combination, or other adjuvant, is administered.

Kits

Also provided herein is a kit comprising a therapeutic combination of the application. A kit can comprise the first polynucleotide, the second polynucleotide, and the lipid nanoparticle and/or liposome carrier(s) in one or more separate compositions, or a kit can comprise the first polynucleotide, the second polynucleotide, and the lipid nanoparticle and/or liposome carrier(s) in a single composition. A kit can further comprise one or more adjuvants or immune stimulants, and/or other anti-HBV agents.

The ability to induce or stimulate an anti-HBV immune response upon administration in an animal or human organism can be evaluated either in vitro or in vivo using a variety of assays which are standard in the art. For a general description of techniques available to evaluate the onset and activation of an immune response, see for example Coligan et al. (1992 and 1994, Current Protocols in Immunology; ed. J Wiley & Sons Inc, National Institute of Health). Measurement of cellular immunity can be performed by measurement of cytokine profiles secreted by activated effector cells including those derived from CD4+ and CD8+ T-cells (e.g. quantification of IL-10 or IFN gamma-producing cells by ELISPOT), by determination of the activation status of immune effector cells (e.g. T cell proliferation assays by a classical [3H] thymidine uptake or flow cytometry-based assays), by assaying for antigen-specific T lymphocytes in a sensitized subject (e.g. peptide-specific lysis in a cytotoxicity assay, etc.).

The ability to stimulate a cellular and/or a humoral response can be determined by antibody binding and/or competition in binding (see for example Harlow, 1989, Antibodies, Cold Spring Harbor Press). For example, titers of antibodies produced in response to administration of a composition providing an immunogen can be measured by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). The immune responses can also be measured by neutralizing antibody assay, where a neutralization of a virus is defined as the loss of infectivity through reaction/inhibition/neutralization of the virus with specific antibody. The immune response can further be measured by Antibody-Dependent Cellular Phagocytosis (ADCP) Assay.

## EMBODIMENTS

The invention provides also the following non-limiting embodiments.

Embodiment 1 is a pharmaceutical composition for use in treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof, comprising:

i) at least one of:

a) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 95%, such as at least 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4, and

b) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having an amino acid sequence that is at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7; and

ii) a cationic lipid, and

iii) at least one selected from the group consisting of anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, polymer conjugated lipids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and a combination thereof.

Embodiment 2 is a pharmaceutical composition for use in treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof, comprising:

i) at least one of

a. a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 95% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and

b. a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen does not have reverse transcriptase activity and RNase H activity; and

ii) a cationic lipid; and

iii) a conjugated lipid;

optionally, the pharmaceutical composition further comprises at least one selected from the group consisting of anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and a combination thereof.

Embodiment 3 is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 1 or 2, wherein the pharmaceutical composition comprises one or more neutral lipids selected from DSPC, DPPC, DMPC, DOPC, POPC, DOPE and SM, preferably DSPC.

Embodiment 3a is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiment 1 to 3, wherein the pharmaceutical composition comprises a steroid, preferably the steroid is cholesterol.

Embodiment 3b is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 3a, wherein the conjugated lipid is a lipid modified covalently by polyethylene glycol (PEGylated lipid), preferably the PEGylated lipid is PEG-DAG, PEG-PE, PEG-S-DAG, PEG-cer or a PEG dialkyoxypropylcarbamate.

Embodiment 3c is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 3b, wherein the cationic lipid is a compound selected from the group consisting of Formula (I) to Formula (VIII), or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt, prodrug or stereoisomer thereof.

Embodiment 3d is the pharmaceutical composition of any of the exemplified cationic lipids descried in US2017/0190661, US2006/0008910, US2015/0064242, US2005/0064595, WO/2019/036030, US2019/0022247, WO/2019/036028, WO/2019/036008, WO/2019/036000, US2016/0376224, US2017/0119904, WO/2018/200943, WO/2018/191657, WO/2018/118102, US20180169268 , WO2018118102 , WO2018119163, US2014/0255472, and US2013/0195968, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Embodiment 4 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-3d, wherein the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the truncated HBV core antigen.

Embodiment 4a is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-3d, wherein the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the HBV polymerase antigen.

Embodiment 4b is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 4 or 4a, wherein the signal sequence independently comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15.

Embodiment 4c is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 4 or 4a, wherein the signal sequence is independently encoded by the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 8 or SEQ ID NO: 14.

Embodiment 5 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-4c, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen comprises an amino acid sequence that is at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 7.

Embodiment 5a is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 5, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7.

Embodiment 5b is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 5a, wherein and the truncated HBV core antigen consists of the amino acid sequence that is at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100%, identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4.

Embodiment 5c is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 5b, wherein the truncated HBV antigen consists of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4.

Embodiment 6 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-5c, wherein each of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is a DNA molecule.

Embodiment 6a is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 6, wherein the DNA molecule is present on a DNA vector.

Embodiment 6b is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 6a, wherein the DNA vector is selected from the group consisting of DNA plasmids, bacterial artificial chromosomes, yeast artificial chromosomes, and closed linear deoxyribonucleic acid.

Embodiment 6c is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-5c, wherein each of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is an RNA molecule.

Embodiment 6d is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 6c, wherein the RNA molecule is an RNA replicon, preferably a self-replicating RNA replicon, an mRNA replicon, a modified mRNA replicon, or self-amplifying mRNA.

Embodiment 6e is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 6d, wherein each of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is independently formulated with a lipid composition, preferably a lipid nanoparticle (LNP).

Embodiment 7 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-6e, comprising the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule in the same non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule.

Embodiment 8 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-6e, comprising the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule in two different non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules.

Embodiment 9 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-8, wherein the first polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.

Embodiment 9a is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 9, wherein the first polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%, 99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.

Embodiment 10 is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 9a, wherein the first polynucleotide sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.

Embodiment 11 the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-10, wherein the second polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 90%, such as at least 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99% or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

Embodiment 11a the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 11, wherein the second polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 98%, such as at least 98%, 98.5%, 99%, 99.1%, 99.2%, 99.3%, 99.4%, 99.5%,

99.6%, 99.7%, 99.8%, 99.9%, or 100%, sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

Embodiment 12 is the pharmaceutical composition of embodiment 11a, wherein the second polynucleotide sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.

Embodiment 13 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1-12, wherein the at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated in a lipid nanoparticle.

Embodiment 14 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 2-12, wherein the at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated in a lipid particle comprising: (a) a substantially solid core containing the nucleic acid molecules, the cationic lipid, and optionally second lipids; and (b) PEGylated -lipid surrounding the core.

Embodiment 15 is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 2-12, wherein the at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated in a liposome comprising: (a) an aqueous core containing the nucleic acid molecules, (b) a lipid layer comprising the cationic lipid, and optionally second lipids; and (c) PEGylated -lipid on the outer surface of the liposome.

Embodiment 15a is the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 15, wherein the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are RNA.

Embodiment 15b is the composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 15, wherein the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are self-replicating RNA molecules.

Embodiment 15c is the composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 15, wherein the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are DNA.

Embodiment 15d is the composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 15, wherein the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are present on one or more DNA plasmids or one or more linear closed miniDNA molecules.

Embodiment 16 is a kit comprising the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 15d, and instructions for using the pharmaceutical composition in treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof.

Embodiment 17 is a method of treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof, comprising administering to the subject the pharmaceutical composition of any one of embodiments 1 to 15d.

Embodiment 17a is the method of embodiment 17, wherein the treatment induces an immune response against a hepatitis B virus in a subject in need thereof, preferably the subject has chronic HBV infection.

Embodiment 17b is the method of embodiment 17 or 17a, wherein the subject has chronic HBV infection.

Embodiment 17c is the method of any one of embodiments 17-17b, wherein the subject is in need of a treatment of an HBV-induced disease selected from the group consisting of advanced fibrosis, cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

Embodiment 18 is the method of any one of embodiments 17-17c, wherein the pharmaceutical composition is administered by injection through the skin, e.g., intramuscular or intradermal injection, preferably intramuscular injection.

Embodiment 19 is the method of embodiment 18, wherein the pharmaceutical composition comprises at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules.

Embodiment 19a is the method of embodiment 19, wherein the pharmaceutical composition comprises the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules.

Embodiment 20 is the method of embodiment 19 or 19a, wherein the non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are administered to the subject in a lipid composition, preferably in a lipid nanoparticle.

## EXAMPLES

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that changes could be made to the embodiments described above without departing from the broad inventive concept thereof. It is understood, therefore, that this invention is not limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but it is intended to cover modifications within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the present description.

**Example 1. HBV core plasmid & HBV pol plasmid**

A schematic representation of the pDK-pol and pDK-core vectors is shown in Fig. 1A and 1B, respectively. An HBV core or pol antigen optimized expression cassette containing a CMV promoter (SEQ ID NO: 18), a splicing enhancer (triple

composite sequence) (SEQ ID NO: 10), a coding sequence for Cystatin S precursor signal peptide SPCS (NP_0018901.1) (SEQ ID NO: 8), and pol (SEQ ID NO: 5) or core (SEQ ID NO: 1) gene was introduced into a pDK plasmid backbone, using standard molecular biology techniques.

The plasmids were tested *in vitro* for core and pol antigen expression by Western blot analysis using core and pol specific antibodies and were shown to provide consistent expression profile for cellular and secreted core and pol antigens (data not shown).

**Example 2. Generation of Adenoviral Vectors Expressing a Fusion of Truncated HBV Core Antigen with HBV Pol Antigen**

The creation of an adenovirus vector has been designed as a fusion protein expressed from a single open reading frame. Additional configurations for the expression of the two proteins, e.g. using two separate expression cassettes, or using a 2A-like sequence to separate the two sequences, can also be envisaged.

Design of expression cassettes for adenoviral vectors

The expression cassettes (diagrammed in FIG. 2A and FIG. 2B) are comprised of the CMV promoter (SEQ ID NO: 19), an intron (SEQ ID NO:12) (a fragment derived from the human ApoAI gene - GenBank accession X01038 base pairs 295 – 523, harboring the ApoAI second intron), followed by the optimized coding sequence – either core alone or the core and polymerase fusion protein preceded by a human immunoglobulin secretion signal coding sequence (SEQ ID NO: 14), and followed by the SV40 polyadenylation signal (SEQ ID NO: 13).

A secretion signal was included because of past experience showing improvement in the manufacturability of some adenoviral vectors harboring secreted transgenes, without influencing the elicited T-cell response (mouse experiments).

The last two residues of the Core protein (VV) and the first two residues of the Polymerase protein (MP) if fused results in a junction sequence (VVMP) that is present on the human dopamine receptor protein (D3 isoform), along with flanking homologies.

The interjection of an AGAG linker between the core and the polymerase sequences eliminates this homology and returned no further hits in a Blast of the human proteome.

**Example 3. *In Vivo* Immunogenicity Study of DNA Vaccine in Mice**

An immunotherapeutic DNA vaccine containing DNA plasmids encoding an HBV core antigen or HBV polymerase antigen was tested in mice. The purpose of the study was designed to detect T-cell responses induced by the vaccine after intramuscular delivery via electroporation into BALB/c mice. Initial immunogenicity studies focused on determining the cellular immune responses that would be elicited by the introduced HBV antigens.

In particular, the plasmids tested included a pDK-Pol plasmid and pDK-Core plasmid, as shown in FIGS. 1A and 1B, respectively, and as described above in Example 1. The pDK-Pol plasmid encoded a polymerase antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7, and the pDK-Core plasmid encoding a Core antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2. First, T-cell responses induced by each plasmid individually were tested. The DNA plasmid (pDNA) vaccine was intramuscularly delivered via electroporation to Balb/c mice using a commercially available TriGrid™ delivery system-intramuscular (TDS-IM) adapted for application in the mouse model in cranialis tibialis. See International Patent Application Publication WO2017172838, and U.S. Patent Application No. 62/607,430, entitled "Method and Apparatus for the Delivery of Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) Vaccines," filed on December 19, 2017 for additional description on methods and devices for intramuscular delivery of DNA to mice by electroporation, the disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties. In particular, the TDS-IM array of a TDS-IM v1.0 device having an electrode array with a 2.5 mm spacing between the electrodes and an electrode diameter of 0.030 inch was inserted percutaneously into the selected muscle, with a conductive length of 3.2 mm and an effective penetration depth of 3.2 mm, and with the major axis of the diamond configuration of the electrodes oriented in parallel with the muscle fibers. Following electrode insertion, the injection was initiated to distribute DNA (e.g., 0.020 ml) in the muscle. Following completion of the IM injection, a 250 V/cm electrical field (applied voltage of 59.4 -65.6 V, applied current limits of less than 4 A, 0.16 A/sec) was locally applied for a total duration of about 400 ms at a 10% duty cycle (i.e., voltage is actively applied for a total of about 40 ms of the about 400 ms duration) with 6 total pulses. Once the electroporation procedure was completed, the TriGridTM array was removed and the animals were recovered. High-dose (20 μg) administration to BALB/c mice was performed as summarized in Table 1. Six mice were administered plasmid DNA encoding the HBV core antigen (pDK-core; Group

1), six mice were administered plasmid DNA encoding the HBV pol antigen (pDK-pol; Group 2), and two mice received empty vector as the negative control. Animals received two DNA immunizations two weeks apart and splenocytes were collected one week after the last immunization.

**Table 1: Mouse immunization experimental design of the pilot study.**

| Group | N | pDNA | Unilateral Admin Site (alternate sides) | Dose | Vol | Admin Days | Endpoint (spleen harvest) Day |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | Core | CT + EP | 20 μg | 20 μL | 0, 14 | 21 |
| 2 | 6 | Pol | CT + EP | 20 μg | 20 μL | 0, 14 | 21 |
| 3 | 2 | Empty Vector (neg control) | CT + EP | 20 μg | 20 μL | 0, 14 | 21 |

CT, cranialis tibialis muscle; EP, electroporation.

Antigen-specific responses were analyzed and quantified by IFN-γ enzyme-linked immunospot (ELISPOT). In this assay, isolated splenocytes of immunized animals were incubated overnight with peptide pools covering the Core protein, the Pol protein, or the small peptide leader and junction sequence (2μg/ml of each peptide). These pools consisted of 15 mer peptides that overlap by 11 residues matching the Genotypes BCD consensus sequence of the Core and Pol vaccine vectors. The large 94 kDan HBV Pol protein was split in the middle into two peptide pools. Antigen-specific T cells were stimulated with the homologous peptide pools and IFN-γ-positive T cells were assessed using the ELISPOT assay. IFN-γ release by a single antigen-specific T cell was visualized by appropriate antibodies and subsequent chromogenic detection as a colored spot on the microplate referred to as spot-forming cell (SFC).

Substantial T-cell responses against HBV Core were achieved in mice immunized with the DNA vaccine plasmid pDK-Core (Group 1) reaching 1,000 SFCs per $10^6$ cells (FIG. 3). Pol T-cell responses towards the Pol 1 peptide pool were strong (~1,000 SFCs per $10^6$ cells). The weak Pol-2-directed anti-Pol cellular responses were likely due to the limited MHC diversity in mice, a phenomenon called T-cell immunodominance defined as unequal recognition of different epitopes from one

antigen. A confirmatory study was performed confirming the results obtained in this study (data not shown).

The above results demonstrate that vaccination with a DNA plasmid vaccine encoding HBV antigens induces cellular immune responses against the administered HBV antigens in mice. Similar results were also obtained with non-human primates (data not shown).

It is understood that the examples and embodiments described herein are for illustrative purposes only, and that changes could be made to the embodiments described above without departing from the broad inventive concept thereof. It is understood, therefore, that this invention is not limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but it is intended to cover modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

## CLAIMS

It is claimed:

1. A pharmaceutical composition for use in treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof, comprising:

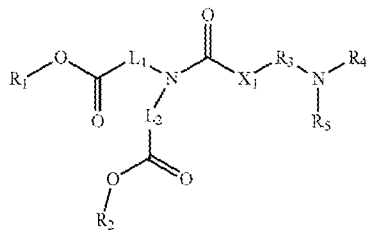
i) at least one of:

a) a first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a first polynucleotide sequence encoding a truncated HBV core antigen consisting of an amino acid sequence that is at least 95% identical to SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and

b) a second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule comprising a second polynucleotide sequence encoding an HBV polymerase antigen having an amino acid sequence that is at least 90% identical to SEQ ID NO: 7, wherein the HBV polymerase antigen does not have reverse transcriptase activity and RNase H activity; and

ii) a cationic lipid, preferably, the cationic lipid is selected from the group consisting of:

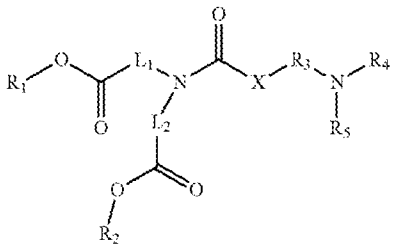
(1) a compound of formula (I):



Formula (I)

wherein $R_1$ is a substituted alkyl consisting of 10 to 31 carbons, $R_2$ is a linear alkyl, alkenyl or alkynyl consisting of 2 to 20 carbons, $R_3$ is a linear or branched alkane consisting of 1 to 6 carbons, $R_4$ and $R_5$ are the same or different, each a hydrogen or a linear or branched alkyl consisting of 1 to 6 carbons; $L_1$ and $L_2$ are the same or different, each a linear alkane of 1 to 20 carbons or a linear alkene of 2 to 20 carbons, and $X_1$ is S or O; or a salt or solvate thereof;

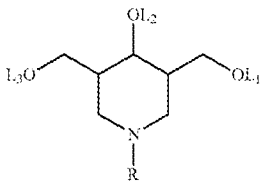
(2) a compound of formula (II):



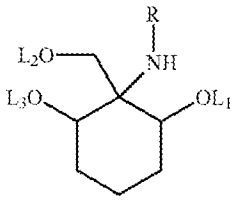
Formula (II)

wherein $R_1$ is a branched, noncyclic alkyl or alkenyl of 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, or 22 carbons; $L_1$ is linear alkane of 1 to 15 carbons; $R_2$ is a linear alkyl or alkenyl of 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15 carbons or a branched, noncyclic alkyl or alkenyl of 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, or 22 carbons; $L_2$ is a linear alkane of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15 carbons; X is O or S; $R_3$ is a linear alkane of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 carbons; and $R_4$ and $R_5$ are the same or different, each a linear or branched, noncyclic alkyl of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 carbons; or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt or solvate thereof;

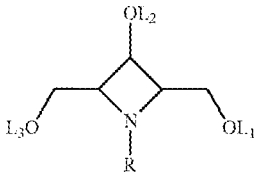
(3) a compound of formula (III), (IV) or (V):



,



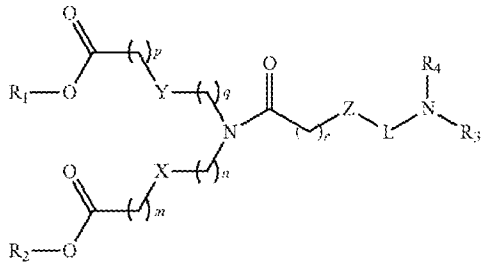
or



(III) (IV) (V)

wherein R comprises a biologically active molecule, and $L_1$, $L_2$, and $L_3$ independently for each occurrence comprise a ligand selected from the group consisting of a carbohydrate, a polypeptide, or a lipophile; a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof; or a pharmaceutical composition thereof;

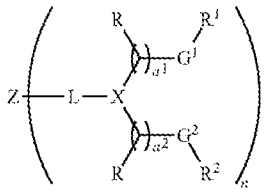
(4) a compound of formula (VI):



Formula (VI)

wherein X is a linear or branched alkylene or alkenylene, monocyclic, bicyclic, or tricyclic arene or heteroarene; Y is a bond, an ethene, or an unsubstituted or substituted aromatic or heteroaromatic ring; Z is S or O; L is a linear or branched alkylene of 1 to 6 carbons; $R_3$ and $R_4$ are independently a linear or branched alkyl of 1 to 6 carbons; $R_1$ and $R_2$ are independently a linear or branched alkyl or alkenyl of 1 to 20 carbons; r is 0 to 6; and m, n, p, and q are independently 1 to 18; wherein when n=q, m=p, and $R_1$=$R_2$, then X and Y differ; wherein when X=Y, n=q, m=p, then $R_1$ and $R_2$ differ; wherein when X=Y, n=q, and $R_1$=$R_2$, then m and p differ; and wherein when X=Y, m=p, and $R_1$=$R_2$, then n and q differ, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof;

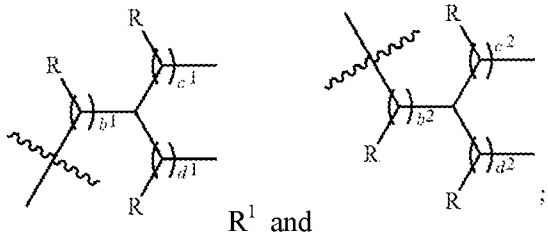
(5) a compound of formula (VII):



Formula (VII)

wherein: one of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —S(O)$_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, SC(=O)—, —N($R^a$)C(=O)—, —C(=O)N($R^a$)—, —N($R^a$)C(=O)N($R^a$)—, —OC(=O)N($R^a$)— or —N($R^a$)C(=O)O—, and the other of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —S(O)$_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, —SC(=O)—, —N($R^a$)C(=O)—, —C(=O)N($R^a$)—, —N($R^a$)C(=O)N($R^a$)—, —OC(=O)N($R^a$)— or —N($R^a$)C(=O)O— or a direct bond; L is, at each occurrence, ˜O(C=O)—, wherein ˜

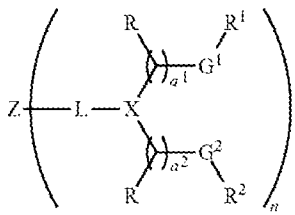
represents a covalent bond to X; X is $CR^a$; Z is alkyl, cycloalkyl or a monovalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is 1; or Z is alkylene, cycloalkylene or a polyvalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is greater than 1; $R^a$ is, at each occurrence, independently H, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ hydroxylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ aminoalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylaminylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxyalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxycarbonyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxy, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyl; R is, at each occurrence, independently either: (a) H or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl; or (b) R together with the carbon atom to which it is bound is taken together with an adjacent R and the carbon atom to which it is bound to form a carbon-carbon double bond; $R^1$ and $R^2$ have, at each occurrence, the following structure, respectively:



$R^1$ and $R^2$

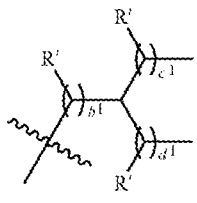
$a^1$ and $a^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 3 to 12; $b^1$ and $b^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently 0 or 1; $c^1$ and $c^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 5 to 10; $d^1$ and $d^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 5 to 10; y is, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 0 to 2; and n is an integer from 1 to 6, wherein each alkyl, alkylene, hydroxylalkyl, aminoalkyl, alkylaminylalkyl, alkoxyalkyl, alkoxycarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl and alkylcarbonyl is optionally substituted with one or more substituent; and

(6) a compound of formula (VIII):

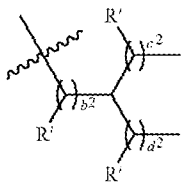


Formula (VIII)

wherein: one of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —$S(O)_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, —SC(=O)—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)—, —C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —OC(=O)$N(R^a)$— or —$N(R^a)$C(=O)O—, and the other of $G^1$ or $G^2$ is, at each occurrence, —O(C=O)—, —(C=O)O—, —C(=O)—, —O—, —$S(O)_y$—, —S—S—, —C(=O)S—, —SC(=O)—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)—, —C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —$N(R^a)$C(=O)$N(R^a)$—, —OC(=O)$N(R^a)$— or —$N(R^a)$C(=O)O— or a direct bond; L is, at each occurrence, ˜O(C=O)—, wherein ˜ represents a covalent bond to X; X is $CR^a$; Z is alkyl, cycloalkyl or a monovalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is 1; or Z is alkylene, cycloalkylene or a polyvalent moiety comprising at least one polar functional group when n is greater than 1; $R^a$ is, at each occurrence, independently H, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ hydroxylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ aminoalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylaminylalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxyalkyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkoxycarbonyl, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxy, $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkylcarbonyl; R is, at each occurrence, independently either: (a) H or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl; or (b) R together with the carbon atom to which it is bound is taken together with an adjacent R and the carbon atom to which it is bound to form a carbon-carbon double bond; $R^1$ and $R^2$ have, at each occurrence, the following structure, respectively:




$R^1$




; $R^2$

R' is, at each occurrence, independently H or $C_1$-$C_{12}$ alkyl; $a^1$ and $a^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 3 to 12; $b^1$ and $b^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently 0 or 1; $c^1$ and $c^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 2 to 12; $d^1$ and $d^2$ are, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 2 to 12; y is, at each occurrence, independently an integer from 0 to 2; and n is an integer from 1 to 6, wherein $a^1$, $a^2$, $c^1$, $c^2$, $d^1$ and $d^2$ are selected such that the

sum of $a^1+c^1+d^1$ is an integer from 18 to 30, and the sum of $a^2+c^2+d^2$ is an integer from 18 to 30, and wherein each alkyl, alkylene, hydroxylalkyl, aminoalkyl, alkylaminylalkyl, alkoxyalkyl, alkoxycarbonyl, alkylcarbonyloxy, alkylcarbonyloxyalkyl and alkylcarbonyl is optionally substituted with one or more substituent,

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt, prodrug or stereoisomer thereof.

2. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 1, wherein the cationic lipid is selected from the cationic lipids described in US2017/0190661, US2006/0008910, US2015/0064242, US2005/0064595, WO/2019/036030, US2019/0022247, WO/2019/036028, WO/2019/036008, WO/2019/036000, US2016/0376224, US2017/0119904, WO/2018/200943, WO/2018/191657, WO/2018/118102, US20180169268 , WO2018118102 , WO2018119163, US2014/0255472, and US2013/0195968, the relevant content of each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

3. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 1, further comprising at least one selected from the group consisting of anionic lipids, zwitterionic lipids, neutral lipids, steroids, polymer conjugated lipids, phospholipids, glycolipids, and a combination thereof.

4. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 3, further comprising a polymer conjugated lipid, preferably the polymer conjugated lipid is a lipid modified covalently by polyethylene glycol (PEGylated lipid).

5. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claim 1-4, comprising at least one of:

i) the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule; and

ii) the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule;

wherein the at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated in a lipid particle comprising the cationic lipid.

6. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 5, wherein the at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated in a lipid nanoparticle comprising: (a) a substantially solid core containing the nucleic acid molecules, the cationic lipid, and optionally second lipids; and (b) the PEGylated -lipid surrounding the core.

7. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 5, wherein the at least one of the first and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules are encapsulated in a lipid nanoparticle or a liposome comprising: (a) an aqueous core containing the nucleic acid molecules, (b) a lipid layer comprising the cationic lipid, and optionally second lipids; and (c) PEGylated-lipid on the outer surface of the lipid nanoparticle or liposome.
8. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1-7, wherein the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the truncated HBV core antigen, and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule further comprises a polynucleotide sequence encoding a signal sequence operably linked to the N-terminus of the HBV polymerase antigen, preferably, the signal sequence independently comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 9 or SEQ ID NO: 15, preferably the signal sequence is independently encoded by the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 8 or SEQ ID NO: 14.
9. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1-8, wherein
a) the truncated HBV core antigen consists of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 2 or SEQ ID NO: 4; and
b) the HBV polymerase antigen comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 7.
10. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1-9, wherein each of the first, and second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules is a DNA molecule, preferably the DNA molecule is present on a plasmid.
11. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1 to 10, comprising the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule in the same non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule.
12. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1 to 11, comprising the first non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule and the second non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecule in two different non-naturally occurring nucleic acid molecules.

13. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the first polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 90% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.
14. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 13, wherein the first polynucleotide sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 or SEQ ID NO: 3.
15. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1 to 13, wherein the second polynucleotide sequence comprises a polynucleotide sequence having at least 90% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.
16. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 15, wherein the second polynucleotide sequence comprises the polynucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 5 or SEQ ID NO: 6.
17. A kit comprising the pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1-16, and instructions for using the pharmaceutical composition in treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof.
18. The pharmaceutical composition of any one of claims 1 to 16 for use in treating a hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in a subject in need thereof.

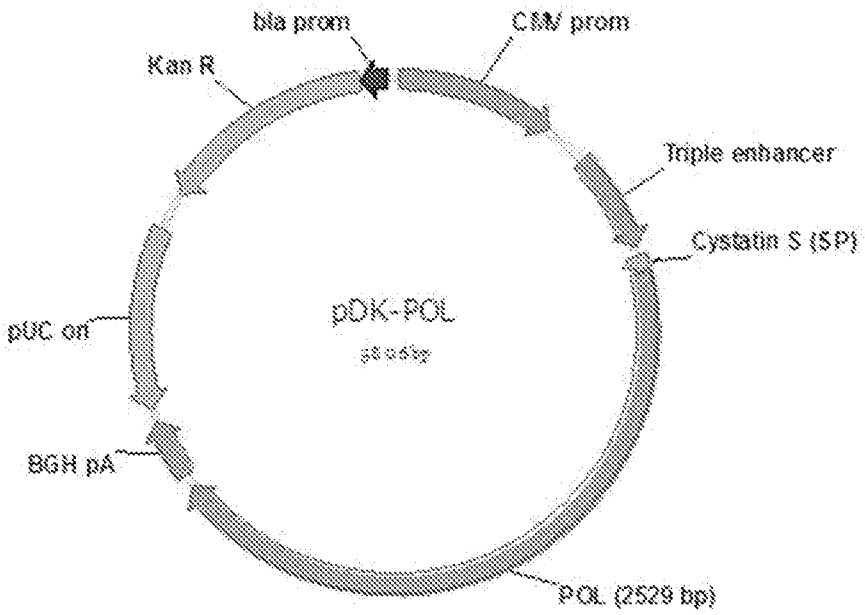

bla prom
CMV prom
Kan R
Triple enhancer
Cystatin S (SP)
pDK-POL
pUC ori
BGH pA
POL (2529 bp)

FIG. 1A

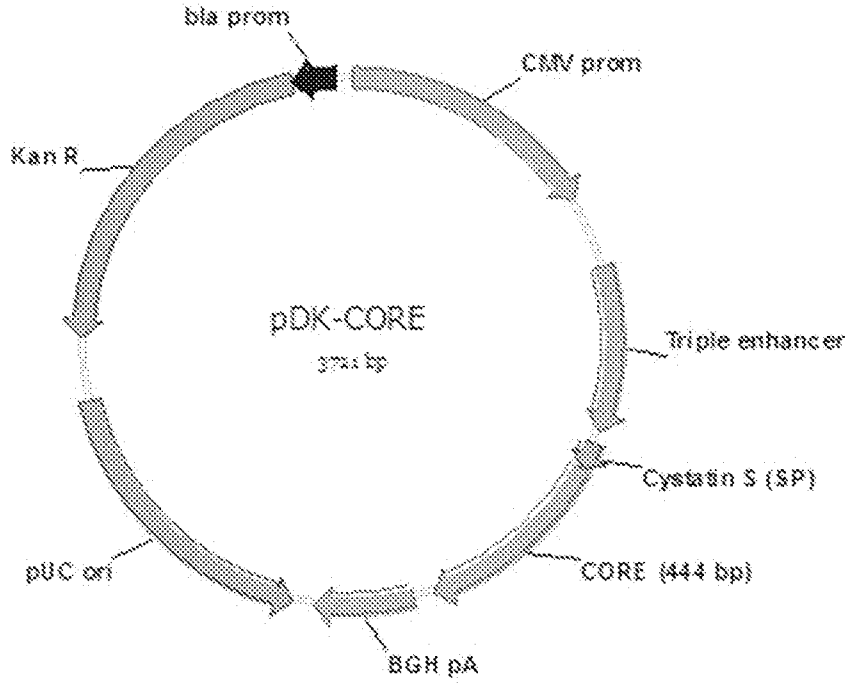

bla prom
CMV prom
Kan R
pDK-CORE
Triple enhancer
Cystatin S (SP)
pUC ori
CORE (444 bp)
BGH pA

FIG. 1B

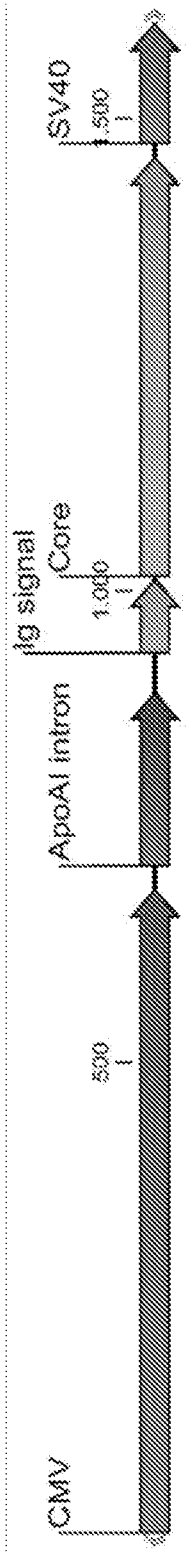

CMV
600
1
ApoAI intron
Ig signal
Core
1.040
1
SV40
600
1

FIG. 2A

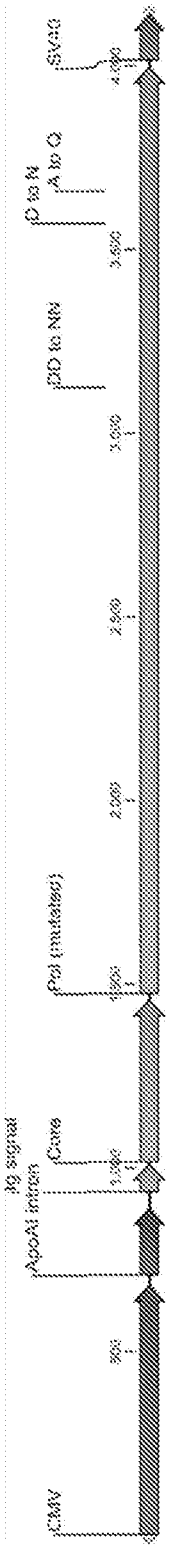

CMV
600
1
ApoAI intron
Ig signal
Core
1.040
1
Pol (mutated)
1.905
1
2.905
1
3.905
1
D to N
A to Q
3.905
1
SV40

FIG. 2B

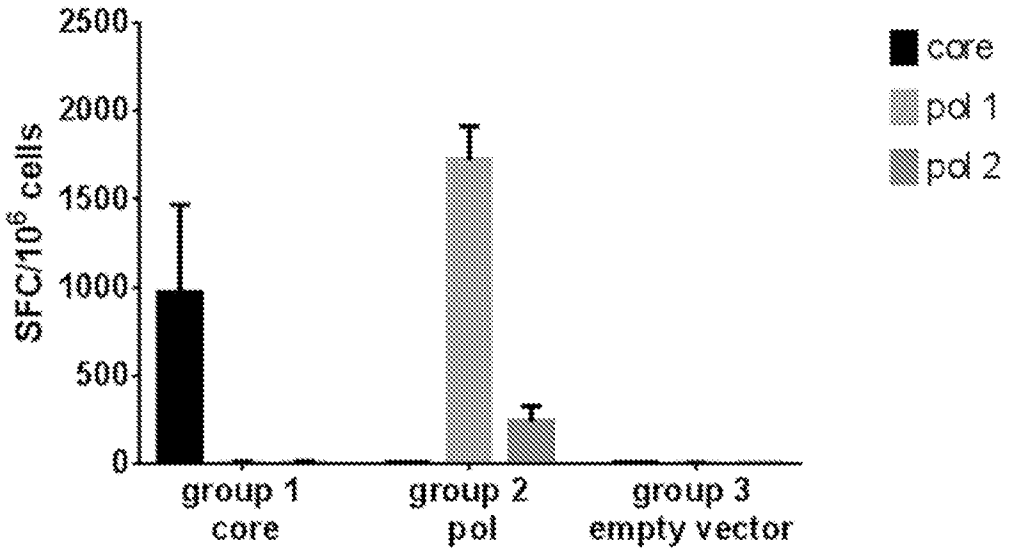

2500
2000
1500
1000
500
0
SFC/10^6 cells
core
pol 1
pol 2
group 1
core
group 2
pol
group 3
empty vector

FIG. 3

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/IB2020/055785

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. A61P31/20 A61K39/12 A61K39/39 A61K47/14 C07C271/22
A61K39/29
ADD.
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
A61P A61K C07C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
EPO-Internal, WPI Data, CHEM ABS Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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| | -/-- | |

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

[X] See patent family annex.

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

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"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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"&" document member of the same patent family

| Date of the actual completion of the international search | Date of mailing of the international search report |
|---|---|
| 29 September 2020 | 07/10/2020 |

| Name and mailing address of the ISA/ | Authorized officer |
|---|---|
| European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2<br>NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk<br>Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040,<br>Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016 | Bareyt, Sébastian |

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C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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