Inhibition of swarming in *Proteus mirabilis* by Alum (Hydrated Aluminum Potassium Sulfate)

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**Abstract**: The antibacterial activity of different concentrations of Alum (Hydrated Aluminum Potassium Sulfate) were examined against Proteus mirabilis that causes upper urinary tract infections. During our experiments we found that the following concentrations (0.0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.3, 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, 0.8, 0.9 mg/ml) were given gradual effect on swarm, a phenotype that was associated with motility. These concentrations were used to inhibit swarming and motility the two important virulence factors coupled closely with the ability to invade urothelial cells. The present study revealed that Alum began significantly inhibited swarming at 0.3 mg/ml for all seven isolates of *P. mirabilis* that tested in the study. It was considered that the concentration 0.6 mg/ml completely inhibition the phenomenon of swarming because the bacteria appear as separated small colony on nutrient agar. The diameter of swarming was decreased by increasing the concentration of Alum. Although it was found that this bacteria loses the motility on semi-solid media in 0.6 mg/ml of alum (Hydrated Aluminum Potassium Sulfate) after 24 hrs incubation but the Minimum Inhibition Concentration (MIC) of Alum was 0.8 mg/ml. The study revealed that Alum has the potential effect against *P. mirabilis*.

**Key words**: *Proteus mirabilis*, Alum, inhibition swarming

**Introduction**

*Proteus mirabilis* is a motile Gram-negative enteric bacterium, it is an important pathogen of the urinary tract, and is the primary infectious agent in patients with indwelling urinary catheters (1). *Proteus mirabilis* is a common cause of complicated urinary tract infections. These infections are predominant in individuals with urinary tract abnormalities or patients with long-term catheters, such as those in nursing homes or hospitals. Bacteriuria with *P. mirabilis* may lead to fever, pyelonephritis(2), bacteraemia and even death (3). During *P. mirabilis* infection, the urinary tract often becomes obstructed by urinary stones resulting from urease production (4). In some cases the organisms can enter the blood stream and cause (5).

These organisms colonize the catheter (6) forming surface biofilm communities. As the biofilm develops it obstructs the flow of urine through the catheter (7). The gram-negative bacterium *Proteus mirabilis* is well known for its ability to motile, and elongated swarmed cells that rapidly spread over a surface. When cultured on a nutrient agar plate, a strain of *P. mirabilis* typically is able to colonize the whole plate within 24 hrs (8). Many materials was used for inhibiting swarming like p-nitrophenylglycrol (9) and Resveratrol (10). Aluminum Potassium Sulfate or, potash alum (*KAl(SO4)*·12*H*₂*O) is used as an astringent and antisepsis in various food preparation, react acid to litmus, and as a flocculent for water purification among other things in crystal form (11). It is successful in controlling profuse bleeding by ensuring effective blood clotting (12).

The aim of this study was to test the inhibition of *P. mirabilis* swarming by Alum (Aluminum Potassium Sulfate)

**Material and Methods**

**Bacterial isolates**

Seven bacterial isolates of *P. mirabilis* were isolated from clinical samples using MacConkey and blood agar (13). Seven clinical isolates were identified as *P. mirabilis* using API 20E system of classification (14) were used throughout this study. All these strains were motile swarming and produce
urease obtained from infections in Ramadi General Hospital.

**Biological activity of Alum on bacteria**

Seven bacterial isolates of *P. mirabilis* were tested against Aluminum Potassium Sulfate in concentrations (0.9, 0.8, 0.7, 0.6, 0.5, 0.3, 0.1, 0.05, and 0.0 mg/ml) to determine the Minimum Inhibition Concentration MIC in the agar (17). The Alum stock solution prepared in concentration 5mg/ml was sterilized by filtration through anilii pore filter with a pore diameter of 0.45mm. All concentrations were prepared from stock solution in a sterile conditions.

**Inhibition of P. mirabilis swarming by Alum** to test the effect of Alum on *P. mirabilis* swarming, 5 of a standardized test inoculums containing 10^7 cells/ml was freshly prepared using the direct colony suspension method, with the aid of the 0.5 McFarland turbidity standard (15) the Bacteria were inoculated onto the centre of nutrient agar, swarming agar plates. containing various concentrations of Alum, and the migration distance of the bacteria was measured after 18 hrs incubation at 37°C. (10) (16).

**Assay of motility test** to test the effect of Alum on *P. mirabilis* motility, the bacteria were inoculated onto semi-solid media(agar concentration 0.4%) (13) containing (0.0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.3, 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, 0.8, 0.9 mg/ml) Alum by stabbing the media and observe the motility after 24 hrs incubation at 37°C.

**Results:**

Seven bacterial isolates were tested against different concentrations of Alum. The results showed that Minimum Inhibition Concentration (MIC) of Alum on agar to *P. mirabilis* is 0.8 mg/ml. Swarming was began to inhibit in all seven *P. mirabilis* isolates at concentrations 0.3 mg/ml but 0.6 mg/ml, completely blocked the swarming ability of *P. mirabilis* (figure 1). The diameter of swarming was decreased with increasing the concentration of Alum (table 1).

Motility was inhibited at concentration of 0.6 mg/ml for all isolates of bacteria after 18hrs and 24hrs incubation (table 2). The result show no cloudy around the stabbing of bacteria in this concentration (negative result) while motility test give positive result (cloudy root-like region around the stabbing) in the following concentration (0.0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.3, 0.5) mg/ml.

**Discussion**

A wide variety of natural products has been under scrutiny for their clinical potential, both in terms of disease prevention and treatment. In this study Alum (Aluminum potassium sulfate) a naturally occurring was tested as swarming inhibitor and the motility in *P. mirabilis*. In this study was is found that Alum inhibits *P. mirabilis* swarming and motility at a concentration as low as 0.3 mg/ml (Figs 1 and table 1), and significantly affect the growth rate of the bacteria at concentrations up to 0.1 mg/ml. This material hydrolyzes in water to form sulfuric acid, which is responsible for rising the acidity in the environment therefore precipitate the protein (17) so the flagella formation and growth rate of bacteria will inhibition (18).

To our knowledge, it is the first report describing the inhibitory effect of Alum on bacterial swarming and motility. Alum inhibit swarming by inhibition of motility. *Proteus mirabilis* immobilizes by inhibition of flagellum formation or by some lytic action on the flagella already synthesized, therefore the ability to motile will be effected because flagella, necessary for motility (19). As a result the swarming that closely related with motility decreases too.

It was observed that if the concentration of Alum increased this will decrease the ability to swarming on agar. The effect begins from concentration of 0.1 mg/ml and the diameter of swarming will be 49 mm. In 0.3mg/ml the diameter decrease to 30mm, in the concentration 0.5 mg/ml the diameter became 10mm and in the concentration 0.6 mg/ml the swarming inhibited completely because the bacteria appear as small colony but the bacteria growth inhibition in 0.8mg/ml and when we increase the concentration all isolates were killed on nutrient agar. It was showed that Alum inhibited *P. mirabilis* swarming and motility at 0.3-0.6 mg/ml. These concentrations were used in purification of potable water (20). Alum has a low toxicity in experimental animals, and because the body doesn't absorb aluminum, it's harmless when swallowed, but ingestion of 30 grams (one ounce) has killed adult humans. Concentrated solutions have caused breakdown of gum tissues, kidney damage, and fatal intestinal bleeding (21). Oneda and others proved that administration of Aluminum potassium sulphate (alum) 1.0, 2.5, 5.0 and 10.0% (w/w) does not exert tumorigenic or any other toxic actions in B6C3F1 mice (11). But if Alum is to be used to treat or prevent *P. mirabilis* infection, its effect on human cells needs to be addressed.

The emergence of bacterial strains that exhibit resistance to various antibiotics possess a major threat to medicine and public health. As a consequence, there is renewed interest in antibacterial targets which, by attenuating...
virulence, disrupt the capacity of pathogenic bacteria to cause infection. Cheong and others (22) proved that the combinations of aluminum with chlorhexidine or erythromycin, are potentially useful as antibacterial agent. It is therefore, more beneficial to develop antibacterial agent using aluminum salts. However, more studies on the effects of these salts on the physical properties as well as toxicity are necessary. In this paper, it was demonstrated that Alum, an antibacterial used in industrial processes, vaccines, Hepatitis A: 250 mcg and DTaP (for Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis): 170-625 mcg of Aluminum (23) and in water treatment, has an inhibitory effect on P. mirabilis swarming and virulence factor expression. This finding opens up the opportunity to develop drugs that slow down P. mirabilis infection, allowing the host to gain valuable time to activate defense mechanisms, and to stop and eliminate pathogenic invaders. Also these material can be used in the laboratory to inhibit swarming on media cultures.

References
17-P C Bulson, D L Johnstone, H L Gibbons and W H Funk( 1984) Removal and


Table 1- Inhibition swarming of seven P. mirabilis isolates by various concentration of Alum on nutrient agar after 18 hrs incubation at 37.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concentration of Alum mg/ ml</th>
<th>Swarming in diameter/m m mean</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>±0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>±1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>±2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>±1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>±0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>±2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>±1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-Inhibition of motility of seven Proteus mirabilis isolates in semi-solid media after 18 and 24 hrs incubation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concentration of Alum in mg/ ml</th>
<th>Motility test</th>
<th>Number of isolates after 18 hrs incubation</th>
<th>Number of isolates after 24 hrs incubation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure (1) images of swarming on nutrient agar plates containing different concentrations of Alum (Aluminum potassium sulfate) at 37°C after 18 hrs inoculation. A= (0.0 mg/ml) normal swarming phenomenon. B = 0.3 mg/ml began the inhibition of swarm. C=(0.5 mg/ml) decrease the diameter of swarming. D= (0.6 mg/ml) Complete inhibition of swarming. E=(0.7 mg/ml) colony without swarming. F=(0.8 mg/ml) inhibition of growth.
تشيّب ظاهرة الانتيال في بكتريا Proteus mirabilis

(بكتريات الألمنيوم البوتاسيوم الهيدروجينية)

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الخلاصة

اختبيرة فعالية الشب (بكتريات الألمنيوم البوتاسيوم) ضد بكتريا المنفلات المسببة لالتهابات المجاري البولية

والشبل الوسيط (P. mirabilis) كبكتريات البوتاسيوم الدهني والتالي (P. mirabilis). استخدمت هذه الدراسات تقييم ظاهرة الانتيال والحركة، وهما من عوامل الضاررة المرتبطة باختراق البكتريا للخلايا الطلائية المبطنة للجهاز البولي. أثبتت الدراسة أن تأثير الشبل الوسيط ظاهرة الانتيال بدأ عند التركيز 0.5 ملغ/ملتر لجميع العوامل السعيدة المنتشرة حيث يظهر نقص في قطر الانتيال بينما ينخفض قطر الانتيال عند التركيز 0.5 ملغ/ملتر وتشير بكتريا المنفلات على هيئة مستعمرات صغيرة منفصلة إذا اعتبر هذا التركيز مثبطًا للمريء الانتيال. وذلك من خلال قياس قطر على طبقات الأكاس المغذي الشيوي. كما أثبتت الدراسة أنه كلما زاد تركيز الشبل زاد تشيّب الانتيال و وجود أن التركيز المثبط للحركة في الوضع النصف الصلب هو 0.6 ملغ/ملتر بعد أربع وعشرين ساعة من الحمض، كما أظهرت النتائج أن التركيز المتين الأدنى للنمو هو 0.5 ملغ/ملتر. من نتائج الدراسة يظهر إن مادة الشبل مادة فعالة ضد بكتريا المنفلات

P. mirabilis ومتينة لظاهرة الانتيال والحركة.