Blood Parasite Identification

The BP-01 challenge contained thick and thin Giemsa-stained smears obtained from a 37-year-old female returning from visiting family in Guinea-Bissau. The specimen contained *Plasmodium falciparum*. A response of "*Plasmodium falciparum*", "*Plasmodium* sp., NOS, would refer or request another specimen, or perform additional molecular testing" or "*Plasmodium* sp./*Babesia* sp. seen, referred for identification" was considered satisfactory.

Table 1. Parasite Identification

Total Responses	Referees (63)		Participants (474)	
Identification	**LABS**	**%**	**LABS**	**%**
Plasmodium falciparum	54	85.7	412	86.9
Plasmodium sp., NOS, would refer or request another specimen, or perform additional molecular testing	8	12.7	53	11.2
Unacceptable				
Plasmodium sp., not *P. falciparum*, referred for identification	1	1.6	4	0.8

Table 2. Parasite Screen

Total Responses	Referees (53)		Participants (778)	
Identification	**LABS**	**%**	**LABS**	**%**
Plasmodium sp./*Babesia* sp. seen, referred for identification	52	98.1	776	99.7

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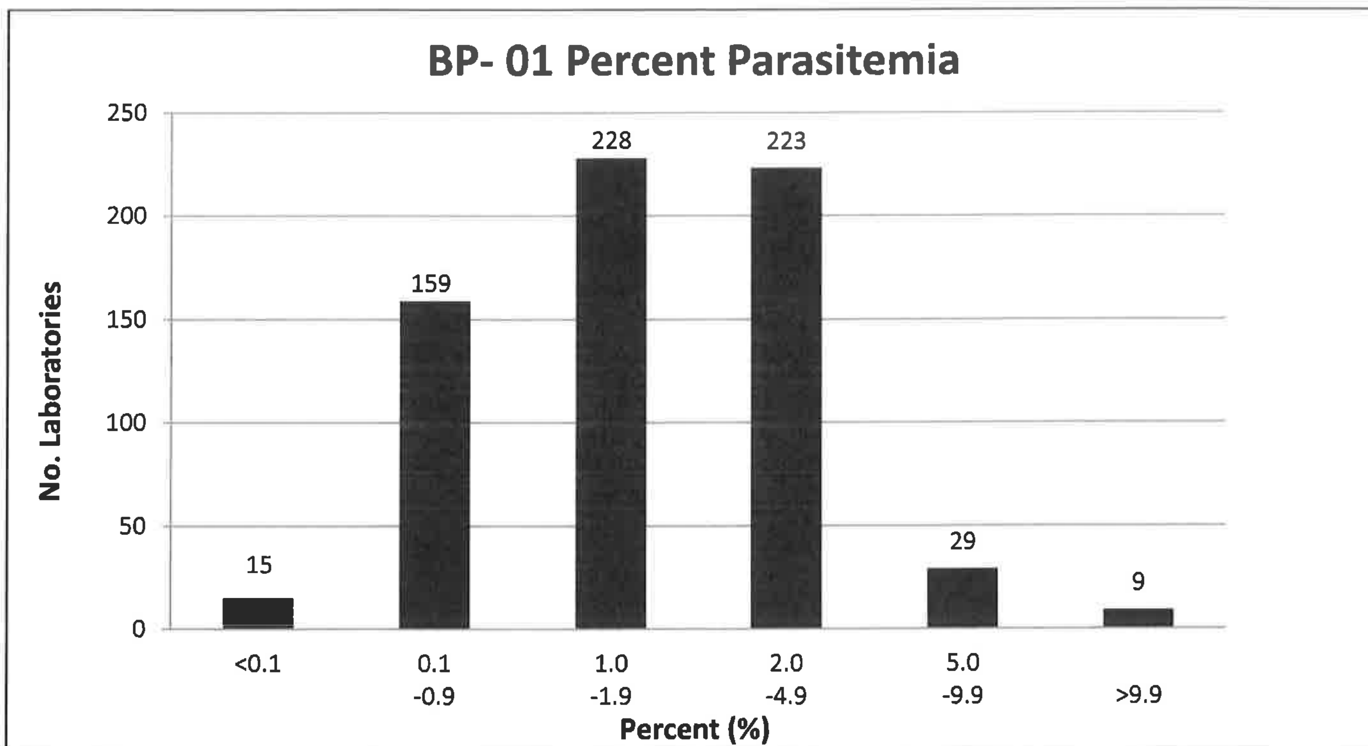
If you have identified a *Plasmodium* sp. or *Babesia* sp.: Report percent of infected RBCs seen (number of infected RBCs per 100 red blood cells). (Ungraded)



Key morphologic features on thin blood film that suggests a diagnosis of *P. falciparum* may include:

- Normal size and shape of infected erythrocytes.
- Smaller, more delicate ring-form trophozoites (approximately 1/5 the diameter of the erythrocyte) frequently with two chromatin dots (so-called "head phone" forms).
- Erythrocytes infected with multiple parasites.
- Presence of ring-form trophozoites at the edge of the erythrocyte (appliqué forms).
- Usually an absence of mature trophozoites and schizonts in the peripheral blood film (may be seen if there is a delay in processing the blood specimen, or in patients with a very high parasitemia or underlying conditions).
- Presence of crescent-shaped gametocytes (not always seen).
- Absence of Schüffner's stippling. Larger, comma-shaped dots (Maurer's clefts) may be seen, especially when the stain buffer is at a pH of 7.2.

Distinguishing *P. falciparum* from *Babesia* spp. can be challenging, given that both have a predominance of small ring forms, infect RBCs of all ages, and there may be multiple parasites per erythrocyte. The presence of Maurer's clefts, malarial pigment, and cresent-shaped gametocytes eliminate *Babesia* infection from consideration. Furthermore, *Babesia* parasites are usually more pleomorphic with spindled, elliptical and ovoid forms. Extracellular forms are also more common in babesiosis. Finally, identification of the classic "Maltese cross" or tetrad form of *Babesia* sp. is diagnostic for babesiosis although it may rarely be observed. Molecular or antigen-detection methods, in addition to clinical/travel history may be useful adjuncts for distinguishing between these two similar appearing parasites.

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Discussion

Causal Agents

There are four species of *Plasmodium* that cause human malaria: *P. falciparum*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale*, and *P. vivax*. In addition, there are at least six species of simian *Plasmodium* that have been documented to cause zoonotic infections in humans, the most notable being *P. knowlesi*, infections of which appear to be increasing on the Malaysian peninsula.

Plasmodium falciparum occurs nearly worldwide in the tropics and subtropics, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. *Plasmodium malariae* also occurs nearly worldwide in the tropics and subtropics, but has a more patchy distribution than *P. falciparum*; most common in tropical Africa, Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. *Plasmodium ovale* occurs primarily in tropical western Africa, but also New Guinea and Southeast Asia; *P. ovale* has not yet been documented from the New World. *Plasmodium vivax* occurs nearly worldwide in the tropics, subtropics, and some regions of northern and eastern Africa, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Americas.

Biology and Life Cycle

Plasmodium spp. are transmitted by mosquitoes in the genus *Anopheles.* Infected female mosquitoes inject sporozoites when taking a blood meal. Sporozoites are carried via blood to the liver where they invade hepatocytes and form schizonts. The liver schizonts rupture, releasing large numbers of merozoites that then invade erythrocytes starting the erythrocytic cycle. Early ring forms develop into mature trophozoites and take one of two pathways: 1) they develop into schizonts (which rupture and continue the erythrocytic cycle) or 2) develop into gametocytes. Gametocytes are a dead-end stage in the human host but are required for sexual reproduction in the mosquito. In the mosquito host, microgametocytes (=males) exflagellate and fertilize macrogametocytes (=females), resulting in an ookinete. Ookinetes further develop into oocysts, which when mature rupture and release the infective sporozoites. In *P. falciparum*, late trophozoites and schizonts express a protein on the surface of the erythrocytic membrane causing the infected erythrocyte to adhere to the endothelial lining of capillaries in internal organs. Thus, only ring forms and gametocytes are usually seen in well-prepared peripheral blood smears.

Diagnosis

The ideal specimen for laboratory identification of malaria is fresh capillary blood from a finger or heel stick, with immediate preparation of thick and thin blood films. Since this is not feasible in most settings, however, venous blood collected in EDTA anticoagulant is also acceptable. It is important to transport the blood as quickly as possible to the laboratory for examination since prolonged exposure to EDTA may result in distortion of the malaria parasites and compromised morphology.

Malaria is primarily diagnosed by the identification of *Plasmodium* parasites on thin and thick blood films stained with Giemsa, Wright, or Wright-Giemsa stain. Molecular methods such as PCR may be employed when an identification cannot be made morphologically or there is morphologic evidence of a mixed infection. Rapid diagnostic tests are also commonly used to distinguish *P. falciparum* from other malaria infections. Serology is not used for routine diagnosis but may be helpful during transfusion investigations.

Typically, thick films are used for the recognition of *Plasmodium*, with a species-level identification performed on the thin film. Thin films should be read at 1000x magnification with oil for at least 100 microscopic fields. Immunologically naïve patients (eg, returning travelers born in non-endemic areas) may present with stronger clinical manifestations at a lower parasitemia. Severe malaria is currently defined as a parasitemia ≥ 2% in immunologically naïve patients and ≥ 5% in non-naïve patients.

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Morphologic Identification:

Two important questions regarding morphologic identification of malaria are:

1) Is it malaria?
2) Is it *Plasmodium falciparum*?

Recognition of *Plasmodium* is based on observing stages of the parasite inside infected red blood cells. In a well-prepared specimen, the cytoplasm will stain blue and the chromatin red. Pigment (which is absent in *Babesia* infections) will present as golden-brown to black flecks. In some species, structures such as Schüffner's stippling or Maurer's clefts may be present when stained at an appropriate pH. Identification of *Plasmodium* to the species level is extremely important for patient management, as different species may be treated differently (for example, it is important to target the liver stages of *P. ovale* and *P. vivax* to prevent relapse of the disease).

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The following table compares the morphologic features of the four stages of human *Plasmodium* spp.

Morphologic Criteria	*Plasmodium falciparum*	*Plasmodium malariae*	*Plasmodium ovale*	*Plasmodium vivax*
Size of infected RBC	Normal	Normal to smaller	Enlarged	Enlarged
Rings (early trophozoites)	Common; usually with thin, delicate cytoplasm and double chromatin dots; often multiple rings per infected RBC; appliqué forms common	Cytoplasm sturdy, usually with single, large chromatin dot; occasional 'birds-eye' forms	Cytoplasm sturdy, with 1-2 large chromatin dots	Large, sturdy cytoplasm, usually with large, single chromatin dot
Developing trophozoites	Rare, but may be seen if a delay in processing; form compact, pigment usually evident	Variable; may be compact to elongate (band-form) or pleomorphic and vacuolated (basket-form); pigment coarse	Compact to slightly amoeboid with dark pigment; elongation and fimbriation may be observed	Pleomorphic to grossly amoeboid; pigment diffuse and golden-brown to nearly black
Schizonts	Rare in peripheral blood; 8-24 small merozoites when mature; pigment dark, compact	6-12 merozoites when mature, often in a rosette pattern around central mass of pigment	6-14 merozoites when mature; pigment dark brown to black and discrete when mature; elongation and fimbriation may be present	12-24 merozoites when mature; may fill entire RBC; often noticeable enlarged
Gametocytes	Crescent-shaped; chromatin discrete (macrogametocyte) or diffuse (microgametocyte); Laveran's bib may be present	Small, round, compact; pigment coarse and diffuse	Round to oval, compact; if elongated and fimbriated may not fill entire infected RBC; pigment coarse, dark	Large and round to pleomorphic (may 'hug' surrounding RBCs); may fill most of infected RBC; pigment golden-brown to nearly black
Other Features	Maurer's clefts may be present; ring-form trophozoites usually predominate	Generally smaller; pigment coarse; Ziemann's stippling may be present; all stages seen	Schüffner's stippling may be present at appropriate pH; elongation and fimbriation may be observed; all stages seen	Schüffner's stippling may be present at appropriate pH; enlargement of infected RBCs usually pronounced; all stages seen

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Calculating Percent Parasitemia

The percent parasitemia is very important to calculate for prognostic purposes and also to evaluate response to antimalarial therapy.

Parasitemia can be calculated on a thin blood film as follows:

1. Count the number of infected RBCs per 100 RBCs in different oil immersion fields.
2. Apply the formula:

$$\frac{\text{\# of infected RBCs}}{\text{total \# of RBCs counted}} \times 100 = \text{\% parasitemia}$$

Notes

1) At least 500 RBC's should be counted, with counting 2000 or more RBCs providing the most accurate estimation of parasitemia.
2) An infected RBC containing multiple parasites is calculated only once.
3) Fields devoid of parasites should be included, if encountered.
4) Gametocytes should not be included in the count. Justification is because: a) many antimalarial drugs are not gametocidal and the presence of gametocytes post-treatment is not indicative of the effectiveness of the treatment and b) gametocytes are a dead-end stage in the human host.

Clinical Significance

In 2014, ninety seven countries and territories had ongoing malaria transmission. Over half a million people die from malaria each year. Most malaria cases and deaths occur in children in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2011, a 40-year high of 1,925 cases of malaria were reported to the CDC in the United States, almost all in recent travelers and immigrants. Although the *Anopheles* mosquito is endemic in parts of North America, malaria transmission was largely eradicated in the 1940s through public health efforts.

Malaria infection can be classified as either uncomplicated or severe (complicated). In uncomplicated infections, patients present with nonspecific symptoms including fever, chills, sweats, headaches, nausea/vomiting, body aches and malaise. Symptoms classically (but infrequently observed) recur either in a two-day cycle (*P. falciparum*, *P. vivax* and *P. ovale*) or in three-day cycle (*P. malariae*). In severe infections, organ failure and/or metabolic abnormalities occur including severe anemia, acute respiratory distress syndrome, acute kidney failure, metabolic acidosis, cerebral infection, and coagulation abnormalities. Severe infection is considered a medical emergency requiring urgent treatment. *Plasmodium falciparum* can cause severe illness and death whereas *P. vivax*, *P. malariae* and *P. ovale* tend to cause less severe illness. The hypnozoite form of *P. vivax* and *P. ovale* can remain dormant in a patient's liver and cause relapsing infection.

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Treatment

Treatment of malaria should ideally wait until a laboratory diagnosis has been made. Treating "presumptively" should occur only when no other option exists. Therapy is guided by the infecting species of *Plasmodium*, the clinical status of the patient and the drug susceptibility of the infecting parasites (dependent on geographic area and previous anti-malarial treatment). Because of the rapid progression of *P. falciparum* infections and a high risk of fatality, urgent treatment is essential.

If the infection is uncomplicated, oral anti-malarial medication can provide effective treatment. However, severe infections necessitate parenteral therapy. *Plasmodium falciparum* and *P. vivax* have different drug resistance patterns in different geographic regions. Although not readily available in North America, the WHO recommends artemisinin-based combination therapy as first-line treatment in uncomplicated *P. falciparum* malaria (oral administration), severe malarial infections (intravenous administration) and *P. vivax* infections in areas of known chloroquine resistance. Other, non-artemisinin based combination treatments include sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine plus either chloroquine, amodiaquine, or atovaquone-proguanil. In recent years, resistance to artemisinins has been detected in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. For confirmed *P. vivax* and *P. ovale* infections, radical cure can be achieved with treatment using primaquine and in order to prevent relapse due to the hypnozoite form. In high-transmission settings re-infection with *P. vivax* is likely. Mixed-species malarial infections are not common but may be underestimated by routine microscopy.

References

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2. World Health Organization. Guidelines for the Treatment of Malaria. 3rd ed. Geneva, 2015.
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5. CDC: Malaria surveillance – United States 2005. *MMWR* 2007;56(SS06);23-38.
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Blood Parasite Identification

The BP-02 challengecontained thick and thin Giemsa-stained smears obtained from a 28-year-old primate research worker recently returned from Brazil. The specimen contained *Plasmodium malariae*. A response of "*Plasmodium malariae*", "*Plasmodium* sp., not *P. falciparum*, referred for identification", "*Plasmodium* sp., NOS, would refer or request another specimen, or perform additional molecular testing", or "*Plasmodium* sp./*Babesia* sp. seen, referred for identification" was considered satisfactory.

Table 1. Parasite Identification

Total Responses	Referees (63)		Participants (467)	
Identification	**LABS**	**%**	**LABS**	**%**
Plasmodium malariae	16	25.4	180	38.5
Plasmodium sp., not *P. falciparum*, referred for identification	25	39.7	158	33.8
Plasmodium sp., NOS, would refer or request another specimen, or perform additional molecular testing	11	17.5	65	13.9
Unacceptable				
Plasmodium vivax	4	6.3	39	8.3
Plasmodium vivax/ovale, NOS	5	7.9	26	5.6

Table 2. Parasite Screen

Total Responses	Referees (53)		Participants (785)	
Identification	**LABS**	**%**	**LABS**	**%**
Plasmodium sp./*Babesia* sp. seen, referred for identification	50	94.3	737	93.9

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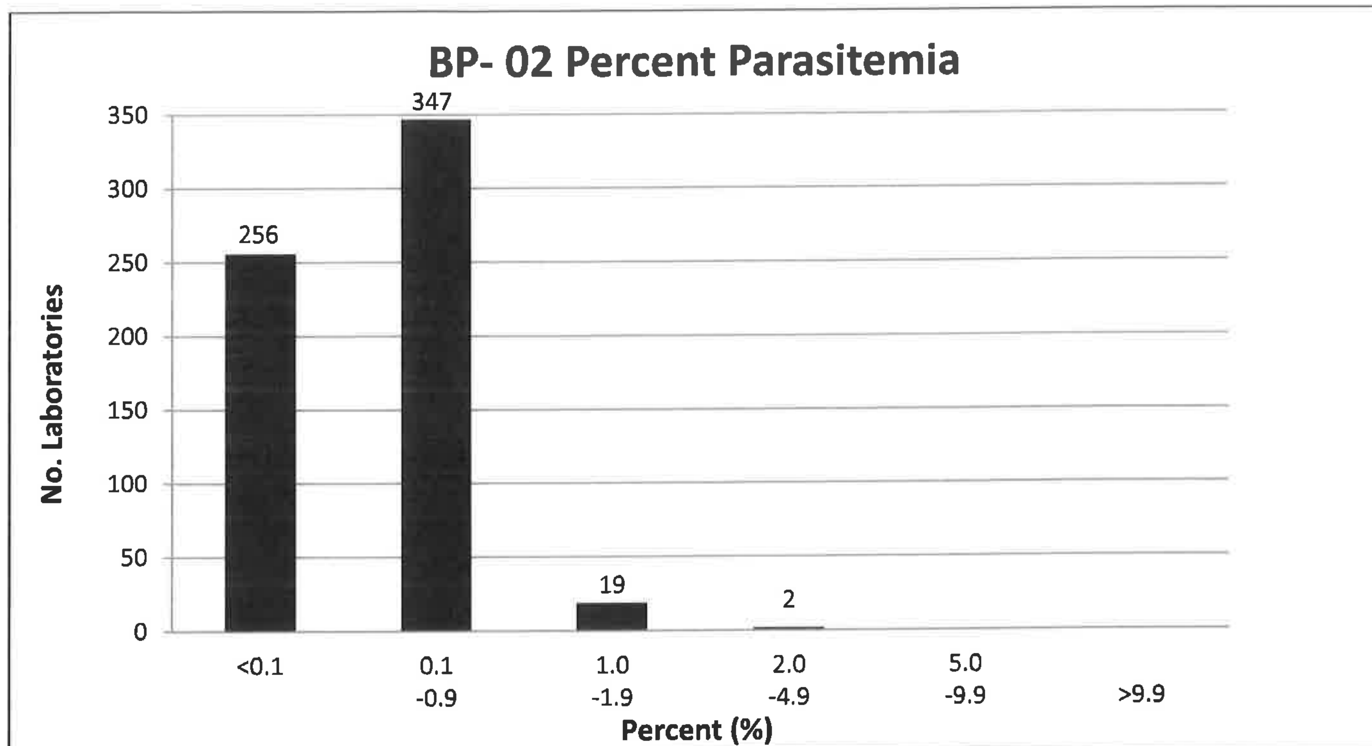
If you have identified a *Plasmodium* sp. or *Babesia* sp.: Report percent of infected RBCs seen (number of infected RBCs per 100 red blood cells). (Ungraded)



Discussion

Identification

Both thick and thin blood films should be prepared when the diagnosis of malaria is suspected. Examination of the thick blood film is considered the gold standard for diagnosis because a larger blood volume can be examined enabling the detection of low levels of parasitemia. Thin blood films are helpful with species identification. In this Survey, the primary challenge was speciation to *Plasmodium malariae*.

Key morphologic features on thin and thick blood film that suggested the diagnosis of *P. malariae* are:

1. Normal size and shape of infected erythrocytes.
2. Predilection to infect older red blood cells.
3. Growing and mature trophozoites, with few to no ring forms. The "band-shaped form" is characteristic and highly suggestive of the diagnosis.
4. Absence of Schuffner's dots and normal color cytoplasm.
5. Schizonts with 6-12 merozoites with rosette pattern.
6. Rounded and compact gametocytes.

Life Cycle

The vector for malaria is the female anopheline mosquito, where the infected mosquito injects sporozoites after a blood meal. Sporozoites are carried via the blood to the liver where they invade hepatocytes and undergo an exoerythrocytic cycle with the formation of liver schizonts. The liver schizonts rupture, releasing large numbers of merozoites that then invade erythrocytes starting the erythrocytic cycle. In the infected erythrocyte, early rings (trophozoites) develop and mature into schizonts. The mature schizont contains merozoites that are then released into the bloodstream. While most merozoites proceed to infect other erythrocytes, a few develop into male and female gametocytes that are capable of infecting mosquitoes. There is no resting stage in the liver.

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Clinical Relevance

Plasmodium malariae occurs less commonly than *P. falciparum* and *P. vivax* compromising 2.0% of malaria cases reported in the United States. A high percentage of *P. malariae* cases occur in West Africa. Unlike other *Plasmodium* species, the cyclic fevers for *P. malariae* occur every 72 hours and the clinical manifestations are usually mild due to lower parasitemia. No resistance to antimalarials has been established.

References

1. Garcia LS. *Diagnostic Medical Parasitology*, 5th ed. Washington, DC: ASM Press, 2007.
2. CDC: Malaria surveillance – United States 2007. *MMWR* 2009;58(SS02);1-16.
3. Guerrant RL, Walker DH, Weller PF. *Tropical Infectious Diseases*, Philadelphia: Churchill Livingstone. 1999.
4. Gonzalez-Garcia JJ, Arnalich F, Pena JM, et al. *An outbreak of Plasmodium vivax malaria among heroin users in Spain. Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg.* 1986;80:549-552.

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Blood Parasite Identification

The BP-03 challenge contained thick and thin Giemsa-stained smears obtained from a 45-year-old entomologist returning from an expedition in The Gambia. The specimen contained *Plasmodium ovale*. A response of "*Plasmodium ovale*", "*Plasmodium vivax/ovale* NOS", "*Plasmodium* sp., not *P. falciparum* referred for identification", "*Plasmodium* sp., NOS, would refer or request another specimen, or perform additional molecular testing", or "*Plasmodium* sp./*Babesia* sp. seen, referred for identification" was considered satisfactory.

Table 1. Parasite Identification

Total Responses	Referees (63)		Participants (469)	
Identification	LABS	%	LABS	%
Plasmodium ovale	10	15.9	100	21.3
Plasmodium vivax/ovale, NOS	21	33.3	153	32.6
Plasmodium sp., not *P. falciparum*, referred for identification	17	27.0	104	22.2
Plasmodium sp., NOS, would refer or request another specimen, or perform additional molecular testing	12	19.1	65	13.9
Unacceptable				
Plasmodium falciparum	2	3.2	9	1.9
Plasmodium vivax	1	1.6	35	7.5

Table 2. Parasite Screen

Total Responses	Referees (53)		Participants (785)	
Identification	LABS	%	LABS	%
Plasmodium sp./*Babesia* sp. seen, referred For identification	53	100.0	779	99.2

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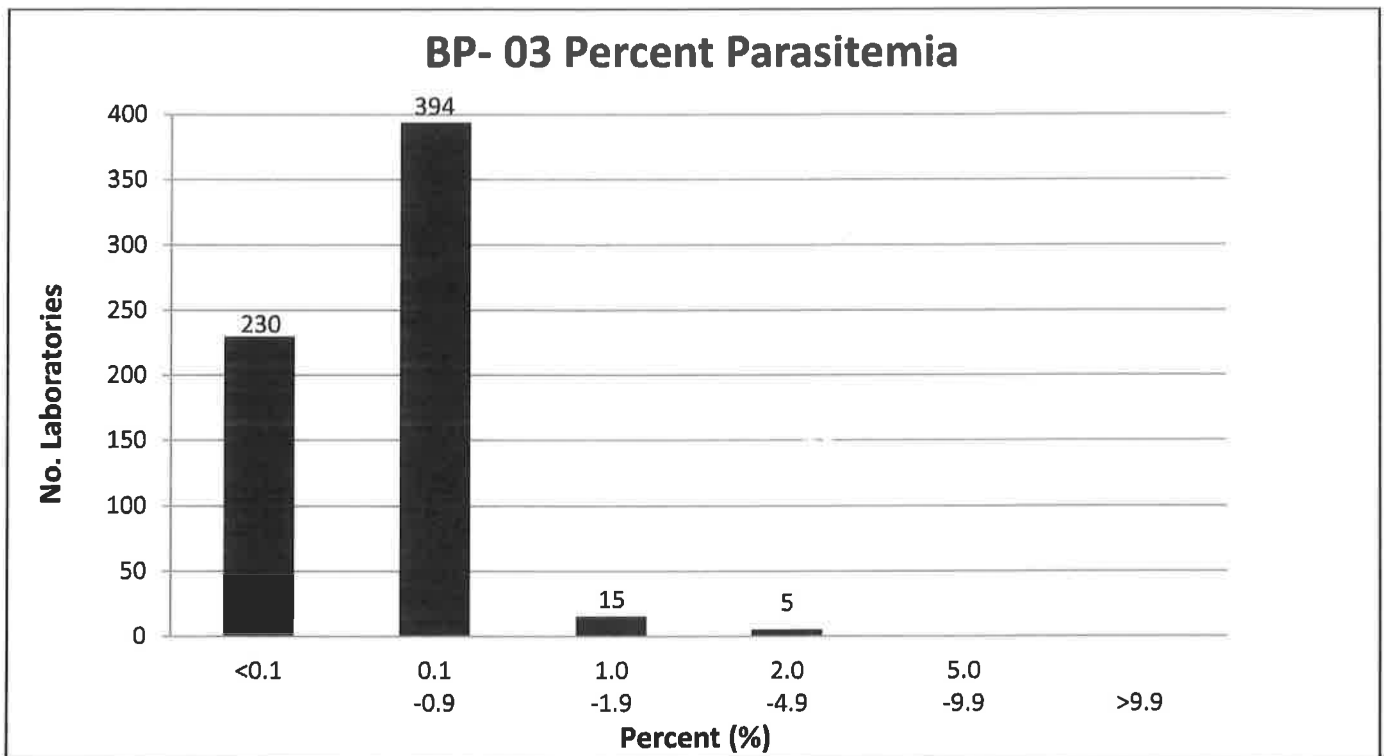
If you have identified a *Plasmodium* sp. or *Babesia* sp.: Report percent of infected RBCs seen (number of infected RBCs per 100 red blood cells). (Ungraded)



Both thick and thin blood films should be prepared when the diagnosis of malaria is suspected. Examination of the thick blood film is considered the gold standard for identification since a larger blood volume can be examined than with the thin film, thus enabling the detection of low levels of parasitemia. In contrast, thin blood films provide the best morphology for species differentiation. In this Survey, the challenge was to recognize the presence of *Plasmodium ovale*.

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Key morphologic features on thin and thick blood films that characterize *P. ovale* may include:

1. Enlarged size of the infected red blood cells (seen with both *P. ovale* and *P. vivax).*
2. Infected red blood cells with fimbriations and an ovoid shape (seen in up to 1/3 of infected cells).
3. Presence of Schüffner's stippling (seen in both *P. ovale* and *P. vivax*). Note: These may not be seen in early ring-form trophozoites in *P. ovale.*
4. Mature schizonts with 8-12 merozoites.
5. Compact ring compared to the more amoeboid trophozoite of *P. vivax.*
6. Large, round gametocytes usually with coarser pigment than as usually seen with *P. vivax.*

Distinguishing *P. ovale* from *P. vivax* morphologically may be challenging when the trophozoites do not have characteristic features and fimbriations are not abundant. The absence of schizonts also makes the differentiation between the two species more difficult. In these cases a diagnosis of *Plasmodium vivax/ovale* may be acceptable. If available, molecular testing can be used confirm the species when morphology is not definitive.

Note: *The ideal specimen for laboratory identification of malaria is fresh capillary blood from a finger or heel stick, with immediate preparation of thick and thin blood films. Since this is not feasible in most settings, however, venous blood collected in EDTA anticoagulant is also acceptable. It is important to transport the blood as quickly as possible to the laboratory for examination since prolonged exposure to EDTA may result in distortion of the malaria parasites and compromised morphology.*

Discussion

Refer to BP-01 on page 5 for discussion.

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Blood Parasite Identification

The BP-04 challenge contained thick and thin Giemsa-stained smears obtained from a 28-year-old male from Gabon with dermal swelling. A response of "No parasite(s) seen" or "Specimen screened for blood parasites, no organisms seen" was considered satisfactory.

Table 1. Parasite Identification

Total Responses	Referees (62)		Participants (442)	
Identification	**LABS**	**%**	**LABS**	**%**
No parasite(s) seen	61	98.4	437	98.9

Table 2. Parasite Screen

Total Responses	Referees (55)		Participants (815)	
Identification	**LABS**	**%**	**LABS**	**%**
Specimen screened for blood parasites, no organisms seen	54	98.2	793	97.3

Discussion

Identification

Careful examination of multiple thin and thick blood films is imperative to exclude the diagnosis of blood parasites, particularly for patients living in endemic areas. For thin films: (1) all blood components (erythrocytes, white blood cells, and platelets) should be intact, (2) the background should be clean and free from debris, (3) erythrocytes should stain a pale grayish-pink, and neutrophilic leukocytes should have deep purple nuclei and well defined granules, and (4) erythrocytes at the terminal, feathered end of the film should be adjacent, but not overlap (one layer thick). For thick films: (1) the background should be clean, free from debris, with a pale mottled-gray color derived from lysed erythrocytes, (2) leukocytes should stain deep purple with pale purple cytoplasm, and (3) eosinophilic granules should stain a bright purple-red and neutrophilic granules should stain deep pink-purple.

Thick films are most useful for screening since they provide a larger quantity of blood for examination. Thin films, on the other hand, are most useful for speciation since they provide the best red blood cell (RBC) and parasite morphology. All requests for peripheral blood smear examination to detect *Plasmodium* spp. should be performed without delay. Both thick and thin films should first be fully screened at low power (ie, using the 10x objective) to detect microfilaria which may be present in low numbers anywhere on the slides and which may not be detected in the standard 300 field slide review at higher magnification.

Due to the severe implications of a misdiagnosis, laboratory personnel should then examine at least 300 oil immersion fields (using the 100X oil immersion objective) for each thick and thin blood film. In addition, one set of blood films is not sufficient to exclude the diagnosis of malaria and the laboratory should recommend collection of multiple blood specimens approximately at 6-8 hour intervals to definitively exclude the presence of blood parasitemia. This comment should accompany the final report "No blood parasites seen."

References

1. Garcia LS. 2016. *Diagnostic Medical Parasitology*, 6th ed., Washington, DC. ASM Press.

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Blood Parasite Identification

The BP-05 challenge contained thick and thin Giemsa-stained smears obtained from a 21-year-old Peace Corps worker returning from Belize. The specimen contained *Trypanosoma cruzi*. A response of "*Trypanosoma cruzi*", "Blood flagellate, NOS, referred for identification" or "Blood or tissue parasite, not *Plasmodium* sp. or *Babesia* sp., referred for identification" were considered satisfactory.

Table 1. Parasite Identification

Total Responses	Referees (61)		Participants (450)	
Identification	LABS	%	LABS	%
Trypanosoma cruzi	61	100.0	445	98.9

Table 2. Parasite Screen

Total Responses	Referees (55)		Participants (801)	
Identification	LABS	%	LABS	%
Blood flagellate, NOS, referred for identification	51	92.7	684	85.4
Blood or tissue parasite, not *Plasmodium* sp. or *Babesia* sp., referred for identification	4	7.3	101	12.6

Discussion

Causal Agent

American Trypanosomiasis (also called Chagas disease) is caused by *Trypanosoma cruzi*, a flagellated protozoan endemic to the American tropics. Although *T. cruzi* is enzootic in the United States, the feeding/defecation patterns of the Nearctic triatomine bugs, in combination with improved living conditions, do not allow for efficient vector-borne transmission.

Biology and Life Cycle

Trypanosoma cruzi is transmitted by triatomine ('kissing') bugs as the bug releases infective trypomastigotes in the feces while taking a blood meal. Trypomastigotes enter the bite site when scratched into the wound, or other mucus membranes such as the conjunctiva. *Trypanosoma cruzi* has also been transmitted in fruit juices and other foods, when infected bugs contaminate fruits and other food sources. At the infection site, parasites differentiate into intracellular amastigotes. Amastigotes multiply by binary fission and differentiate into trypomastigotes and are released into the bloodstream. Trypomastigotes infect cells from a variety of tissues and transform into intracellular amastigotes in the new infection sites. Only amastigotes replicate; trypomastigotes do not divide (unlike with the African trypanosome, *T. brucei*). Triatomine bugs become infected when they take a blood meal from an infected human or animal with circulating trypomastigotes. Ingested trypomastigotes transform into epimastigotes in the midgut and multiply there. Epimastigotes migrate to the hindgut where they become infective metacyclic trypomastigotes.

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Diagnosis

Trypanosoma cruzi can be challenging to diagnose. During the acute stage of the disease, trypomastigotes may be observed in peripheral blood or CSF. Trypomastigotes are approximately 20 µm long, have a central nucleus, and a large subterminal kinetoplast at the pointed posterior end. The single flagellum is anteriorly directed. Dividing forms are not seen.

During the chronic stage of the disease, amastigotes may be found in tissue biopsy specimens, although serologic testing is recommended. Molecular diagnosis (PCR) is often employed in cases of transplant or transfusion transmission or when congenital cases are suspected. PCR can also be useful for early detection of *T. cruzi* in transplant-transmitted recipients of organs from donors with chronic disease. The diagnosis of chronic Chagas in patients without immunosuppression should be performed with serology.

Clinical Significance

Between six and seven million people are thought to be infected with *T. cruzi* in the Americas. The clinical presentation of Chagas is biphasic. Acutely, over a period of two months, individuals can be asymptomatic or present with skin changes such as swelling of eyelids accompanied with fever, myalgia, and lymphadenopathy. Disease with this pathogen can be cured if treated early. Complications of chronic disease include heart (30%), gastrointestinal (10%), neurological (5%), and mixed disease. If untreated, cardiomyopathy and neurological deficits can lead to sudden death. Blood donor and organ screening is critical to prevent transfusion or organ related transmission. Other forms of transmission include consumption of food contaminated with triatomine excrement, congenital infection, and laboratory accidents usually with infected human specimens.

Treatment

Specific anti-Chagas drug therapy can be achieved with benznidazole and nifurtimox. Both agents are effective in the acute phase, but efficacy is proportionally lower as the disease progresses into the chronic phase. Treatment in the acute phase can be protracted (up to 2 months) and complicated by adverse drug reactions such as kidney and liver injury. Cardiac and gastrointestinal disease may require targeted therapy to correct the anatomical dysfunction caused by chronic disease. Immunosuppressive regimens associated with autoimmune or neoplastic disease can lead to reactivation of Chagas which also requires anti-parasitic therapy.

References

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3. Mandell GL, Bennett JE, Dolin R. *Mandell, Douglas, and Bennett's Principles and Practice of Infectious Diseases*, 7th ed. Churchill Livingstone Elsevier, 2009.

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Attestation of Participation of Self-Reported Training*

We the participants below have completed the review of the BP-A 2021 CAP Program
(Product Mailing, Year)
Participant Summary/Final Critique report and can self-report this activity towards fulfilling education and maintenance of certification (MOC) requirements.

Participant	Date	Participant	Date

_______________________________________ _______________

Director (or Designee) Signature - I have verified that the individuals listed above have successfully participated in this activity. Date

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1. Go to www.cap.org
2. Click **Login** and enter your User ID and Password.
    - If you are unsure whether you have an *individual* web account with the CAP, or do not remember your user ID and password, click on **PASSWORD HINT**.
    - If you do not have an *individual* web account, click **CREATE AN ACCOUNT**. Complete and submit the account request form. You will be notified within one business day that your individual account has been activated.
3. Click **Learning** from the top menu bar
4. Click **Transcript** from the menu bar
5. Click **+ My Activity**
6. Follow prompts to enter 'Self-Reported Training Activities' including upload of this supporting documentation*.

For assistance, call our Customer Contact Center at 800-323-4040 or 847-832-7000 option 1.

CAP Self-Reported Training activities do not offer CE credit but can be used towards fulfilling requirements for certification of maintenance by agencies such as the American Society of Clinical Pathology (ASCP). Please verify with your certifying agency to determine your education requirements.

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