THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL BIOSAFETY COMMITTEE
New York, NY
September 23, 2026
Minutes - By Zoom

Attendees: Gaitree McNab, Leslie Diaz, Charles Rice, Jeremy Rock, Jennifer Rohr, Sarah Schlesinger, Agata Smogorzewska

Chair's Remarks:

- Ms. McNab stated that she is acting as Chair for today's meeting because Ms. Wilkerson is out of the country. She thanked the members for agreeing to meet for this *ad hoc* meeting. She said that the August 4, 2026, meeting minutes would be reviewed along with those from today's meeting at the next IBC meeting.
- Ms. McNab stated that a full report on the incident involving exposure of a postdoc in the Tavazoie Lab on September 3, 2026, will be included at the next meeting. She provided a summary of the follow-up incident review.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The Chair noted that Dr. Rice will be asked to recuse prior to any action taken on the amendment request to his PI Based Registration. All other members stated that they had no conflict with the business in front of the Committee.

Amendments:
2024-04-003 Charles Rice PI Based Registration: The Rice Laboratory is seeking approval to expand hepatitis B Virus (HBV) research to investigate the genetic determinants of interferon-alpha (IFNα) sensitivity and resistance in patient-derived HBV genotype A2 clinical isolates. They updated their inventory list to add these isolates. The Laboratory will identify IFN-sensitive and IFN-resistant HBV-A2 strains in humanized mice and generate replication-competent infectious chimeric HBV by exchanging naturally occurring HBc, Pol, preS1/preS2/S, and HBx genetic elements between sensitive and resistant isolates. Additional, naturally occurring nucleotide variants may be introduced to further identify genetic determinants of IFN responsiveness, with subsequent studies performed in humanized mice and primary human hepatocyte models. The PI acknowledges that the work may result in increased IFNα resistance in preclinical models but does not anticipate generating dangerous gain-of-function (DGOF) viruses or novel resistance to nucleotide analog antiviral therapy.

The proposed work presents an occupational risk of exposure to infectious HBV, primarily through accidental inoculation/sharps injury or mucous-membrane exposure; existing containment practices for infectious HBV will be used, and potentially exposed personnel are subject to the University's Exposure Control Plan and are offered HBV vaccination.

The work will proceed in three phases:

- Phase 1: Identify IFN-sensitive and IFN-resistant HBV-A2 strains. Patient-derived consensus HBV sequences will be synthesized as plasmid DNA and converted to recombinant covalently closed circular DNA (rcccDNA). These clinical variants will be evaluated in human hepatocyte-xenografted ("humanized") mice to identify the most IFN-sensitive (A2S) and IFN-resistant (A2R) strains. Mice will receive PEG-IFNα after plateau viremia is established.
- Phase 2: Generate infectious chimeric HBV. Eight chimeric viruses will be constructed by exchanging the HBc, Pol, preS1/preS2/S, and HBx ORFs between the A2S and A2R isolates. Replication and viability will be assessed in humanized mice. The mice will subsequently be

infected with serum containing viable A2S/A2R reassortants, treated with PEG-IFNα, and monitored for viral rebound after treatment withdrawal.

- Phase 3: Further genetic dissection. If a particular Open Reading Frame (ORF) is identified as the major determinant of IFNα sensitivity/resistance, additional chimeras containing naturally occurring single-nucleotide differences will be generated to narrow the responsible region. Identified elements will then be introduced into other HBV-A2 clinical isolates. Mechanistic studies will also use mouse-passaged primary human hepatocytes to examine virus-host interactions and antiviral responsiveness.

The proposed research is covered under Sections III-D-4, III-E-1, III-E-3 and III-F-2.

Ms. McNab reported on her review as BSO, noting the proposed work with infectious HBV and humanized-mouse studies must be conducted using ABSL2/BSL2 practices and containment. Existing SOPs should be reviewed to ensure they adequately address sharps prevention, mucous-membrane protection, spill response, and procedures involving infectious serum and viremic animals. Personnel conducting the work should have current biosafety training and be (re)offered hepatitis B vaccination through University Health & Wellness, as indicated in the amendment.

The Committee discussed the following:

- The proposed work includes potential gain-of-function outcomes.
- Whether the proposed work would be covered by the new NIH Policy covering DGOF.
- The proposed research is very similar to work undertaken by the Rice Lab previously, working with HBV both *in vivo* and *in vitro*.
- The University has well established medical surveillance and post exposure procedures in place to address the proposed work.

Dr. Rice was invited to and provided a summary of the proposed work. Members asked no follow up questions. He recused himself from the meeting.

The Committee agreed the proposed work must be conducted at BSL2/ABSL2. The Committee discussed and determined that the proposed work does not meet the criteria for potential DGOF research on the basis that the study examines existing, naturally occurring resistance/susceptibility to one HBV treatment, rather than generating new resistance or affecting other HBV drugs.

There was motion to approve the amendment request on condition that all work on following conditions:

- Work must be conducted using ABSL2/BSL2 practices and containment.
- Existing SOPs must be reviewed to ensure they adequately address sharps prevention, mucous-membrane protection, spill response, and procedures involving infectious serum and viremic animals.
- Personnel conducting the work should have current biosafety training and be (re)offered hepatitis B vaccination through University Health & Wellness.

The motion was seconded. It was approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned.