

A simple, safe and sensitive method for SARS-CoV-2 inactivation and RNA extraction for RT-qPCR

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Running title: Simple, biosafe RNA extraction for SARS-CoV-2 testing

22 **ABSTRACT**

23 The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created an urgent need for large amounts of diagnostic tests to
24 detect viral RNA, which commercial suppliers are increasingly unable to deliver. In addition to the
25 lack of availability, the current methods do not always fully inactivate the virus. Together, this calls
26 for the development of safer methods for extraction and detection of viral RNA from patient
27 samples that utilise readily available reagents and equipment present in most standard laboratories.
28 We present a rapid and straightforward RNA extraction protocol for inactivating the SARS-CoV-
29 2 virus that uses standard lab reagents. This protocol expands analysis capacity as the inactivated
30 samples can be used in RT-qPCR detection tests at laboratories not otherwise classified for viral
31 work. The method circumvents the need for commercial RNA purification kits, takes about 30
32 minutes from swab to PCR-ready viral RNA, and enables downstream detection of SARS-CoV-2
33 by RT-qPCR with very high sensitivity (~4 viral RNA copies per RT-qPCR). In summary, we
34 present a rapid, safe and sensitive method for high-throughput detection of SARS-CoV-2, that can
35 be conducted in any laboratory equipped with a qPCR machine.

36

37

38 INTRODUCTION

39 In mid-December 2019, reports emerged that patients in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, were
40 suffering from atypical pneumonia, and by start-January, the causative agent, severe acute
41 respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was identified (1, 2). The disease was named
42 coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The initial epicentre of virus spread seems to have been
43 the Huanan seafood wholesale market in Wuhan. Although the SARS-CoV-2 genome is very
44 similar to bat SARS-CoV-like coronaviruses (~96%), it carries unique sequence motifs in the
45 receptor-binding domain (RBD) of the Spike protein that binds to the human angiotensin-
46 converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) receptor (3). These differences suggest that natural selection in an
47 intermediate host species optimised binding of SARS-CoV-2 to ACE2, and facilitated transmission
48 to, and spread between, humans. By mid-January 2020, the virus was found in Thailand and Japan
49 following which it spread worldwide (4, 5). As of June 2020, the US had the largest number of
50 identified SARS-CoV-2 infected individuals, but also several European countries, e.g., Italy, Spain,
51 United Kingdom, and France have large numbers of COVID-19 patients (6). As of today, cases of
52 COVID-19 are rapidly increasing in India, Mexico and parts of Africa and South America.

53
54 The possibility to rapidly test large numbers of individuals for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 is a
55 vital component in containing viral spread, in understanding the infectious fatality rate, and in
56 subsequently guiding the controlled reopening of our societies. In medical laboratories, the
57 presence of SARS-CoV-2 is commonly detected in a two-step process, where each step requires
58 different kits. Step one is the RNA extraction from patient swabs usually performed using a kit
59 from Qiagen or Roche (7), and step two is the detection of SARS-CoV-2, often achieved by a
60 reverse-transcriptase quantitative polymerase chain reaction (RT-qPCR). With the rapidly growing
61 need for SARS-CoV-2 tests, commercial supplies are increasingly falling short on kits for both

62 steps, thereby creating a need for alternative methods that utilise readily available reagents and
63 equipment present in most standard laboratories.

64

65 A method, which combines a high molar acidic guanidinium isothiocyanate (GITC) solution,
66 phenol and chloroform (collectively termed GPC), is broadly used to extract intact RNA from
67 diverse biological samples (8, 9). The standard protocol for RNA-extraction by GCP is lengthy and
68 requires significant expertise in handling RNA, making it unsuitable for large-scale screening
69 programs. Here, we present a much-simplified version of the GPC-extraction method that
70 overcomes these limitations while still providing inactivated, viral RNA that is compatible with
71 downstream RT-qPCR detection. The method enables detection of ~ 4 viral RNA copies per RT-
72 qPCR, corresponding to $\sim 10^4$ viral RNA copies on the swab. This detection limit is substantially
73 lower than the average virus load per nasopharyngeal (NP) or oropharyngeal (OP) swab from
74 symptoms onset to day five (6.76×10^5 copies per swab) and later during the disease course
75 (3.44×10^5) (10, 11). In addition to the protocol simplification, this modified method further offers
76 safe working conditions for healthcare personnel as the GPC solution is known to rapidly and fully
77 inactivate viruses of the corona family, e.g., MERS-CoV (12). The efficient viral inactivation
78 enables the simplified GCP-extraction method to be used at laboratories not classified for viral
79 work, when on-site capacity at authorised hospital laboratories presents an issue, thereby expanding
80 testing capacity.

81

82 In summary, we propose a rapid, safe and sensitive method for high-throughput detection of SARS-
83 CoV-2, that can be conducted in any laboratory equipped with an RT-qPCR machine, using
84 inexpensive and readily available reagents.

85

86 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

87 **Protocol outline**

88 The method comprises the following four steps.

- 89 1. Patient sampling by NP or OP swabs.
- 90 2. Addition of the GPC reagents that instantly inactivates the virus and protects the released
91 viral RNA genome from enzymatic degradation.
- 92 3. Extraction of RNA in 2 simple steps.
- 93 4. RT-qPCR to detect SARS-CoV-2 RNA in the patient sample.

94

95 **Sample preparation and RNA extraction using the simplified GPC-extraction method**

96 We obtained OP and NP samples from one hospitalised COVID-19 patient who had tested virus-
97 positive three weeks earlier (cobas® SARS-CoV-2 test, Roche diagnostics), from three individuals
98 who had previously tested SARS-CoV-2 positive, but tested negative on the day of sampling
99 (cobas® SARS-CoV-2 test, Roche diagnostics), and from a healthy individual. NP and OP swabs
100 were collected using FLOQSwabs® (COPAN, 552C), placed in transport tubes, sealed and
101 transferred to the laboratory. Each swab was incubated for 5 min at room temperature in an
102 Eppendorf tube containing 1.1 mL TRI-reagent (T9424, Sigma), after which the swab was
103 discarded, and 200 µL of chloroform was added. This sample/GPC mixture was vortexed for 30
104 sec, incubated for 3 min at room temperature, centrifuged for 15 min 12.000 g at 4°C, after which
105 10 µL of the upper aqueous phase was carefully transferred to a new tube without disturbing the
106 interphase. The 10 µL sample was diluted with RNase-free water as detailed below.

107

108 **Dilution series of RNA extracted from OP and NP samples**

109 To test the effect of GITC on the quality of both one-step and two-step RT-qPCR reactions, we
110 created dilution series of the OP and NP samples that allowed the final dilution in the subsequent
111 RT-reaction of the RT-qPCR to range from 8x to 100x (**Figure 1**). For example, to achieve a 100x
112 final dilution in the RT-reaction of a 25 μ L one-step RT-qPCR, the 10 μ L sample was mixed with
113 190 μ L RNase-free water to a dilution of 20x, followed by 5 μ L of this sample mixed in a 25 μ L
114 one-step RT-qPCR to a final dilution of 100x.

115

116 **Two-step RT-qPCR against human B2M mRNA**

117 The effect of GITC on RT-qPCR components was examined by amplifying beta-2-microglobulin
118 (B2M) mRNA (13) in the dilution series of extracted RNA from OP and NP samples from a healthy
119 individual, in an RT-qPCR run in two separate steps. The reverse transcription reaction (20 μ L)
120 contained 2 μ L 10x M-MuLV buffer (B0253S, New England Biolabs), 1 μ L of 50 μ M Oligo 18 dT
121 (SO132, Thermo Fisher), 1 μ L of 50 ng/ μ L random hexamers (18091050, Invitrogen), 1 μ L of 10
122 mM of deoxynucleotide triphosphate (dNTPs) (180912050, Invitrogen), 0.2 μ L of 40 U/ μ L RNase
123 inhibitor (3335402001, Roche), 5 μ L of the RNA extraction sample (diluted from 2x to 25x), 8.8
124 μ L RNase-free H₂O, and 1 μ L of 200 U M-MuLV reverse transcriptase enzyme (B0253S, New
125 England Biolabs). Negative controls were reactions without the RT enzyme and without sample,
126 and the positive control was RNA isolated from HeLa cells. The RT-reaction was performed in
127 Veriti™ 96-Well Thermal cycler (Applied Biosystems) (5 min at 25C, 1 h at 42C, and 20 min at
128 65C). The qPCR reaction (10 μ L) contained 0.5 μ L of the 10 μ M B2M forward primer (5'-TGC
129 CTG CCG TGT GAA CCA TGT-3'), 0.5 μ L of the 10 μ M B2M reverse primer (5'-TGC GGC
130 ATC TTC AAA CCT CCA TGA-3'), 1 μ L of the RT-reaction, 3 μ L RNase-free H₂O, 5 μ L
131 PowerUp SYBR Green Master Mix (A25741, Thermo Fisher). Reactions were set up in a 384-well

132 plate and run in a QuantStudio 12K Flex Real-Time PCR System (4471081, Applied Biosystems)
133 (2 min at 50C, 2 min at 95C, followed by 40 cycles of 95C for 15 sec; 60C for 1 min). Finally, a
134 melting curve was recorded for 15 sec. at 95°C, 1 min at 60°C and 15 sec at 95°C. Data were
135 analysed using QuantStudio™ 12K Flex Software. To confirm that only mRNA was amplified, the
136 reactions were analysed by gel electrophoresis (data not shown). The B2M qPCR reaction proceeds
137 with a forward primer placed in exon 2 and a reverse primer spanning the exon 3/4 junction to
138 avoid amplification of the genomic B2M gene. With B2M cDNA, the primers produce an amplicon
139 of 97 nucleotides, whereas the amplicon from the B2M gene itself spans 1974 nucleotides.

140

141 **One-step RT-qPCR against SARS-CoV-2**

142 The effect of GITC on a corresponding one-step SARS-CoV-2 RT-qPCR reaction was examined
143 using the dilution series of extracted RNA from OP and NP samples from the COVID-19 patient.
144 SARS-CoV-2 specific RT-qPCR was also performed on samples from three previously SARS-
145 CoV-2 positive, and a true negative, individual, to examine if non-specific amplification might
146 occur. Three negative controls were used; NP and OP samples from a healthy individual and a test
147 without sample. A primer and detection probe set against human RNase P mRNA was used as an
148 internal positive control. The RT-qPCR was performed using SuperScript™ III One-Step RT-PCR
149 System with Platinum™ Taq DNA Polymerase (12574-026, Invitrogen). Each 25 µL reaction
150 contained 5 µL of sample, 12.5 µL of the 2x Superscript™ III reaction mix (a buffer containing
151 0.4 mM of each dNTP and 3.2 mM MgSO₄), 0.4 µL 50 mM MgSO₄, 0.05 µL of 20 µg/µL (1 µg
152 BSA/reaction) of nonacetylated bovine serum albumin (BSA, 10711454001, Roche), 1 µL
153 SuperScript™ III RT/Platinum *Taq* Mix and 1.85 µL of primer/probe mix (2019-nCoV CDC EUA
154 Kit, 10006606, IDT). Primer and probe concentrations are outlined in **Table 1**. The thermal cycling

155 conditions were: 55°C for 30 min, 95°C for 3 min, then 45 cycles of 95°C for 15 sec; 62°C for 30
156 sec; 68°C for 30 sec, followed by a final 68°C elongation step for 5 min on QuantStudio 12K Flex
157 Real-Time PCR System (4471081, Applied Biosystems). Data were analysed using QuantStudio™
158 12K Flex Software.

159

160 **Preparation of a SARS-CoV-2 RNA dilution series using the GPC-extraction method**

161 An OP sample swab was collected from a healthy individual and processed as described above.
162 From the upper aqueous phase, 7.5 µL was carefully transferred to a new tube without disturbing
163 the interphase, and spiked with 2.5 µL of Twist Synthetic SARS-CoV-2 RNA Control 1
164 (MT007544.1) to make a stock of 250,000 RNA copies/µL. This stock solution was used in a serial
165 dilution with the remaining, un-spiked, aqueous phase to create a series of positive controls
166 containing 3125, 781, 195, 48, 12, 3 or 0.76 RNA copies/µL. From each of these, 5 µL was used
167 in a 25 µL one-step RT-qPCR reaction thus achieving a final number of 15625, 3906, 977, 244,
168 61, 15 and 3.8 SARS-CoV-2 RNA copies per one-step RT-qPCR reaction.

169

170 **RESULTS**

171 **GITC/RNA dilution thresholds compatible with efficient two-step RT-qPCR**

172 To investigate how GITC affected the efficiency of each step of an RT-qPCR reaction, we set up
173 two-step B2M RT-qPCRs in the presence of varying concentrations of GITC. The B2M mRNA
174 was extracted from OP and NP swabs from a healthy individual to mimic how patient material is
175 obtained for SARS-CoV-2 testing. First, swabs were treated with the GPC solution. After mixing
176 and centrifugation, this solution separated into an upper aqueous phase containing RNA, GITC and
177 other salts, an interphase and a lower organic phase both containing DNA and proteins. The upper
178 RNA/GITC aqueous phase was retrieved and diluted and used directly in an RT reaction at different

179 final dilutions (ranging from 8x to 100x) followed by detection of B2M by qPCR with SYBR green
180 (**Figure 1**). Consistent with GITC being a concentration-dependent mixed inhibitor (14), amplicons
181 only appeared in the qPCR when the initial RT step was conducted with GITC dilutions $\geq 50x$
182 (**Figure 1**). Using the NP swab samples, amplicons were detected in the qPCR reaction with cycle
183 threshold (Ct) values of 30-31 at a 50x GITC dilution. At the higher GITC dilution (100x),
184 amplicons were detected at a later time with Ct-values > 35 , likely due to the increased dilution of
185 the B2M mRNA template in these reactions. When OP swabs were used, amplicons were similarly
186 detected at $\geq 50x$ GITC dilutions (Fig. 1), but with a slightly higher Ct-values of 36. This difference
187 in Ct thresholds for NP and OP swabs samples likely reflects differences in the amounts of cells
188 obtained by the different sampling methods. Together, these results confirm that the RT-qPCR can
189 proceed in the presence of low concentrations of GITC. The size of the B2M amplicons was
190 examined using gel electrophoresis, and all amplicons were found to have the expected size of 97
191 nucleotides; no amplification of the genomic B2M gene was observed, and no amplicons were
192 present in reactions without RT or sample. These results confirmed that the simplified GPC-
193 extraction method is capable of providing RNA that can serve as a template in RT-qPCR.

194

195 **GITC/RNA dilution thresholds compatible with efficient one-step SARS-CoV-2 RT-qPCR**

196 We next tested if the simplified GPC-extraction method was compatible with detection of SARS-
197 CoV-2 in a hospitalised COVID-19 patient who had tested virus-positive three weeks earlier using
198 the cobas® SARS-CoV-2 test (Roche diagnostics). OP and NP samples were obtained from the
199 patient, three former COVID-19 patients, and a healthy individual. For SARS-CoV-2 detection,
200 we used a one-step RT-qPCR (11) with two different sets of primers and detection probes (N1 and
201 N2) (15) (**Table 1**) specific for the conserved SARS-CoV-2 nucleoprotein (N) gene.

202

203 RNA was extracted from the OP and NP swabs and based on the B2M RT-qPCR results, the
204 aqueous phase with RNA and GITC was used at a 50x, 75x, or 100x final dilution in the one-step
205 SARS-CoV-2 RT-qPCRs. The OP swab sample from the COVID-19 patient yielded Ct-values of
206 27 at the 100x dilution for both duplicates for the N1 primer set, and Ct-values of 31 for both
207 duplicates for the N2 primer set (**Figure 2a**). The RNase P internal control PCR resulted in Ct-
208 values of 30 for both duplicates. No amplification was detected using the NP sample, which could
209 reflect intermittent, low and/or no viral shedding from NP cells at this time (11), or problems with
210 sampling from the nasopharynx. The three former COVID-19 patients who tested negative for
211 SARS-CoV-2 using the cobas® SARS-CoV-2 test on the day of comparison, and the healthy
212 control, were virus-negative and RNase P positive. These results confirmed that the simplified
213 GPC-extraction method, combined with a one-step RT-qPCR reaction, can be used to detect SARS-
214 CoV-2 in an infected individual and that unspecific amplification does not seem to occur.

215

216 **The simplified GPC-extraction allows detection of ~4 copies of SARS-CoV-2 per RT-qPCR**

217 To assess the sensitivity of the COVID-19 diagnostic test flow, the one-step RT-qPCR was
218 performed on a dilution series of a synthetic SARS-CoV-2 control RNA. RNA from an OP swab
219 from a healthy individual was extracted using the simplified GPC-extraction method, after which
220 some of the aqueous phase was spiked with the SARS-CoV-2 synthetic RNA to a final
221 concentration of 250000 copies/ μ L. This spiked sample was used to create a dilution series ranging
222 from 15625 to 3.8 copies/ μ L using the un-spiked aqueous phase from the sample as the diluent to
223 retain consistent amounts of GITC and swab components in the RT-qPCRs. In accordance with the
224 COVID-19 diagnostic test flow, each spiked sample was used at a final GITC dilution of 100x and

225 SARS-CoV-2 RNA was detected with N1 or N2 primers, and using RNase P primers as positive
226 control.

227

228 Amplicons were detected in all dilutions of the SARS-CoV-2 synthetic RNA down to 3.8 copies
229 with the N1 primers (**Figure 2b**). This sensitivity is consistent with that reported for other primers
230 that target the N gene (N-Sarbeco, Tib-Molbiol, Berlin, Germany) that showed a detection limit of
231 8.3 copies/reaction when used with a commercial RNA extraction kit (MagNA Pure 96 system,
232 Roche, Penzberg, Germany) and the same one-step RT-qPCR (11). The ability to detect ~4 copies
233 of viral RNA in the RT-qPCR reaction translates into $\sim 10^4$ viral copies per swab, which is more
234 than 10 fold lower than the average virus load per NP or OP swab from symptoms onset to day five
235 (6.76×10^5 copies per swab) and later (3.44×10^5 copies per swab) (10, 11). The N2 primers proved
236 less sensitive, detecting synthetic RNA down to only 244 copies/reaction in our set-up. It cannot,
237 however, be excluded that the sensitivity is nearer the next testing point of 61 copies/reaction. The
238 negative control with no added virus showed no amplification, whereas efficient amplification was
239 observed with all positive control reactions targeting RNase P. Together, these data demonstrate
240 that the simplified GPC-extraction method allows for similar detection sensitivity in the one-step
241 RT-qPCR as a currently utilised kit-based RNA extraction methods.

242

243 Based on combined experiments, we outlined a COVID-19 diagnostic test flow from patient-to-
244 result that covers patient sampling, RNA extraction by the simplified GPC-extraction method, and
245 one-step RT-qPCR detection (**Figure 3**).

246

247 **DISCUSSION**

248 The ability to test large segments of the population represents the most effective means of managing
249 the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and making informed decisions on the reopening of our societies. To
250 date, such tests typically combine the use of a front-end RNA extraction kit and a one-step RT-
251 qPCR detection kit. Many commercial RNA extraction kits have been shown to not fully inactivate
252 the virus, potentially putting healthcare personnel that handles the samples at risk of SARS-CoV-
253 2 infection (18). Similarly, several recently published quick RNA-extraction methods (7, 16, 17)
254 that rely on inactivation of the virus by heat, do not completely inactivate the virus (18). In contrast,
255 the GPC-solution fully inactivates corona viruses such as MERS-CoV (12), adding a desirable
256 safety aspect to this method.

257

258 The GITC salt is a mixed inhibitor of PCRs, affecting both the function of polymerase enzymes
259 and the melting temperature of primer/template duplexes (14). GITC is therefore usually removed
260 from the RNA by precipitation of the RNA with isopropanol, centrifugation and washing of the
261 RNA pellet with 70% ethanol after which the pellet is dissolved in H₂O. This process requires
262 expertise in RNA handling as GITC can co-precipitate with the RNA, and too vigorous pipetting
263 or wrongly handled RNA pellet solvation can result in RNA loss. A previous study demonstrated
264 that GITC had only a modest inhibitory effect at a concentration of 9 µg/µL (~75 mM) (14),
265 prompting us to speculate that the RNA/GITC aqueous phase could be used directly in RT-qPCR
266 without precipitation, centrifugation, washing and solvation if the solution was diluted below the
267 ~75mM threshold. Our results robustly demonstrate that a dilution of 50x and 100x of the aqueous
268 phase is compatible with one- and two-step RT-qPCRs, respectively, and that approximately ~4
269 copies of SARS-CoV-2 can be detected, equivalent to ~10⁴ virus copies per NP or OP swab. The

270 difference between the one- and two-step RT-qPCRs results are likely due to the extended period
271 of exposure of the PCR polymerase to GITC salts during the latter procedure.

272

273 As the simplified GPC-extraction method presented here rapidly inactivates the virus, it allows
274 detection by RT-qPCR in laboratories not classified to handle infectious air-borne viruses. The
275 GCP-solution also denatures proteins to prevent enzymatic degradation of the viral RNA genome,
276 which facilitates sample storage prior to extraction when needed. Moreover, the simplified GCP-
277 extraction method utilises equipment and reagents common to clinical and molecular biology
278 laboratories, thus removing the reliance on commercial RNA-extraction kits that presents a
279 bottleneck for large-scale SARS-CoV-2 testing. The simplified GPC-extraction method shortens
280 the time from patient sampling to testing relative to using the full GPC-extraction protocol (19),
281 but, more importantly, excludes the steps that require experience with RNA precipitation, washing
282 and reconstitution. The resulting lowered complexity makes this simplified method amenable to
283 non-RNA-experts, thereby increasing the number of laboratories at which these tests can be
284 performed. The sensitivity of the downstream RT-qPCR was similar to that reported previously
285 (11) and appears superior to that of other RT-qPCR protocols, including the cobas® SARS-CoV-
286 2 test (20). The difference in sensitivity between the N1 and N2 primer sets is important when
287 evaluating the result of SARS-CoV-2 test using both primers sets as confirmatory for the infection,
288 since a negative result for the N2 primers, but positive result for the N1 primers, could simply
289 reflect a lower viral load in the tested infected individual, compared to a patient with two positive
290 results.

291

292 In the here-presented protocol we add the virus-inactivating TRI-reagent after the collected samples
293 are transferred to the laboratory, where this solution can be safely handled in a fume hood. It is

294 tempting to speculate that a test tube could be developed that enables contact between the swab
295 and the TRI-reagent at the point of sampling, without exposing testing personal to the reagent, thus
296 inactivating the virus at the earliest possible time point in the diagnostic procedure.

297

298 In summary, our protocol for RNA extraction relieves the dependence on expensive commercial
299 kits that have become a bottleneck in the diagnosis of the virus, and ensures the safety of healthcare
300 workers testing for SARS-CoV-2 infections, which in turn expands the number of testing
301 laboratories and thus testing capacity.

302

303 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

304 We are grateful to Camilla Thomsen for sample handling and processing.

305

306 **FUNDING STATEMENT**

307 No external funding was obtained for this work.

308

309 **AUTHOR DECLARATIONS**

310 The authors declare no competing interests.

311

312 Standard ethical guidelines and regulations regarding method development and optimisation were
313 followed. All necessary patient/participant consent has been obtained and the appropriate
314 institutional forms have been archived. No project-specific ethical approval was necessary.

315

316 All data are available from the authors upon request.

317

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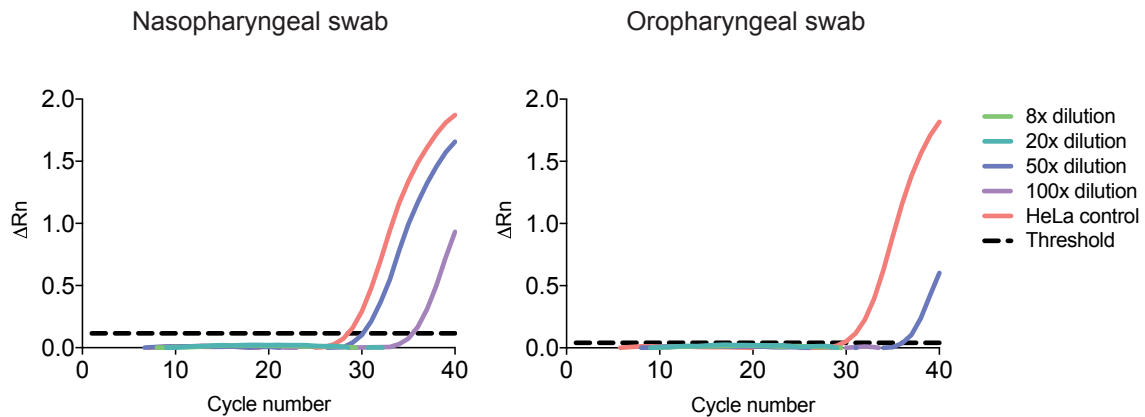
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380 **FIGURES**

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382 **Figure 1**

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385 **Figure 1. The effect of GITC salts on the efficiency of a two-step B2M RT-qPCR using**
386 **dilutions of the aqueous phase from the GPC extraction of an NP and OP sample.**

387 A representative amplification plot of ΔR_n against PCR cycle number for the two-step B2M RT-
388 qPCR with different dilutions of the RNA-GITC solution in the RT reaction (ranging from 8x to
389 100x). No amplification was observed at 8x and 20x dilutions. The threshold is shown as a black
390 dashed line and corresponds to 0.116 for the NP swab and 0.040 for the OP swab. ΔR_n : R_n (the
391 fluorescence of the reporter dye divided by the fluorescence of the passive reference dye ROX)
392 minus the baseline (black dashed line). The amplifications were performed in duplicate.

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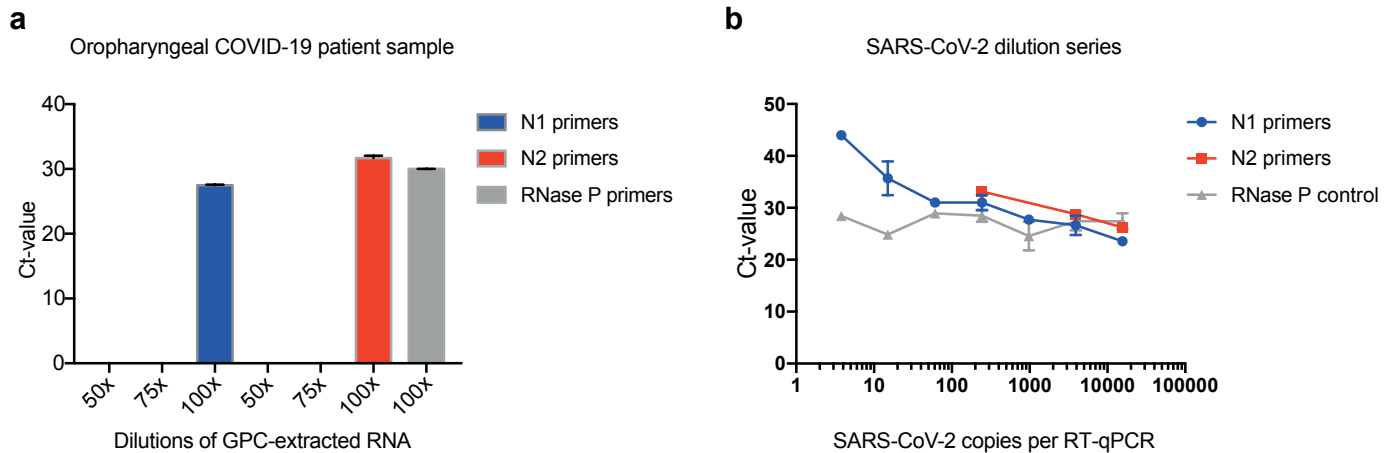
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399 **Figure 2**

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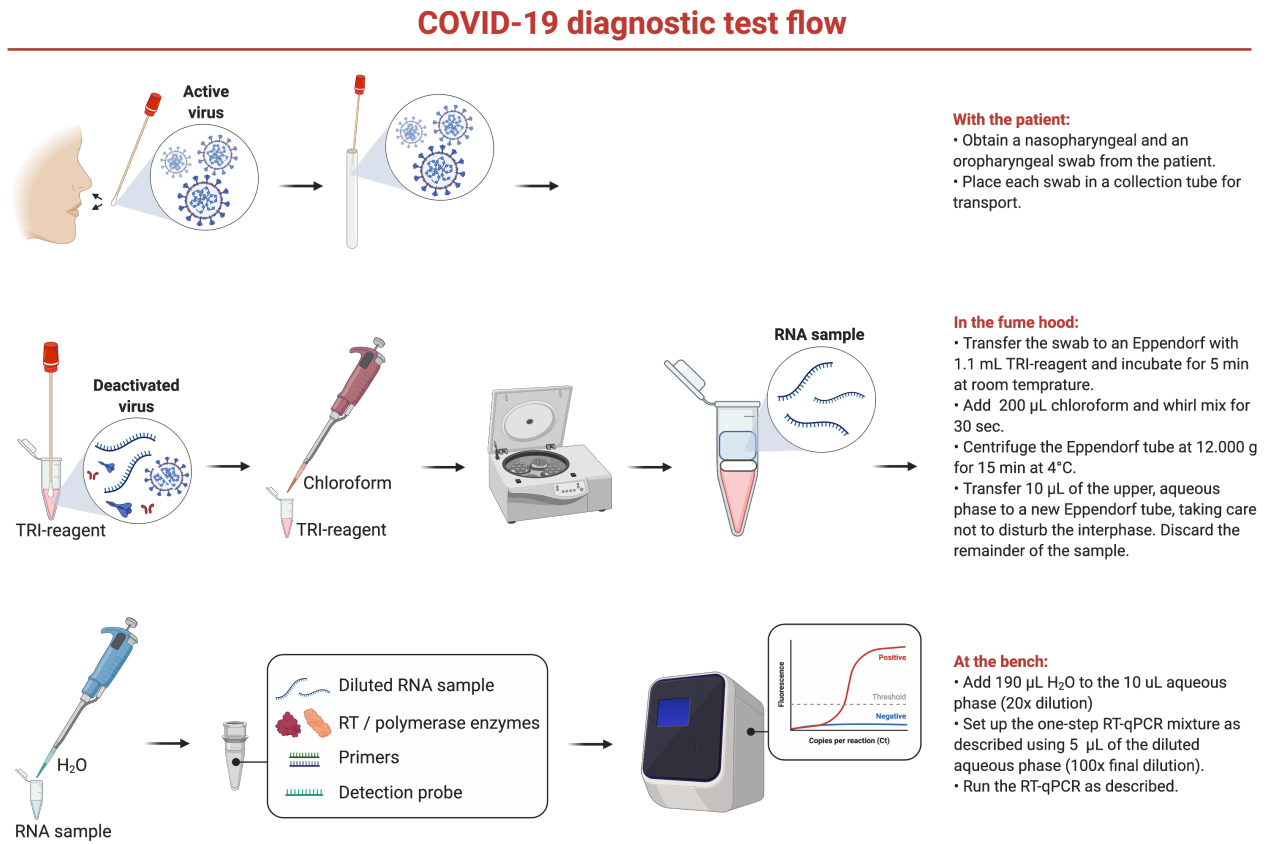
403 **Figure 2. The effect of GITC and other salts on the efficiency of SARS-CoV-2 RT-qPCR and**
404 **assay sensitivity.**

405 **a.** The effect of GITC and other salts on SARS-CoV-2 RT-qPCR detection of virus in the diluted
406 aqueous phase of samples from a COVID-19 patient. Cycle threshold (Ct) for RT-qPCRs targeting
407 the N-gene on the SARS-CoV-2 virus RNA, with viral RNA extracted from an OP swab from
408 confirmed COVID-19 patient. The internal control RNase P RT-qPCR amplifications were
409 negative at 50x and 75x dilutions (not shown).

410 **b.** Determination of the sensitivity of the SARS-CoV-2 one-step RT-qPCR protocol using synthetic
411 SARS-CoV-2 RNA combined with RNA extracted from an OP swab from a healthy individual
412 using the GPC-extraction method. The concentration of GITC and other salts were constantly kept
413 at a 100x dilution in each of the diluted virus samples. Cycle threshold (Ct) for RT-qPCRs targeting
414 the N-gene on the synthetic SARS-CoV-2 virus RNA using the N1 and N2 primer sets,
415 respectively. Amplification of RNase P was used as an internal control. The amplifications were
416 performed in duplicate.

417 **Figure 3**

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420 **Figure 3. Workflow for SARS-CoV-2 detection using the simplified GPC-extraction**

421 **method.**

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430 **TABLES**

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432 **Table 1. Overview of primers and probes used for SARS-CoV-2 detection.** IPC: internal
 433 positive control, fw: forward primer, rv: reverse primer, pr: probe. Genome pos: genome
 434 position according to SARS-CoV-2 GenBank NC_004718.

Species target	Target gene (genome pos.)	Oligo name	Oligonucleotide sequence (5'-3')	Conc. qPCR	Ref.
SARS-CoV-2	N-gene (28287-28358)	N1-fw	GACCCCAAATCAGCGAAAT	500 nM	(15)
		N1-rv	TCTGGTACTGCCAGTTGAATCTG	500 nM	(15)
		N1-pr	FAM-ACCCCGCATTACGTTTGGTGGACC-BHQ1	125 nM	(15)
SARS-CoV-2	N-gene (29164-29230)	N2-fw	TTACAAACATGGCCGCAAA	500 nM	(15)
		N2-rv	GCGCGACATTCCGAAGAA	500 nM	(15)
		N2-pr	FAM-ACAATTTGCCCCAGCGCTTCAG-BHQ1	125 nM	(15)
Human IPC	RNase P	RNaseP-fw	AGATTTGGACCTGCGAGCG	500 nM	(15)
		RNaseP-rv	GAGCGGCTGTCTCCACAAGT	500 nM	(15)
		RNaseP-pr	FAM-TTCTGACCTGAAGGCTCTGCGCG-BHQ1	125 nM	(15)

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