

HCR v3.0 multiplexed mRNA northern blot protocol

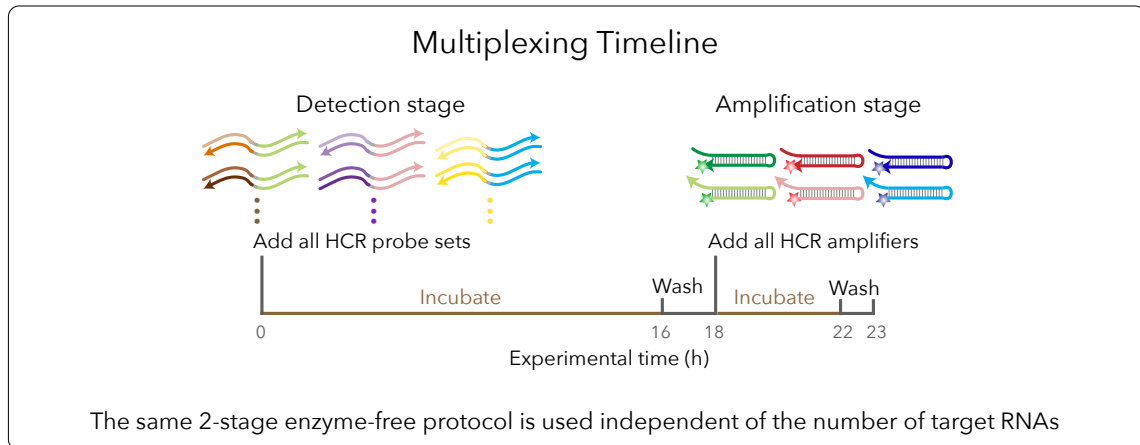
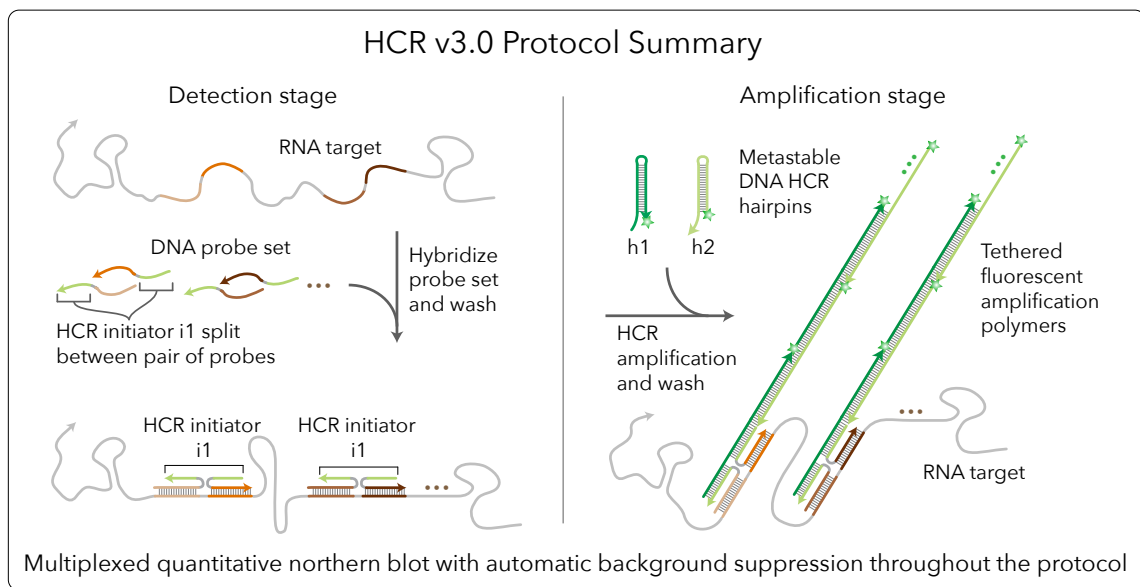
Technical support: support@molecularinstruments.com

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Storage conditions

Store HCR probe sets, HCR amplifiers, HCR probe hybridization buffer, and HCR probe wash buffer at -20 °C. Store HCR amplification buffer at 4 °C. On the bench top, keep stock solutions on ice. Make sure all solutions are well mixed before use.



Denaturing agarose gel electrophoresis

1. Prepare a 1% denaturing agarose gel.
NOTE: The gel should be ≤ 6 mm for efficient RNA transfer.
NOTE: We recommend using NorthernMax™ denaturing gel buffer for preparing denaturing agarose gels.
2. Mix RNA samples in a 1:1 ratio with formamide and heat to 65 °C for 15 min prior to gel loading.
CAUTION: formamide is a hazardous material.
3. Run RNA samples (typically 1–20 μg) at 55 V in 1 \times NorthernMax™ running buffer until your targets of interest are well-resolved.
NOTE: For targets with low or unknown expression levels we recommend starting with 10–20 μg of total RNA.

RNA transfer and crosslinking

1. Wash the gel 4 \times 5 min, in ultrapure H₂O.
2. Wet membrane in ultrapure H₂O and equilibrate for 5 min in 20 \times SSC.
NOTE: A positively charged nylon membrane is recommended.
3. Perform a capillary transfer of RNA onto the membrane in 20 \times SSC.
NOTE: We recommend using the TurboBlotter Rapid Downward Transfer System. Alternative transfer methods may be used.
4. Wash the membrane for 5 min in 2 \times SSC.
5. Crosslink the RNA to the membrane by incubating at 80 °C for 2 h.
NOTE: Alternative RNA crosslinking methods may be used.

Multiplexed HCR v3.0 protocol

Detection stage

1. Let V denote the volume of buffer to be used for blots, calculated as:

- (a) 1 mL per 10 cm² of membrane
- (b) rounded up to the nearest 0.5 mL
- (c) no less than 1.5 mL

For example, $V = 3.5$ mL for a membrane that is 32 cm² and $V = 1.5$ mL for a membrane that is 9 cm².

2. Pre-heat HCR probe hybridization buffer to 60–68 °C for 1 h and maintain at 37 °C until use.
CAUTION: *HCR probe hybridization buffer contains formamide, a hazardous material.*
3. Pre-hybridize blot in ($V - 0.5$ mL) of HCR probe hybridization buffer in a hybridization bottle for 30–60 min at 37 °C in a rolling hybridization incubator.
4. Prepare probe solution by adding each probe into a total volume of 0.5 mL of HCR probe hybridization buffer at 37 °C such that each probe will be at a final concentration of 5 nM in volume V .
5. Add the probe solution to the pre-hybridization solution and incubate blot overnight at 37 °C in a rolling hybridization incubator.
6. Remove excess probes by washing four times using pre-heated 37 °C wash solutions (volume $2V$ per wash):
 - (a) two low-stringency washes ($2\times$ SSC, 0.1% SDS; 5 min at 37 °C)
 - (b) two high-stringency washes ($0.2\times$ SSC, 0.1% SDS; 15 min at 37 °C)

Amplification stage

1. Pre-heat HCR amplification buffer to 37 °C.
2. Pre-amplify blot in ($V - 0.5$ mL) of HCR amplification buffer in a hybridization bottle for 30–60 min at 37 °C in a rolling hybridization incubator.
3. Separately prepare hairpin h1 and hairpin h2 by snap cooling (heat at 95 °C for 90 seconds and cool to room temperature in a dark drawer for 30 min).
NOTE: *HCR hairpins h1 and h2 are provided in hairpin storage buffer ready for snap cooling. Snap cool an amount of each hairpin corresponding to 30 nM final concentration in a final volume V . h1 and h2 should be snap cooled in separate tubes.*
4. Prepare hairpin mixture by adding all snap-cooled hairpins into a final volume of 0.5 mL HCR amplification buffer at 37 °C.
5. Add the hairpin mixture to the pre-amplification solution and incubate blot for 4 h at 37 °C in the dark in a rolling hybridization incubator.
NOTE: *Amplification time can be increased beyond 4 h if desired.*
NOTE: *HCR amplification may alternatively be carried out at room temperature.*
6. Remove excess hairpins by washing in pre-heated $5\times$ SSCT (volume $2V$ per wash): 2×15 min at 37 °C in the dark.
NOTE: *If HCR amplification is performed at room temperature, hairpin washes should also be performed at room temperature.*

Buffer recipes for sample preparation

10% SDS

10% SDS

For 100 mL of solution

10 g of SDS powder

Fill up to 100 mL with ultrapure H₂O

Heat solution to 68 °C to dissolve powder if necessary.

2× SSC, 0.1% SDS

2× sodium chloride sodium citrate (SSC)

0.1% SDS

For 100 mL of solution

10 mL of 20× SSC

1 mL of 10% SDS

Fill up to 100 mL with ultrapure H₂O

0.2× SSC, 0.1% SDS

0.2× sodium chloride sodium citrate (SSC)

0.1% SDS

For 100 mL of solution

1 mL of 20× SSC

1 mL of 10% SDS

Fill up to 100 mL with ultrapure H₂O

5× SSCT

5× sodium chloride sodium citrate (SSC)

0.1% Tween 20

For 40 mL of solution

10 mL of 20× SSC

400 μL of 10% Tween 20

Fill up to 40 mL with ultrapure H₂O

Reagents and supplies

NorthernMax™ denaturing gel buffer (10X) (ThermoFisher Scientific, Cat. # AM8676)
NorthernMax™ (10X) running buffer (ThermoFisher Scientific, Cat. # AM8671)
Formamide (deionized) (Life Technologies, Cat. # AM9342)
Nylon membrane, positively-charged (Roche, Cat. # 11209272001)
3 mm Whatman chromatography paper (GE Healthcare Life Sciences, Cat. # 3030-6188)
Whatman TurboBlotter (Fisher Scientific, Cat. # 09-301-184)
Whatman gel blotting paper (GE Healthcare Life Sciences, Cat. # 10427805)
Whatman GB003 filter paper (GE Healthcare Life Sciences, Cat. # 10427812)
Hybridization bottle (Wheaton, Cat. # 805000 or 805021)
Rolling hybridization incubator (SciGene, Cat. # 1040-50-1)
UltraPure Sodium Dodecyl Sulfate (SDS) (Life Technologies, Cat. # 15525-017)
20× SSC (sodium chloride sodium citrate; Invitrogen, Cat. # 15557-044)
50% Tween 20 (Invitrogen, Cat. # 00-3005)

Citation Notes

For citation, please select from the list below as appropriate for your application:

- **HCR v3.0**
Automatic background suppression for dramatically enhanced performance (signal-to-background, qHCR precision, dHCR fidelity) and ease-of-use (no probe set optimization for new targets and organisms) (Choi *et al.*, 2018). Quantitative analysis modes:
 - **qHCR imaging**: analog mRNA relative quantitation with subcellular resolution in the anatomical context of thick autofluorescent samples.
 - **qHCR flow cytometry**: analog mRNA relative quantitation for high-throughput expression profiling of mammalian and bacterial cells.
 - **dHCR imaging**: digital mRNA absolute quantitation with single-molecule resolution in the anatomical context of thick autofluorescent samples.

Protocols for v3.0 in diverse organisms are adapted from the Zoo paper.
- **qHCR imaging**
mRNA relative quantitation with subcellular resolution in the anatomical context of whole-mount vertebrate embryos; read-out/read-in analysis framework (Trivedi *et al.*, 2018).
- **Zoo paper**
Protocols for multiplexed mRNA imaging in diverse sample types (Choi *et al.*, 2016):

bacteria in suspension	FFPE human tissue sections
generic sample in suspension	generic sample on slide
whole-mount chicken embryos	whole-mount fruit fly embryos
whole-mount mouse embryos	whole-mount sea urchin embryos
whole-mount worm larvae	whole-mount zebrafish embryos and larvae
- **dHCR imaging**
Single-molecule mRNA imaging in thick autofluorescent samples (e.g., 0.5 mm adult mouse brain sections) (Shah *et al.*, 2016).
- **qHCR northern blot**
Simultaneous quantification of RNA target size and abundance for up to 5 target RNAs (Schwarzkopf & Pierce, 2016).
- **HCR v2.0**
2nd generation in situ HCR technology (v2.0) using DNA HCR probes and DNA HCR amplifiers: 10× increase in signal, 10× reduction in cost, dramatic increase in reagent durability (Choi *et al.*, 2014).
- **HCR v1.0**
1st generation in situ HCR technology (v1.0) using RNA HCR probes and RNA HCR amplifiers: multiplexed mRNA imaging in whole-mount vertebrate embryos with simultaneous signal amplification for up to 5 target mRNAs (Choi *et al.*, 2010).
- **HCR mechanism**
Isothermal enzyme-free molecular signal amplification (Dirks & Pierce, 2004).

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