HCR™ RNA-FISH protocol for FFPE tissue sections

This protocol has not been optimized for all tissue types and should only be used as a template.

Technical support
support@molecularinstruments.com

Safety data sheets (SDS)
www.molecularinstruments.com/safety

Patents
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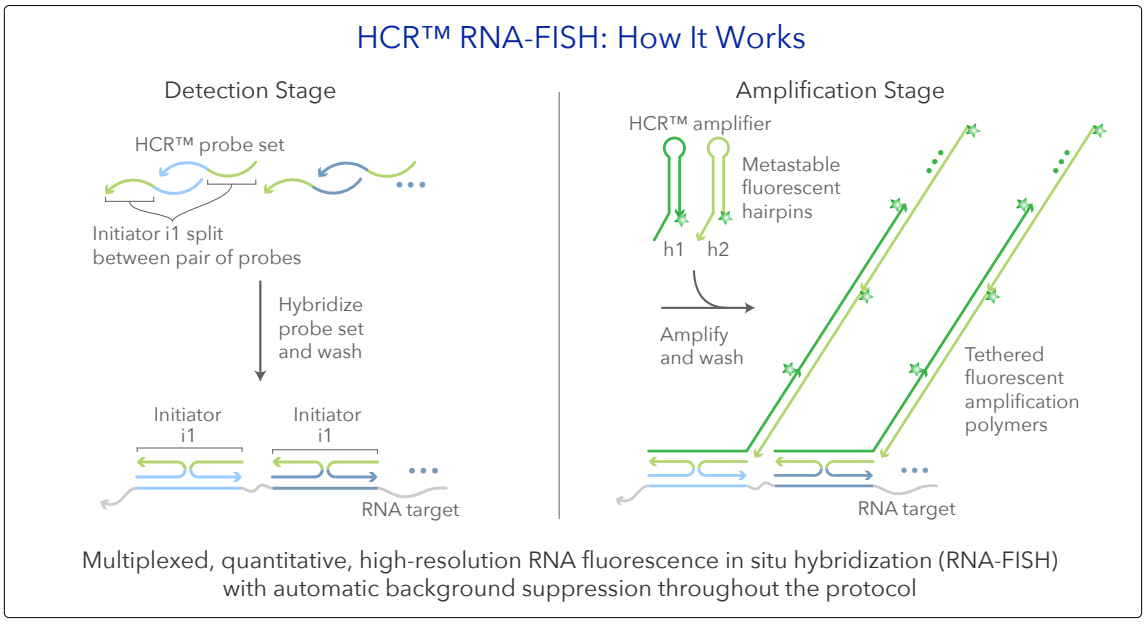

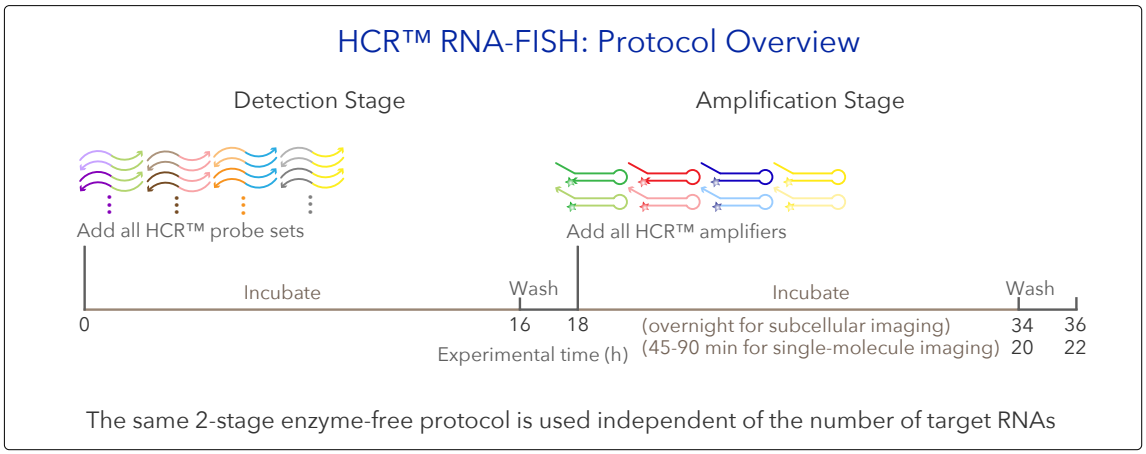

HCR™ RNA-FISH

Multiplexed, quantitative, high-resolution RNA imaging

Multiplexed Experiment

- Order one HCR™ RNA-FISH bundle per target RNA

Example 2-Plex Experiment

- HCR™ RNA-FISH bundle for target mRNA1
  - HCR™ probe set: target mRNA1 for use with amplifier B1
  - HCR™ amplifier: B1-647
  - HCR™ RNA-FISH buffers: probe hybridization buffer, probe wash buffer, amplification buffer (for use with all bundles)
- HCR™ RNA-FISH bundle for target mRNA2
  - HCR™ probe set: target mRNA2 for use with amplifier B2
  - HCR™ amplifier: B2-488

Storage conditions

- Store HCR™ probe sets, HCR™ amplifiers, HCR™ RNA-FISH probe hybridization buffer, and HCR™ RNA-FISH 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.

Sample preparation protocol

1. Bake slides in a dry oven for 1 h at 60 °C to improve sample adhesion to the slide.
2. In a fume hood, deparaffinize FFPE tissue by immersing slide in dewaxing solution (e.g., xylene, Pro-Par Clearant etc.) for 3 × 5 min. Move slides up and down occasionally.
   CAUTION: *dewaxing solution may contain hazardous material, use with care.*
   NOTE: *Each 50 mL tube can fit two outward-facing slides. A volume of 30 mL is sufficient to immerse sections in the tube. If desired, a larger number of slides can be processed together using a Coplin jar.*
3. Incubate slides in 100% ethanol (EtOH) for 2 × 3 min at room temperature. Move slides up and down occasionally.
4. Rehydrate with a series of graded EtOH washes at room temperature.
   (a) 95% EtOH for 3 min
   (b) 70% EtOH for 3 min
   (c) 50% EtOH for 3 min
   (d) Nanopure water for 3 min
5. Bring 500 mL of 1× Tris-EDTA buffer (pH 9.0) in a beaker to boil in a microwave.
   NOTE: *1× citrate buffer (pH 6.0) can be used in place of Tris-EDTA buffer (pH 9.0).*
6. Maintain Tris-EDTA buffer temperature at 95 °C on a hot plate.
7. Immerse slides for 15 min.
8. Remove beaker from hot plate and add 100 mL of nanopure water every 5 min to allow temperature to decrease to 45 °C in 20 min.
9. Immerse slides in 400 mL of nanopure water in a separate container for 10 min at room temperature.
10. Immerse slides in 1× PBST for 2 × 2 min at room temperature.
    NOTE: *avoid using calcium chloride and magnesium chloride in PBS as this leads to increased autofluorescence in the tissue.*
11. Dry slide using a Kimwipe. Avoid touching the tissue.
12. Draw a barrier around the tissue using a hydrophobic pen.
13. Optional: Introduce 200 μL of 10 μg/mL of proteinase K solution on top of sample and incubate slides in a humidified chamber for 10 min at 37 °C.
    NOTE: *Proteinase K concentration and treatment time should be reoptimized for each batch of proteinase K.*
14. Wash slides by immersing in 1× PBST.
15. Repeat with fresh 1× PBST.
16. Proceed to HCR™ RNA-FISH assay.

Multiplexed HCR™ RNA-FISH protocol

Detection stage

1. Pre-warm a humidified chamber to 37 °C.
2. Dry slide by blotting edges on a Kimwipe.
3. Add 200 μL of probe hybridization buffer on top of the tissue sample.
   CAUTION: *probe hybridization buffer contains formamide, a hazardous material.*
4. Pre-hybridize for 10 min inside the humidified chamber.
5. Prepare probe solution by adding 0.4 pmol of each probe set (e.g. 0.4 μL of 1 μM stock) to 100 μL of probe hybridization buffer at 37 °C.
   NOTE: *For single-molecule RNA imaging, use higher probe concentration (e.g., 16 nM) to increase probe hybridization yield. If desired, this approach can also be used to increase signal for subcellular quantitative RNA imaging.*
6. Remove the pre-hybridization solution and drain excess buffer on slide by blotting edges on a Kimwipe.
7. Add 50–100 μL of the probe solution on top of the tissue sample.
   NOTE: *Amount of probe solution depends on the size of the tissue.*
8. Place a coverslip on the sample and incubate overnight (>12 h) in the 37 °C humidified chamber.
9. Immerse slide in probe wash buffer at 37 °C to float off coverslip.
   CAUTION: *probe wash buffer contains formamide, a hazardous material.*
10. Remove excess probes by incubating slide at 37 °C in:
    (a) 75% of probe wash buffer / 25% 5× SSCT for 15 min
    (b) 50% of probe wash buffer / 50% 5× SSCT for 15 min
    (c) 25% of probe wash buffer / 75% 5× SSCT for 15 min
    (d) 100% 5× SSCT for 15 min

    NOTE: *Wash solutions should be pre-heated to 37 °C before use.*
11. Immerse slide in 5× SSCT for 5 min at room temperature.

Amplification stage

1. Dry slide by blotting edges on a Kimwipe.
2. Add 200 μL of amplification buffer on top of the tissue sample and pre-amplify in a humidified chamber for 30 min at room temperature.
3. Separately prepare 6 pmol of hairpin h1 and 6 pmol of hairpin h2 by snap cooling 2 μL of 3 μM stock (heat at 95 °C for 90 seconds and cool to room temperature in a dark drawer for 30 min).
   NOTE: *Hairpins h1 and h2 are provided in hairpin storage buffer ready for snap cooling. h1 and h2 should be snap cooled in separate tubes.*
4. Prepare hairpin solution by adding snap-cooled h1 hairpins and snap-cooled h2 hairpins to 100 μL of amplification buffer at room temperature.
5. Remove the pre-amplification solution and drain excess buffer on slide by blotting edges on a Kimwipe.
6. Add 50–100 μL of the hairpin solution on top of the tissue sample.
   NOTE: *Amount of hairpin solution depends on the size of the tissue.*
7. Incubate overnight (>12 h) in a dark humidified chamber at room temperature.
   NOTE: *For single-molecule RNA imaging, amplify for a shorter period of time to ensure single-molecule dots are diffraction-limited.*
8. Remove excess hairpins by incubating slide in 5 × SSCT at room temperature for:
   (a) 1 × 5 min
   (b) 2 × 15 min
   (c) 1 × 5 min
9. Dry slide by blotting edges on a Kimwipe.
10. Add 50–100 μL of antifade mounting reagent on top of the tissue.
11. Place a coverslip on top for microscopy.

Buffer recipes

4% paraformaldehyde (PFA)
4% PFA
1× PBS

For 30 mL of solution
7.5 mL of 16% PFA solution
3 mL of 10× PBS
Fill up to 30 mL with water

1× Tris-EDTA buffer
1× Tris-EDTA buffer

For 500 mL of solution
5 mL of 100× Tris-EDTA buffer pH 9.0 (Abcam Cat. #ab93684)
Fill up to 500 mL with water

1× citrate buffer
1× citrate buffer

For 500 mL of solution
5 mL of 100× citrate buffer pH 6.0 (Abcam Cat. #ab93678)
Fill up to 500 mL with water

Proteinase K solution
10 μg/mL proteinase K

For 1 mL of solution
0.5 μL of 20 mg/mL proteinase K
Fill up to 1 mL with 1× PBS

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 H_2O

NOTE: *avoid using calcium chloride and magnesium chloride in PBS as this leads to increased autofluorescence in the samples.*

HCR™ Technology Citation Notes

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

- **HCR™ IF + HCR™ RNA-FISH**
  HCR™ IF + HCR™ RNA-FISH enables a unified approach to multiplexed, quantitative, high-resolution protein immunofluorescence (IF) and RNA fluorescence in situ hybridization (RNA-FISH), with quantitative 1-step enzyme-free signal amplification performed for all protein and RNA targets simultaneously (Schwarzkopf et al., 2021).

- **HCR™ IF**
  HCR™ IF enables multiplexed, quantitative, high-resolution protein immunofluorescence (IF) in highly autofluorescent samples (e.g., FFPE brain tissue sections) (Schwarzkopf et al., 2021).

- **HCR™ RNA-FISH (v3.0)**
  Third-generation HCR™ RNA-FISH (v3.0) enables multiplexed, quantitative, high-resolution RNA fluorescence in situ hybridization (RNA-FISH) with automatic background suppression *throughout the protocol* for dramatically enhanced performance (signal-to-background, subcellular quantitative RNA imaging precision, single-molecule quantitative RNA imaging fidelity) and ease-of-use (no probe set optimization for new targets and organisms) (Choi et al., 2018). Quantitative analysis modes:

  - Subcellular quantitative RNA imaging: analog mRNA relative quantitation with subcellular resolution in the anatomical context of thick autofluorescent samples.
  - Single-molecule quantitative RNA imaging: digital mRNA absolute quantitation with single-molecule resolution in the anatomical context of thick autofluorescent samples.
  - Quantitative RNA flow cytometry: analog mRNA relative quantitation for high-throughput expression profiling of mammalian cells and bacteria.

  Protocols for HCR™ RNA-FISH (v3.0) in diverse organisms are adapted from the Zoo paper.

- **Subcellular quantitative RNA imaging**
  Subcellular quantitative RNA imaging enables mRNA relative quantitation with subcellular resolution in the anatomical context of thick autofluorescent samples (e.g., whole-mount vertebrate embryos). The read-out/read-in analysis framework enables bidirectional quantitative discovery in an anatomical context (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 solution
  - generic sample on a slide
  - mammalian cells on a slide
  - mammalian cells in suspension
  - whole-mount chicken embryos
  - whole-mount fruit fly embryos
  - whole-mount mouse embryos
  - whole-mount nematode larvae
  - whole-mount sea urchin embryos
  - whole-mount zebrafish embryos and larvae

- **Single-molecule quantitative RNA imaging**
  Single-molecule quantitative RNA imaging enables RNA absolute quantitation with single-molecule resolution in the anatomical context of thick autofluorescent samples (e.g., 0.5 mm adult mouse brain sections) (Shah et al., 2016).

- **HCR™ northern blots**
  HCR™ northern blots enable multiplexed quantification of RNA target size and abundance for up to 5 target RNAs (Schwarzkopf & Pierce, 2016).

- **HCR™ RNA-FISH (v2.0)**
  Second-generation in situ HCR™ RNA-FISH 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™ RNA-FISH (v1.0)**
  First-generation HCR™ RNA-FISH 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™ technology**
  HCR™ amplifiers enable multiplexed, quantitative, 1-step, isothermal, enzyme-free signal amplification in diverse technological settings (Dirks & Pierce, 2004).