



# Direct PCR from blood preserved on Whatman FTA® and 903® Cards using Phusion® Blood Direct PCR Kit

Pak Yang Chum and Chas Andre, Finnzymes Oy

December 2008

Finnzymes' Phusion® Blood Direct PCR Kit enables DNA amplification directly from blood samples stored on Whatman FTA® and 903® Cards. No prior DNA extraction or purification steps are needed. When combined with Finnzymes' Piko® Thermal Cycler and ultra-thin walled UTW® reaction vessels, PCR products can be amplified in as little as 30 minutes.

## Introduction

Paper cards are a popular method of storing blood due to their ease of use and long term stability at room temperature (1,2). However, these cards often contain various chemicals that may inhibit enzymatic reactions, and thus special extraction buffers and/or protocols are generally recommended before such samples can be used in PCR. Phusion Blood DNA Polymerase is a unique, engineered hot start enzyme based on fusion protein technology (3). This polymerase contains a dsDNA binding domain which allows efficient amplification of DNA even in the presence of a wide range of inhibitors, including those found in blood and in storage cards. Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit contains a complete set of reagents optimized to perform in the presence of blood regardless of the storage method or anticoagulant used. Here we present protocols for the robust amplification of genomic DNA from blood dried onto Whatman 903, FTA Elute and FTA Gene Cards.

## Materials and methods

- Phusion® Blood Direct PCR Kit (Finnzymes Oy)
- Piko® Thermal Cycler (Finnzymes Oy)
- UTW® tubes or plates (Finnzymes Oy)
- Primers:

506 bp fragment of human Cathepsin K gene

F: GAGAATCGCTTGAACCCGGGAGGTGTAGGT 30 nt Tm 78.1°C  
R: CCTGCTGATGCTGGCCTCTTCTCTTTG 30 nt Tm 78.1°C

1020 bp fragment of human glutathione peroxidase 3 gene

F: CATCAGCCCGTCTAGGAACCCAGTCATCAG 30 nt Tm 77.6°C  
R: CTCCTTCATCCCGCTACACCACGCATACAC 30 nt Tm 77.9°C

3.8 kb fragment of human beta-globin gene

F: GCACTGGCTTAGGAGTTGGACT 22 nt Tm 65.9°C  
R: ACAGACACCCAGGCCTACTTG 21 nt Tm 65.6°C

7.5 kb fragment of human beta-globin gene

F: GCACTGGCTTAGGAGTTGGACTCAAACC 29 nt Tm 73.9°C  
R: CAACTGCTGAAAGAGATGCGGTGGG 25 nt Tm 75.1°C

237 bp fragment of human SOX21 gene 5' region (control primers of Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit)

F: AGCCCTTGGGGASTTGAATTGCTG 24 nt Tm 73.5°C  
R: GCACTCCAGAGGACACGRGTGTCAATA 27 nt Tm 72.2°C/  
75.3°C  
(R=A/G)

## Sample preparation

Fresh blood or blood preserved with heparin (1.4 IU/ml), K<sub>2</sub>EDTA (1.8 mg/ml), or Na Citrate (109 mM) was applied onto the Whatman 903 Cards, FTA Elute Cards, or FTA Gene Cards and dried as per the manufacturer's instructions.

For direct PCR, a 1 mm disc was punched out of the sample in the card and used in the following PCR reaction volumes:

- Whatman 903: 10–50 µl
- Whatman FTA Elute Card: 25–50 µl
- Whatman FTA Gene Card: 50 µl

If larger punches or smaller reaction volumes were used, punches were washed with 20 µl of H<sub>2</sub>O at 50°C for 3 minutes. After removing the H<sub>2</sub>O, PCR reaction components were added directly to the rinsed punch.

## Reaction conditions for PCR

Component	25 µl reaction	50 µl reaction	Final conc.
H <sub>2</sub> O	Add to 25 µl	Add to 50 µl	
2x Phusion® Blood PCR Buffer	12.5 µl	25 µl	1x
primer A	x µl	x µl	0.5 µM
primer B	x µl	x µl	0.5 µM
Phusion® Blood DNA Polymerase	0.5 µl	1 µl	
903/FTA Card	1 mm punch	1 mm punch	
Optional components for reaction optimization*			
50 mM MgCl <sub>2</sub>	0.75 µl	1.5 µl	
50 mM EDTA	0.6–1.25 µl	1.25–2.5 µl	
DMSO	1.25 µl	2.5 µl	5 %

\* Please refer to the Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit manual for more instructions related to optional components.

## Cycling protocols

Cycle step	2-step protocol		3-step protocol		Cycles
	Temp.	Time	Temp.	Time	
Lysis of cells	98°C	5 min	98°C	5 min	1
Denaturation	98°C	1 s	98°C	1 s	35–40
Annealing*	-	-	X°C	5 s	
Extension**	72°C	15–30 s /kb	72°C	15–30 s /kb	
Final extension	72°C 4°C	1 min hold	72°C 4°C	1 min hold	1

\* 2-step protocol is applicable when primer Tm values are at least 69–72°C as calculated with Finnzymes' Tm calculator. As a basic rule, for primers > 20 nt, anneal at Tm +3°C of the lower Tm primer. For primers ≤ 20 nt use an annealing temperature equal to the Tm of the lower Tm primer.

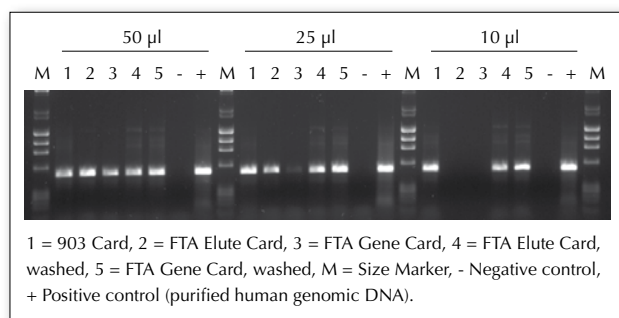
\*\* The recommended extension time is 15 seconds for amplicons ≤ 1 kb, and 30 s/kb for amplicons >1kb.

## Results

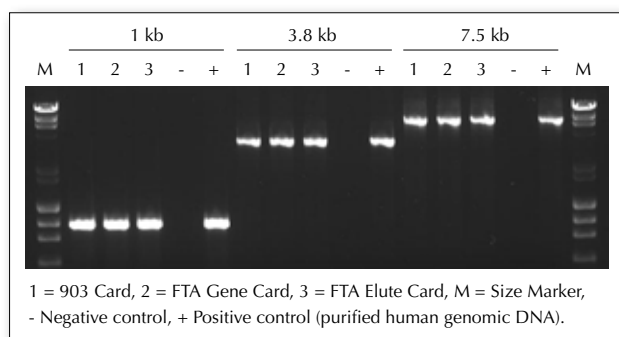
With Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit, it is possible to amplify DNA directly from blood stored on various filter cards. We have seen that the various types of storage cards show differing levels of inhibition when used in Direct PCR (Figure 1). 903 Cards showed almost no inhibition, and a 1 mm punch could be used with reaction volumes as low as 10  $\mu$ l. FTA Elute Cards inhibited direct PCR reactions slightly; a 1 mm disc in a 25–50  $\mu$ l reaction worked well, but when placed in a 10  $\mu$ l reaction, the PCR reaction was totally inhibited. FTA Gene Cards showed the greatest level of inhibition. Without any pretreatments, a 1 mm punch of FTA Gene Card worked well only in a 50  $\mu$ l reaction volume. For smaller reaction volumes, a very simple washing protocol was enough to remove inhibitors from both FTA Elute and FTA Gene Cards. After washing the card punch for 3 minutes with H<sub>2</sub>O, it could be used for direct PCR with Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit at all reaction volumes tested (Figure 1).

Direct PCR from blood dried onto cards is also applicable to long amplicons. Punches from 903 Cards and rinsed punches from FTA Elute and FTA Gene Cards (all 1 mm in diameter) were used in 50  $\mu$ l PCR reactions with primers specific for 1kb, 3.8 kb and 7.5 kb amplicons. In all cases, PCR worked well (Figure 2).

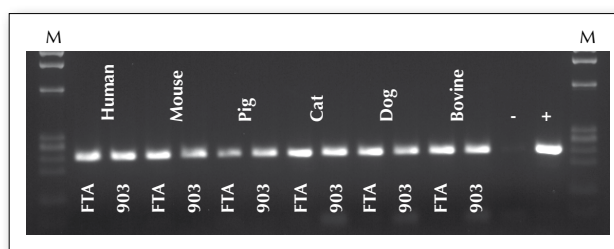
The Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit is compatible with blood from variety of species. A highly conserved 237 bp region upstream of the SOX21 gene (4) was successfully amplified from blood of a number of vertebrate species dried onto 903 and FTA Gene Cards (Figure 3).



**Figure 1. Direct amplification of a 500 bp genomic DNA fragment from human blood treated with heparin and preserved on various cards.** Reactions were performed from 1 mm punches either rinsed or placed directly into PCR reactions of 50, 25 or 10  $\mu$ l in volume. A 2-step PCR protocol described in Materials and Methods was used. Using Piko Thermal Cyclers and UTW reaction vessels, the total PCR protocol time was 30 minutes.



**Figure 2. Direct PCR of 1 kb, 3.8 kb and 7.5 kb gDNA amplicons from human blood treated with EDTA and preserved on various cards.** Reactions were performed from 1 mm punches in 50  $\mu$ l reactions (FTA Gene Card punches were rinsed as described in Materials and Methods for 7.5 kb fragment). A 2-step protocol was used for 1 kb and 7.5 kb fragments and a 3-step protocol for 3.8 kb amplicon. Using Piko Thermal Cyclers and UTW reaction vessels the total PCR protocol times were 30 min for 1 kb, 1 h 35 min for 3.8 kb, and 2 h 33 min for 7.5 kb fragment.



**Figure 3. Direct PCR performed on blood from several mammalian species treated with EDTA and preserved on 903 and FTA Gene Cards.** Reactions were performed from 1 mm punches using the universal control primers included in the Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit and 20  $\mu$ l reaction volume (FTA Gene Cards were rinsed). The 2-step PCR protocol time was 30 minutes. Piko Thermal Cyclers and UTW reaction vessels were used in PCR. M Size Marker, - Negative control, + Positive control (purified human genomic DNA).

## Discussion

Amplification of DNA directly from storage cards commonly used for preserving blood samples is particularly challenging due to PCR inhibitors present in both blood and the storage cards themselves. With conventional DNA polymerases, a thorough washing protocol is required to remove the contaminants from the punch discs before PCR (5). We show here that Phusion Blood Direct PCR Kit allows amplification of DNA directly from blood stored on cards such as Whatman 903, FTA Elute and FTA Gene Cards with no or very little pretreatment. Direct PCR from a 1 mm punch worked well for all the cards tested in 50  $\mu$ l PCR reaction volume. In smaller reaction volumes, 903 Cards could be used directly whereas FTA Cards were applicable after a brief rinsing step.

When combined with the fast Piko Thermal Cyclers and ultra-thin walled reaction vessels, total protocol times can be significantly reduced while maintaining good product yields with no DNA isolation or purification steps.

## References

1. Kline M.C. *et al.* (2002) *Anal. Chem.* 74: 1863–1869.
2. Makowski G.S. *et al.* (2003) *Ann Clin Lab Sci.* 33: 243–250.
3. Wang Y. *et al.* (2004) *Nuc. Acids Res.* 32:1197–1207.
4. Woolfe A. *et al.* (2005) *PLoS Biology* 3: 116–130.
5. [www.whatman.com/FTA](http://www.whatman.com/FTA)

Finzymes' Direct PCR allows amplification of DNA directly from various starting materials such as blood, mouse ear and tail tissues, plants, and FFPE tissue samples. For more information about the Direct PCR products and protocols, please visit [www.finzymes.com/directpcr](http://www.finzymes.com/directpcr).

Phusion® and Piko® are registered trademarks of Finzymes Oy or its affiliates in European Community (EC trademarks). UTW® is a registered trademark of Finzymes Oy or its affiliates in European Community (EC trademark) and Japan. FTA® and 903® are registered trademarks of companies within the Whatman Group.