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2	Intermittent preventive treatment with dihydroartemisinin-piperaquine in
3	Ugandan schoolchildren selects for Plasmodium falciparum transporter
4	polymorphisms that modify drug sensitivity
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19	Running title: Selection for <i>P. falciparum</i> polymorphisms by DP
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## 22 Abstract

23 Dihydroartemisinin-piperaquine (DP) offers prolonged protection against malaria, but its impact on Plasmodium falciparum drug sensitivity is uncertain. In a trial of intermittent 24 preventive treatment in schoolchildren in Tororo, Uganda in 2011-12, monthly DP for one 25 26 year decreased the incidence of malaria by 96% compared to placebo; DP once per school term offered protection primarily during the first month after therapy. To assess the impact 27 of DP on selection of drug resistance, we compared the prevalence of key polymorphisms in 28 29 isolates that emerged at different intervals after treatment with DP. Blood obtained monthly and at each episode of fever was assessed for *P. falciparum* parasitemia by 30 microscopy. Samples from 160 symptomatic and 650 asymptomatic episodes of parasitemia 31 32 were assessed at 4 loci (N86Y, Y184F, and D1246Y in *pfmdr1* and K76T in *pfcrt*) that modulate sensitivity to aminoquinoline antimalarials utilizing a ligase detection reaction 33 34 fluorescent microsphere assay. For pfmdr1 N86Y and pfcrt K76T, but not the other studied 35 polymorphisms, the prevalences of mutant genotypes were significantly greater in children who had received DP within the past 30 days compared to those not treated within 60 days 36 (86Y 18.0% vs. 8.3%, p=0.03; 76T 96.0% vs. 86.1%, p=0.05), suggesting selective pressure of 37 DP. Full sequencing of *pfcrt* in a subset of samples did not identify additional polymorphisms 38 39 selected by DP. In summary, parasites that emerged soon after treatment with DP were 40 more likely than parasites not under drug pressure to harbor pfmdr1 and pfcrt 41 polymorphisms associated with decreased sensitivity to aminoquinoline antimalarials.

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## 43 Introduction

Malaria, in particular infection with *Plasmodium falciparum*, remains a huge public 44 health problem, with the highest disease burden in sub-Saharan Africa (1, 2). Important 45 advances have been made in malaria control recently, with a significant decrease in malaria 46 47 burden and progress towards elimination noted in some areas (3). Among key tools in the control of malaria is intermittent preventive treatment (IPT), the provision of full treatment 48 courses at regular intervals to high risk populations (4). IPT is standard practice during 49 50 pregnancy (IPTp), is recommended in children living in seasonal malaria transmission settings as seasonal malaria chemoprevention (5), and is being investigated in other 51 populations (6-9). However, currently IPT is advocated only with sulfadoxine-52 pyrimethamine (SP) or a combination of SP and amodiaquine (SP+AQ) (5, 10), regimens 53 severely compromised by drug resistance in much of Africa (11-13). For malaria treatment, 54 55 older regimens have been replaced by artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs), and 56 a similar change may be warranted for IPT. Dihydroartemisinin-piperaquine (DP), which provides rapid killing of most parasites 57 by dihydroartemisinin, prolonged action against any remaining parasites by piperaquine, 58 59 and protection for weeks after therapy due to the long half-life of piperaquine, has recently 60 been investigated for IPT. Compared to IPTp with SP, IPTp with DP was associated with lower risks of *P. falciparum* infection and symptomatic malaria during pregnancy in Kenya 61 (14) and Uganda (15). In Ugandan schoolchildren, monthly IPT with DP was associated with 62 reduced incidence of malaria and reduced prevalence of parasitemia and anemia compared 63 to DP given approximately once every three months or placebo (6, 16). Similar results were 64 observed in Ugandan infants when monthly IPT with DP was compared with daily 65 66 trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole or monthly SP (7). Thus, DP is a promising alternative to SP

or SP+AQ for IPT, but its benefits may be undone by the emergence of *P. falciparum*resistance to either component of the combination.

Mediators of decreased drug sensitivity and selective pressures for resistance are 69 70 quite well understood for some antimalarial drugs. Resistance to the aminoquinolines 71 chloroquine and amodiaquine is mediated largely by polymorphisms in putative drug 72 transporters encoded by pfcrt and pfmdr1 (13, 17), and these polymorphisms are selected in new infections that emerge soon after therapy with artesunate-AQ (AS/AQ) (18, 19). 73 74 Piperaquine is a bisaminoquinoline related to chloroquine and amodiaquine. Resistance to piperaquine was widely reported during the pre-artemisinin era in China (20), and recently 75 clinically relevant resistance, with frequent recrudescences after therapy with DP, has been 76 77 noted in Cambodia(21-23). However, mechanisms of resistance to piperaquine are uncertain. Use of DP for treatment (24) or chemoprevention (25) did not select for the 78 79 polymorphisms associated with chloroquine resistance in Burkina Faso, but in Uganda 80 recent treatment with DP selected for pfmdr1 mutations associated with decreased 81 sensitivity to aminoquinolines (26). Interestingly, some other antimalarials, notably lumefantrine, which is a component of the Ugandan first-line antimalarial regimen 82 artemether-lumefantrine (AL), exert the opposite selective pressure. Thus, new infections 83 emerging within two months of treatment with AL showed selection of wild-type sequences 84 at the *pfcrt* K76T and *pfmdr1* N86Y and D1246Y alleles (26-29); mutant sequences are 85 86 selected at these same alleles by aminoquinolines. Of recent concern has been resistance to artemisinins, manifest as delayed parasite clearance after therapy, in Southeast Asia (22, 30-87 32), but recent studies utilizing clinical, parasitological, and molecular markers (33, 34) 88 89 suggest that the artemisinin-resistant phenotype is not yet prevalent in Uganda (26, 35, 36) 90 or other parts of Africa (37, 38).

Taken together, available evidence suggests that DP may select for the same *P*. *falciparum* polymorphisms as other aminoquinolines, leading to decreased treatment or
preventive efficacy of DP, but data on the effects of IPT with DP are very limited. We
therefore assessed the prevalences of key polymorphisms in isolates that emerged at
different intervals after treatment with DP using samples from a recent trial evaluating IPT
with DP in Ugandan schoolchildren.

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98 Methods

Clinical trial. Study samples were from a randomized, double-blinded, placebo-99 controlled trial conducted in Tororo, Uganda from 2011 to 2012 (6, 39). In brief, 740 100 101 schoolchildren aged 6–14 years from one primary school in Mulanda sub-county, Tororo 102 District were enrolled and randomized 1:1:1 to one of three study arms: DP monthly, DP 103 once per school term (four treatments over 12 months), or placebo. DP was administered 104 according to weight based guidelines and treatment was directly observed. Finger-prick 105 blood samples were obtained at enrollment, every month, and with every episode of fever to assess for malaria infection by thick blood smear, and for storage on filter paper. 106 107 Episodes of uncomplicated malaria were treated with AL. Children were followed for 12 108 months. The trial was approved by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and the Makerere University School of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee and 109 registered at ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT01231880). Molecular studies were also approved by the 110 University of California, San Francisco Committee on Human Research. 111

Selection of samples for testing of parasite polymorphisms. We considered all samples that were positive for *P. falciparum* parasitemia based on evaluation of Giemsastained thick blood smears, as previously described (6). A total of 160 symptomatic and

1,522 asymptomatic episodes of P. falciparum parasitemia were documented. The number 115 116 of samples analysed was determined by estimating the power for two-sample comparison of proportions using effect sizes observed for each mutant polymorphism in a recent study 117 in Tororo (0.34 for *pfmdr*1 N86Y, 0.11 for *pfmdr*1 D1246Y, 0.04 for *pfmdr*1 184F, and 0.09 118 119 for *pfcrt* K76), fixing  $\alpha$  at 0.05 (26). The sample size giving the maximum power was considered in the analysis. From these estimates, we analysed all 160 samples from 120 symptomatic episodes, all 50 samples from children with recurrent parasitemia within 13-30 121 122 days of prior therapy with DP, and 600 samples randomly selected from children with either recurrent parasitemia >30 days after prior therapy with DP or from the control arm of the 123 study. All samples were analyzed for 4 common *P. falciparum* polymorphisms known to be 124 associated with drug sensitivity: pfcrt K76T, and pfmdr1 N86Y, Y184F, and D1246Y. A subset 125 of 25 samples from children with prior DP therapy within 13-30 days and 25 randomly 126 127 selected paired samples from children in the control arm (each pair matched for collection 128 within 15 days of each other) were subjected to sequencing of the complete *pfcrt* gene. Characterization of 4 pfcrt and pfmdr1 polymorphisms. DNA was extracted from 129 filter paper blood spots into 100 µL of water using Chelex-100 as previously described (40). 130 Gene fragments spanning all loci of interest were amplified in nested reactions (26), and 131 failed reactions were repeated. To detect polymorphisms, multiplex ligase detection 132 reaction-fluorescent microsphere assays were performed as previously described (26, 41). 133 Sequencing of pfcrt. For a subset of samples pfcrt was sequenced from DNA samples 134 as previously described (42) with minor modifications. Briefly, pfcrt was amplified in 3 135 nested-PCR reactions, covering exons 1-2, 3-8, and 9-13, using the published primer 136 sequences. For both rounds of PCR, each 25  $\mu L$  reaction contained 2 mM MgSO4, 200  $\mu M$ 137 138 each dNTP, 1 µM each primer, 1X PCR Buffer, and 2U Platinum Taq DNA Polymerase High

Fidelity (Invitrogen). Conditions for all reactions were 94oC for 2 min; 30 cycles of 94oC for 139 140 20 sec, 47oC for 10 sec, and 60oC for 3 min; and a final extension at 60oC for 5 min. Amplicons were cloned with the TOPO-TA Cloning Kit for Sequencing and transfected into 141 One Shot TOP10 chemically competent E. coli (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer's 142 instructions. Colonies were grown overnight under kanamycin selection, picked, and 143 incubated in LB broth with kanamycin. Plasmid DNA was purified using the PureLink Quick 144 Plasmid Miniprep Kit (Invitrogen), digested with *EcoRI* to confirm the insert size, and then 145 146 sequenced (Eurofins) using M13 forward and reverse primers. DNA sequence data were assembled and edited, and mutations were detected by alignment and comparison it to the 147 expected sequence using CodonCode Aligner v. 5.1.5. Multiple clones were sequenced to 148 distinguish true polymorphisms from PCR errors, including at least 3 clones for all but 3 149 fragments, for which 2 clones were sequenced. 150

151 Statistical analysis. Data analysis was done using Stata version 14 (StataCorp). 152 Outcomes of interest were the prevalence of pure mutant alleles for each locus of interest. 153 The exposure variable of interest was duration since prior DP dose, evaluated as a 154 categorical variable split into 13 – 30, 31 – 60, and > 60 days (including the no treatment control group) since the last treatment. Associations between outcomes and duration since 155 last treatment and differences between prevalences of *pfcrt* alleles were measured using 156 Fisher's exact test and expressed as relative risk. In all analyses, a 2-tailed P value < 0.05 was 157 158 considered statistically significant.

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#### 160 Results

Study samples. A total of 740 schoolchildren aged 6 – 14 years were randomized to
 one of the 3 study arms in the parent study and followed for one year from 2011 to 2012. As

previously reported, compared to either DP once per school term (approximately every 3 163 164 months) or placebo, monthly DP offered strong protective efficacy against malaria (6). For this sub-study, samples collected from children with blood smears positive for P. falciparum 165 were analyzed (Table 1). As expected due to the protective efficacy of monthly DP, fewer 166 167 samples were available from this study arm than from children who received placebo or DP 168 once per school term. A total of 810 samples from 160 symptomatic and 650 asymptomatic episodes of parasitemia were assessed (Table 1). Samples were analysed for common 169 170 polymorphisms in *pfmdr1* and *pfcrt*. Genotyping results were available for *pfcrt* K76T in 806 (99.5%) samples and for pfmdr1 N86Y, N184Y, and D1246Y in 800 (98.8%), 810 (100%), and 171 784 (96.8%) samples, respectively, and these results were included in the analysis. 172

173 Prevalence of pfcrt and pfmdr1 polymorphisms. The prevalence of the 4 studied polymorphisms was similar to that in contemporaneous samples from Tororo that were 174 175 reported previously (43). For two polymorphisms, pfcrt K76T and pfmdr1 N86Y, the 176 prevalence of mutant genotypes was significantly higher in samples from children who had 177 received DP within 30 days compared to those from children who had not received DP 178 within 60 days (Table 2). For the other studied polymorphisms the prevalence of genotypes did not differ between children who had or had not received recent therapy with DP. 179 180 Matching for duration since a prior episode, there was no difference in the prevalence of pfcrt and pfmdr1 mutant alleles between samples from children with symptomatic or 181 asymptomatic parasitemia (data not shown). 182

Sequencing of *pfcrt*. As DP may select for additional polymorphisms in *pfcrt*, we
sequenced the gene in a subset of 25 parasitemic samples under strong selective pressure
as indicated by emergence within 30 days of prior therapy with DP and in 25 paired samples
collected near the same date from children who did not receive DP. We successfully

sequenced the full gene in 17 pairs. We identified 9 polymorphisms, 6 of which are 187 188 commonly reported in African isolates (Supplemental Table 1). All isolates had the pfcrt 72-76 CVIET or a mix of the CVIET and CVMNT haplotype, except for one isolate that had the 189 pfcrt 72S mutation, resulting in the SVIET haplotype (in all 6 clones from a patient not 190 191 receiving DP). Two additional polymorphisms, L50P and F112I, were each identified in at least 2 clones from a single isolate, the 50P mutation in a control isolate and the 112I 192 mutation in an isolate from a child recently treated with DP (Supplemental Table 2). We 193 194 found 9 pfcrt haplotypes; the majority (76% in the DP arm and 65% in the control arm) were mutant at the six loci that are commonly mutant in Africa (74I, 75E, 76T, 220S, 271E, 371I) 195 (17). Overall, we saw no evidence that DP selected for novel pfcrt polymorphisms in 196 197 Ugandan children.

198

### 199 Discussion

200 Monthly IPT with DP was highly efficacious in reducing the risks of symptomatic malaria, parasitemia, and anemia in Ugandan schoolchildren (6). However, the 201 202 chemoprophylactic benefits of a long-acting antimalarial such as piperaquine may be accompanied by selection of drug resistant parasites (13). We tested whether DP selected 203 204 for parasites with genotypes associated with altered sensitivity to aminoquinolines. 205 Compared to parasites not under drug pressure, those that emerged within 30 days of IPT with DP were more likely to harbor two mutations, pfmdr1 86Y and pfcrt 76T; these 206 mutations are associated with resistance to chloroquine and amodiaquine (36, 43-45). 207 Thus, the marked preventive efficacy of IPT with DP may be accompanied by selection of 208 209 decreased sensitivity to aminoquinolines.

Resistance to chloroquine and amodiaquine is mediated primarily by polymorphisms 210 211 in putative drug transporters encoded by pfcrt and pfmdr1 (13, 46). The pfcrt 76T and pfmdr1 86Y and 1246Y mutations are selected in new infections that emerge soon after 212 therapy with regimens including chloroquine or amodiaquine (47). Piperaquine is a related 213 214 bisaminoquinoline, but mechanisms of resistance are uncertain, and studies of the selective pressure exerted by DP have yielded conflicting results. Specifically, use of DP for treatment 215 (48), or chemoprevention (25), did not select for the polymorphisms associated with 216 217 aminoquinoline resistance in Burkina Faso, but, in Uganda, recent treatment with DP selected for the *pfmdr1* 86Y and 1246Y mutations (26). Our new results shed additional 218 light on this area. In the setting of IPT in schoolchildren, recent receipt of DP was associated 219 220 with selection of the *pfmdr1* 86Y and *pfcrt* 76T mutations, but not the *pfmdr1* 1246Y mutation. Differing results may have been due to the changing baseline of polymorphism 221 222 prevalence in Uganda, with decreasing prevalence of *pfmdr1* 1246Y and *pfcrt* 76T over time. 223 Differences in results between West and East Africa may also be explained by differences in parasite backgrounds; of note, the *pfmdr1* 1246Y mutation, which until recently was 224 225 widespread in Uganda, has consistently been uncommon in Burkina Faso (24, 25, 28). Importantly, although we lack a head-to-head comparison, it appears that DP does 226 not select as readily as other ACTs for key transporter mutations. In multiple studies the 227 selective pressure of AS/AQ was marked (49), including a recent trial that showed the 228 prevalence of the pure pfmdr1 86Y mutation to rise from 59% at baseline to 99% in 229 recurrent infections within one month of treatment (50). AL also exerts strong selective 230 pressure, but in the opposite direction, with selection of wild type *pfcrt* K76 and *pfmdr1* N86 231 232 and N1246 sequences in parasites that emerge soon after therapy (19, 29). Our recent 233 findings indicate that DP selects for resistance in a manner similar to that of the other

234 aminoquinolines, but associations between recent therapy and transporter polymorphisms 235 were less marked, suggesting that the selective pressure of DP is lower than that of other regimens. This difference might be due to different mechanisms of transport for 236 piperaquine, a much larger molecule compared to chloroquine or amodiaquine. 237 238 We were concerned that IPT with DP might select for additional resistance-mediating P. falciparum polymorphisms. Polymorphisms in addition to those commonly described in 239 African isolates have been identified in other regions, in some cases with biochemical and 240 241 clinical consequences (51, 52). Sequencing of *pfcrt* in a subset of samples either under or not under the selective pressure of DP identified a few previously unidentified pfcrt 242 mutations, but it did not suggest that additional polymorphisms were selected by DP. 243 Our results have important implications for the use of DP for IPT. Although it offers 244 great promise for decreasing the malaria burden, DP use may be accompanied by selection 245 246 of parasites with decreased sensitivity to DP, and also to the related ACT AS/AQ. 247 Consideration of the opposite resistance pressures of different antimalarials has led some to 248 recommend multiple or rotating first-line antimalarial regimens (53). For example, AS/AQ and AL have opposite selective pressures on *pfcrt* and *pfmdr1* such that each regimen 249 should blunt selection of resistance to the other. Our results are consistent with a prior 250 251 study in Uganda indicating that DP has similar selective pressure to that of AS/AQ. Thus, considering resistance selection, using DP in IPT might be best advised when the standard 252 treatment regimen is AL, such that the treatment and IPT regimens offer mutual protection 253 against selection of resistance. Further, our results suggest that, with changing treatment 254 and control practices, continued surveillance for clinical, biochemical, and molecular 255 256 markers of antimalarial drug resistance in Africa is an important priority.

257

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- 269 **Potential conflicts of interest**
- 270 All authors report no conflicts of interest.

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# Table 1. Characteristics of study children that supplied samples and of episodes selected

for analysis

Characteristics of children with at least one episode of parasitemia	N=389			
Median age (IQR)	9 (7 – 11)			
Median duration of observation in days (IQR)	366 (365 – 368)			
Female sex (n, %)	209 (53.7)			
Study group n (%)				
Placebo	178 (45.8)			
IPT once a school term	178 (45.8)			
Monthly IPT	33 (8.4)			
Characteristics of episodes of parasitemia	N=810			
Malaria classification n (%)				
Asymptomatic episodes	650 (80.2)			
Clinical episodes	160 (19.8)			
Study group n (%)				
Placebo	334 (41.3)			
IPT once a school term	419 (51.7)			
Monthly IPT	57 (7.0)			
Duration since prior treatment n (%)				
15 – 30 days	50 (6.2)			
31 – 60 days	122 (15.1)			
61 – 90 days	170 (20.9)			
>90 days	134 (16.5)			
No treatment	334 (41.2)			

Allele	Days since last	RR for mutant genotype	p-value			
	dose of DP		n/N (%)	(95% CI)		
		Wild type	Mixed	Mutant		
pfmdr1	>60ª	189/630 (30.0)	389/630 (62.7)	52/630 (8.3)	1	
N86Y	31 - 60	53/120 (44.2)	57/120 (47.5)	10/120 (8.3)	1.01 (0.53 – 1.93)	0.98
	13 - 30	25/50 (50.0)	32/50 (32.0)	9/50 (18.0)	2.18 (1.14 – 4.16)	0.03
pfmdr1	>60ª	143/638 (22.4)	458/638 (68.8)	37/638 (5.8)	1	
N184Y	31 - 60	25/122 (20.5)	84/122 (68.8)	13/122 (10.7)	1.84 (1.01 – 3.35)	0.07
	13 - 30	21/50 (42.0)	28/50 (56.0)	1/50 (2.0)	0.34 (0.05 – 2.46)	0.51
pfmdr1	>60ª	261/616 (42.4)	292/616 (47.4)	63/616 (10.2)	1	
D1246Y	31 - 60	59/120 (49.2)	51/120 (42.5)	10/120 (8.3)	0.81 (0.43 – 1.54)	0.62
	13 - 30	24/48 (50.0)	21/48 (43.7)	3/48 (6.3)	0.61 (0.20 – 1.87)	0.61
pfcrt	>60ª	9/635 (1.4)	79/635 (12.4)	547/635 (86.1)	1	
K76T	31 - 60	1/121 (0.8)	13/121 (10.7)	107/121 (88.4)	1.03 (0.96 – 1.10)	0.56
	13 - 30	1/50 (2.0)	1/50 (2.0)	48/50 (96.0)	1.11 (1.04 – 1.19)	0.05

Table 2: Prevalence of *P. falciparum* pure mutant alleles stratified by time since last dose of DP.

<sup>a</sup>Includes those given no drug (placebo group)

Supplemental Table 1. Non-synonymous polymorphisms detected by sequencing of *pfcrt* in Ugandan isolates.

pfcrt Allele	Treatment	Wild	Mixed	Mutant	P-value <sup>b</sup>	
	Arm <sup>a</sup>	type	N (%)	N (%)		
		N (%)				
L50P	DP	17 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	p = 1.000	
2501	Control	16 (94)	1 (6)	0 (0)	p 1.000	
C72S	DP	17 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	p = 1.000	
0720	Control	16 (94)	0 (0)	1 (6)	p 1.000	
M74I	DP	0 (0)	2 (12)	15 (88)	p = 0.6552	
	Control	0 (0)	4 (24)	13 (76)	p 0.0332	
N75E	DP	0 (0)	2 (12)	15 (88)	p = 0.6552	
	Control	0 (0)	4 (24)	13 (76)		
К76Т	DP	0 (0)	2 (12)	15 (88)	p = 0.6552	
	Control	0 (0)	4 (24)	13 (76)	p 0.0332	
F112I	DP	16 (94)	1 (6)	0 (0)	p = 1.000	
	Control	17 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	p 1.000	
A220S	DP	0 (0)	2 (12)	15 (88)	p = 1.000	
A2203	Control	1 (6)	0 (0)	16 (94)	p 1.000	
Q271E	DP	0 (0)	2 (12)	15 (88)	p = 1.000	
22712	Control	1 (6)	0 (0)	16 (94)		
R371I	DP	1 (6)	0 (0)	16 (94)	p = 0.60	
	Control	3 (18)	0 (0)	14 (82)		

<sup>a</sup>Samples from the DP arm were parasites emerging 15-30 days after therapy with DP; controls were from the placebo group that did not receive DP.

<sup>b</sup>P-values are based on comparison of prevalence between treatment arms using Fisher's exact test.

	Treatment arm										
Haplotype	DP	Control	L50P	C72S	M74I	N75E	К76Т	F112I	A220S	Q271E	R371I
	N (%)	N (%)									
1	13 (76)	11 (65)	L	С	I	E	Т	F	S	E	Ι
2	1 (6)	2 (12)	L	С	M/I	N/E	К/Т	F	S	E	R
3	0 (0)	1 (6)	L	С	M/I	N/E	К/Т	F	S	E	Ι
4	0 (0)	1 (6)	L	S	I	E	Т	F	S	E	Ι
5	0 (0)	1 (6)	L	С	I	E	Т	F	Α	Q	R
6	1 (6)	0 (0)	L	С	I	E	Т	F	A/S	Q/E	-
7	1 (6)	0 (0)	L	С	M/I	N/E	К/Т	F	A/S	Q/E	Ι
8	1 (6)	0 (0)	L	С	I	E	Т	F/I	S	E	I
9	0 (0)	1 (6)	L/P	С	I	E	Т	F	S	E	I

# Supplemental Table 2. *Pfcrt* haplotypes seen in sequenced samples.

Loci with two alleles indicate a mixed genotype.