

## A photoactivable natural product with broad antiviral activity against enveloped viruses including highly pathogenic coronaviruses

Thomas Meunier, Lowiese Desmarets, Simon Bordage, Moussa Bamba, Kévin Hervouet, Yves Rouillé, Nathan François, Marion Decossas, Valentin Sencio, François Trottein, et al.

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#### 28 Abstract

29 The SARS-CoV-2 outbreak has highlighted the need for broad-spectrum antivirals against coronaviruses (CoVs). Here, pheophorbide a (Pba) was identified as a highly active antiviral 30 molecule against HCoV-229E after bioguided fractionation of plant extracts. The antiviral 31 activity of Pba was subsequently shown for SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV, and its mechanism of 32 action was further assessed, showing that Pba is an inhibitor of coronavirus entry by directly 33 34 targeting the viral particle. Interestingly, the antiviral activity of Pba depends on light exposure, 35 and Pba was shown to inhibit virus-cell fusion by stiffening the viral membrane as demonstrated by cryo-electron microscopy. Moreover, Pba was shown to be broadly active against several 36 37 other enveloped viruses, and reduced SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV replication in primary 38 human bronchial epithelial cells. Pba is the first described natural antiviral against SARS-CoV-2 with direct photosensitive virucidal activity that holds potential for COVID-19 therapy or 39 40 disinfection of SARS-CoV-2 contaminated surfaces.

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#### 43 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the lack of specific antiviral compounds available 44 against coronaviruses (CoVs). COVID-19 is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome 45 coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the third identified human CoV causing severe pneumonia (1–3). 46 47 Before 2003, coronaviruses were known to cause severe diseases in animals, but human CoVs, such as HCoV-229E and OC-43, were mainly associated with common colds, and only rarely 48 with severe outcomes (4). The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) 49 50 outbreak in 2003 was the first emergence of a highly pathogenic human CoV. The second highly pathogenic coronavirus, identified in 2012 in Saudi Arabia, is the Middle-East respiratory 51 52 syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), which is still endemically present up to date. SARS-CoV-2 53 is highly related to SARS-CoV (5). The tremendous efforts of the scientific community worldwide to counteract the COVID-19 pandemic have rapidly led to the development of highly 54 efficient vaccines that are now administered worldwide. Unfortunately, the emergence of SARS-55 CoV-2 variants in different regions of the world might render the vaccines less efficient and may 56 57 necessitate a booster vaccination every year which might not be achievable for billions of human 58 beings in all parts of the world. Therefore, to get rid of this pandemic and face future epidemics, it is assumed that not only vaccination is necessary but also the availability of efficient antiviral 59 treatments. Before the emergence of SARS-CoV-2, no specific antiviral was commercially 60 61 available for treatment of CoV infections. Due to the urgent need for antivirals against SARS-62 CoV-2, many researchers have focused their investigations on repurposing available drugs. Unfortunately, until now, none of them has been able to significantly reduce severe outcomes in 63 64 patients. High content screening in vitro of approved drugs identified some potential interesting antiviral molecules that have still to be tested in clinic on patients with COVID-19 (6–8). 65 Protease and polymerase inhibitors are also widely investigated in *in vitro* studies (9). Recently, 66 White *et al.* identified plitidepsin, an inhibitor of the host protein eEF1A as a potential antiviral 67

agent for SARS-CoV-2 (10). To date, only synthetic neutralizing monoclonal antibodies have
been approved for emergency usage in newly infected patients.

Coronavirus are members of the Coronaviridae family within the order Nidovirales. CoVs are 70 71 enveloped viruses with a positive single-stranded RNA genome of around 30 kb. The genome 72 encodes 4 structural proteins, the nucleocapsid (N), the spike (S), the envelope (E), and the 73 membrane (M) proteins. The S protein is important for the interaction of the viral particle with 74 the cellular host receptor, being angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) for SARS-CoVs (11, 75 12), dipeptidyl peptidase 4 (DPP4) for MERS-CoV (13) and aminopeptidase N (APN) for HCoV-229E (14). Once attached, the virus releases its genome into the cytosol by fusion of the viral 76 77 envelope with a host membrane. This fusion process is mediated by the S protein, a class I fusion 78 protein, and can occur either at the plasma- or at the endosomal membrane. Viral class I fusion 79 proteins are typically synthesized as inactive precursor proteins and require proteolytical 80 activation by cellular proteases to acquire their fusion competent state. The host-cell protease 81 TMPRSS2 has been shown to be necessary for plasma membrane fusion of many coronaviruses 82 including SARS-CoV-2 (12, 15, 16), whereas cathepsins are often involved in fusion processes at 83 endosomal membranes (17).

It is estimated that about 80% of the global population rely on traditional medicine to treat infectious diseases. Plants are a natural source of compounds with a structural diversity that is much higher than those obtained by chemical synthesis. Many of these compounds have proven their antiviral activity *in vitro*. To date, some reports describe the antiviral activity of natural compounds on coronavirus including SARS-CoV-2, but many of them are *in silico* analyses without any *in vitro* or *in vivo* evidence (18, 19).

Here we show that pheophorbide a (Pba) isolated from *Mallotus oppositifolius* (Geiseler)
Müll.Arg. (Mo, *Euphorbiaceae*) leave crude extract after bioguided fractionation has antiviral
activity against various CoVs, including HCoV-229E, MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, but also

against other enveloped viruses, such as yellow fever virus (YFV), hepatitis C virus (HCV) and
Sindbis virus (SINV). Moreover, we demonstrate that Pba is an antiviral photosensitizer directly
acting on the viral particle, thereby impairing the virus-cell fusion step.

96

97 **Results** 

# 98 Pheophorbide a (Pba) isolated from the crude methanolic extract from *Mallotus*99 oppositifolius (Geiseler) Müll.Arg. is highly active against HCoV-229E

100 Fifteen plants methanolic extracts from the Ivorian pharmacopeia, which were initially screened 101 for their anti-HCV activity (Bamba et al., submitted), were tested against HCoV-229E-Luc, a 102 luciferase recombinant version of HCoV-229E, which allows for a rapid and easy screening of 103 diverse molecules in vitro. Seven of the fifteen extracts significantly reduced HCoV-229E 104 infection (Figure 1A), whereas none of the extracts showed cytotoxicity in Huh-7 cells at the 105 tested concentrations (Bamba et al., submitted). The Mallotus oppositifolius (Mo) crude extract 106 was the most active and therefore selected for further analyses. A bioguided fractionation was 107 performed to find out the active compound(s) in this plant. This revealed that the methylene 108 chloride (MC) partition was the most active on HCoV-229E (Figure 1B) and was therefore 109 chosen for fractionation by centrifugal partition chromatography (CPC), leading to 10 fractions (F1-F10). Among these fractions, F7 was the most active and subjected to further fractionation by 110 111 preparative high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), leading to 9 subfractions (F7.1-112 F7.9). F7.7 was the most active of them and seemed to contain only one molecule. This dark green product was analysed by LC-UV-MS, which revealed only one peak (m+H = 593,3) with 113 114 two maxima of absorption in the visible light (409 and 663 nm). This information was used for a 115 Dictionary of Natural Product search (https://dnp.chemnetbase.com/), indicating that this molecule could be pheophorbide a (Pba). F7.7 purity and chemical structure was further 116 117 confirmed by nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR)(data not shown).

118 To confirm that Pba was the active compound of the Mo extract, a dose-response experiment was 119 performed with both the pure compound isolated in F7.7 and commercial Pba against HCoV-120 229E-Luc in Huh-7 cells. As shown in Figure 1C, IC<sub>50</sub> values were comparable for both natural 121 and commercial Pba (0.51  $\mu$ M and 0.54  $\mu$ M, respectively), confirming that Pba was indeed the 122 active substance of Mo.

123

#### 124 Pba is active against several human CoVs at non-cytotoxic concentrations

125 Prior to the assessment of its broad-spectrum activity against various CoVs, the cytotoxicity of 126 Pba was determined in different cells lines. As Pba is known to be a photosensitizer it was 127 assumed that light could affect its toxicity. MTS assays were performed in similar conditions 128 than the infection procedures. Cells were incubated with Pba at different concentrations and taken out of the incubator after 1 h to change the medium and left for 10 min under light exposure in 129 130 the biosafety cabinet (BSC), after which they were replaced in the incubator for 23 h. In parallel, 131 plates were kept for 24 h in the dark. Pba did not exhibit any toxicity at concentrations up to 132  $120 \,\mu\text{M}$  when left in the incubator for 24 h without light exposure, whereas it showed some 133 toxicity when the cells were shortly exposed to light, with CC<sub>50</sub> values of  $4.4 \pm 1.2 \mu M$ ,  $5.8 \pm 1.9$ 134  $\mu$ M and 5.5 ± 2.0  $\mu$ M for Huh-7, Vero-E6 cells, and Vero-81, respectively (Figure 2 and Figure S1). 135 Taken together, these results show that the cytotoxicity of Pba in cell culture depends on light 136 exposure.

137 The antiviral activity of Pba was tested on different human CoVs. It was first confirmed on 138 HCoV-229E by measuring infectious titers (Figure 2) with an IC<sub>50</sub> value of 0.1  $\mu$ M, resulting in a 139 selectivity index of 44. Similarly, infection inhibition assays were performed with various non-140 cytotoxic concentrations of Pba against SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV. As shown in Figure 2, 141 Pba had a strong antiviral effect against both highly pathogenic coronaviruses at non-toxic 142 concentrations, with  $IC_{50}$  values of 0.18  $\mu$ M for both SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV, resulting in

a selectivity index of 32 and 24, respectively.

144

#### 145 Pba is an inhibitor of coronavirus entry by direct action on the particle

146 Coronaviruses fusion is triggered by proteolytic cleavage of the spike protein. Depending on cellular proteases available, fusion can occur after endocytosis of the virus or directly at the cell 147 148 surface. It has been demonstrated that HCoV-229E and SARS-CoV-2 fusion at the plasma 149 membrane depends on the expression of the TMPRSS2 protease (12, 20), and for many 150 coronaviruses the entry via fusion at the plasma membrane has been shown to be the most 151 relevant pathway in vivo (21). To determine if Pba was able to inhibit both entry pathways, its 152 antiviral activity was tested in Huh-7, and Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells, the latter being obtained after transduction with a TMPRSS2 lentiviral expression vector. Two inhibitors of the entry pathway 153 154 were used as a control, E64D as inhibitor of the endocytic pathway and Camostat as inhibitor of 155 the TMPRSS2 protease. As shown in Figure S2, E64D specifically inhibited HCoV-229E 156 infection in Huh-7 cells whereas Camostat inhibited infection in Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells. 157 Complete inhibition of infection was observed when a combination of the two inhibitors was 158 used, showing that both entry pathways can be used in vitro. No difference in antiviral activity of 159 Pba against HCoV-229E infection was observed in the presence or absence of TMPRSS2 (Figure 160 3A). Similar results were obtained with SARS-CoV-2 in Vero cells (our unpublished 161 observation). These results show that Pba exhibits antiviral activity whatever the entry pathway 162 used.

To gain insights into the mechanism of action of Pba, a time-of-addition assay with Pba was performed during HCoV-229E or SARS-CoV-2 infection. Therefore, Pba was added at different time points before, during or after inoculation. All experiments were performed under BSC's light exposure. For both viruses, no inhibition of infection was observed when Pba was added to 167 the cells before inoculation (pre-treatment of the cells), whereas a strong inhibition of infection 168 was noticed when Pba was present during the virus inoculation step (Figure 3B and 3C). When 169 Pba was added only after inoculation, its inhibitory effect rapidly dropped and normal levels of 170 infectivity were observed again when Pba was added more than 2 h after inoculation. 171 Chloroquine is a well-known inhibitor of SARS-CoV-2 replication in vitro, as it inhibits virus-172 cell fusion after endocytosis by preventing endosomal acidification. As shown in Figure 3C, the 173 Pba and chloroquine inhibition curves were rather similar, showing that Pba could inhibit virus 174 entry. It is worth noting that normal levels of infectivity were observed when Pba was added 175 more than 2 h after inoculation, whereas chloroquine-treated cells remained at around 60% of 176 normal levels which may be due to inhibition of the second round of entry since our experimental 177 conditions are compatible with reinfection. Taken together, these results suggest that Pba is 178 inhibiting virus entry.

179 Since no antiviral activity was observed with cells treated with Pba prior to inoculation, we 180 wondered whether Pba targets the virus instead of the cells. To test this hypothesis, HCoV-229E-181 Luc was pre-incubated for 30 min at a concentration 10 times higher than that used during 182 inoculation. For this experiment, HCoV-229E-Luc was pre-incubated with Pba at 2 µM for 30 183 min, then diluted to reach a concentration of Pba of 0.2 µM for inoculation, a concentration 184 which does not severely impact HCoV-229E-Luc infection as shown above. In parallel, cells 185 were directly inoculated with HCoV-229E-Luc at 0.2 and 2 µM as a control. The results clearly 186 show that when HCoV-229E-Luc was pre-treated with Pba at high concentration (2 µM) before 187 inoculation at low concentration (0.2 µM), the antiviral activity was much stronger than when 188 inoculation was performed in the presence of 0.2 µM Pba without any pre-treatment (Figure 3D). 189 Taken together, these results indicate that Pba inhibits HCoV entry by a direct effect on the viral 190 particle.

191

#### 192 Pba is an inhibitor of viral fusion

193 Virus entry can be divided into two different steps, firstly the viral attachment to the cell surface, 194 and secondly the fusion of the virus envelope with cellular membranes. To further define the 195 mode of action of Pba, experiments were performed with HCoV-229E, which can be manipulated 196 in a lower containment facility. To determine a potential effect at the attachment step, Huh-7-197 TMPRSS2 cells were incubated with HCoV-229E in the presence or absence of Pba at 4°C for 1 198 h. These conditions block endocytosis but allow virus attachment to the cell surface. Cells were 199 rinsed with PBS and the amount of virions attached to the surface was determined by 200 quantification of viral genomes by qRT-PCR. As shown in Figure 4A, only a slight and non-201 significant decrease in RNA levels was observed in the presence of Pba, indicating that Pba 202 barely affect virus attachment. The action of Pba on the fusion step was investigated in virus-cell 203 fusion assay by using trypsin as an exogenous protease to induce coronavirus membrane fusion at 204 the plasma membrane (22, 23). Huh-7 cells were treated with  $NH_4Cl$  to inhibit fusion in the 205 endocytic pathway and viruses were bound at the cell surface at 4°C. Then, fusion was induced 206 by a short trypsin treatment at 37°C. Entry at the cell surface was more efficient in presence of 207 trypsin compared to the control (Figure 4B), which is consistent with other reports (22, 23). In 208 addition, Pba at both 0.5 and 1 µM strongly inhibited infection levels in trypsin-mediated fusion 209 conditions in a similar range compared to the inhibition seen with the control. Taken together, 210 these results indicate that Pba inhibits entry at the fusion step and not by preventing attachment.

Two viral structures are involved in the virus-cell fusion, namely the spike protein and the viral membrane itself. To find out if Pba targets the spike, a cell-cell fusion assay was performed. For this, the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein was transiently expressed by plasmid transfection in Vero-81 cells. At 6 h post-transfection, the medium was replaced with medium containing either DMSO or 1  $\mu$ M Pba until 24 h p.t.. As shown in Figure 4C, spike induced cell-cell fusion (apparent as syncytium formation) occurred equally well in control (DMSO)- and Pba-treated conditions,

- 217 indicating that Pba cannot prevent cell-cell fusion induced by the viral spike protein. Taken
- together these results are not in favour of an effect of Pba on the viral spike fusion protein.

219

## 220 The antiviral activity of Pba is increased upon light exposure and targets the viral 221 membrane

222 Given that Pba is photoactivable, we wondered whether its antiviral effect is light-dependent. We 223 therefore inoculated Huh-7 cells with HCoV-229E in the presence of Pba under different light 224 exposure conditions. As shown in Figure S3, the antiviral activity of Pba increased upon light 225 exposure. However, even in the dark, antiviral activity was observed at 10  $\mu$ M. A typical feature 226 of photosensitizers is that the concentration required for its biological properties decreases upon 227 increase of time of exposure to the light. To see whether Pba behaves as other photosensitizers, 228 HCoV-229E was pre-incubated with Pba at various concentrations (0.02, 0.2 and 2 µM) and 229 exposed to the normal white light of the laminar flow cabinet for different durations (ranging 230 from 5 to 80 min). It is important to note that light alone was not responsible of the antiviral 231 activity because there was no antiviral effect after a long exposure time (80 min) with Pba at 232 inactive concentration (0.02 µM). As shown in Figure 5A, results clearly showed that with a 233 same concentration of Pba, increased inhibitory effect could be observed with longer light 234 exposure times. Similar results were observed with SARS-CoV-2 (Figure 5B). Together, these 235 data indicate that the anti-coronavirus properties of Pba depend on its dynamic photoactivation.

Photodynamic inactivation (PDI) of microorganisms typically results from the onset of reactive oxygen species (ROS), including free radicals or singlet oxygen species ( $^{1}O_{2}$ ), generated when the light-activated photosensitizer falls back to its ground state, thereby transferring its energy to molecular oxygen (resulting in the onset of  $^{1}O_{2}$ ) or initiating photochemical reactions with ROS generation. Two mechanisms of activation have been described, either type I reactions in which the photosensitizer activates a substrate that generates reactive oxygen species (ROS), or type II

reactions in which the photosensitizer directly generates singlet oxygen  $({}^{1}O_{2})$ . Subsequently, 242 these species can damage various micro-organism structures, such as nucleic acids, proteins or 243 lipids (24, 25). To determine if the antiviral activity of Pba also depends on ROS or  ${}^{1}O_{2}$ 244 245 generation, infection was performed in the presence of quenchers that are able to trap these generated oxygen species. Two  ${}^{1}O_{2}$  quenchers were used, a water-soluble analogue of vitamin E, 246 247 Trolox, and NaN<sub>3</sub> (Figure 5C). HCoV-229E was mixed with the quenchers Trolox and NaN<sub>3</sub> both 248 at 10 mM, and Pba was added at the inoculation step. Then the cells were rinsed and fresh culture 249 medium was added for 6 h. The results clearly showed that both Trolox and NaN<sub>3</sub> were able to 250 reduce the action of Pba (Figure 5C), indicating that the antiviral activity of Pba is mediated by the generation of  ${}^{1}O_{2}$  after photoactivation. 251

Vigant *et al.* clearly demonstrated that the generation of  ${}^{1}O_{2}$  by the lipophilic photosensitiser 252 253 LJ001 induces the phosphorylation of unsaturated phospholipid of viral membranes, and changes 254 the biophysical properties of viral membranes, thereby affecting membrane fluidity and/or 255 increasing rigidity (24). As a result, the change of fluidity and/or rigidity of the viral membrane 256 impairs its ability to undergo virus-cell fusion. We therefore wondered whether a similar action 257 of the photosensitizer on the lipids of the viral envelope might also explain our observation that 258 Pba is able to inhibit HCoV-229E fusion by targeting the viral particle. We hypothesized that the 259 Pba-induced membrane rigidity may render the virus less sensitive to a shrinkage effect induced 260 by an osmotic stress. Therefore, HCoV-229E was incubated with Pba either in the dark or under 261 light exposure for 30 min, and subjected to osmotic shock with 400 mM NaCl before fixation 262 with 4% PFA. Fixed viral particles were visualized by cryo-electron microscopy (CryoEM). As 263 shown in Figure 6, intact virions with their characteristic spikes at the surface can be observed in 264 untreated conditions (control). The addition of Pba either in the dark or under light condition did 265 not affect the overall morphology of virions in normal medium conditions. Interestingly, when 266 intact virions were subjected to an osmotic stress by increasing NaCl concentration from 100 mM

267 to a final concentration of 400 mM, the virions shape was altered due to a shrinkage of the viral 268 membrane. When virions incubated with Pba in the dark were subjected to osmotic shock, similar 269 alteration of viral shape was observed. However, in the presence of Pba and under light 270 condition, no membrane deformation was observed suggesting that the virus was more resistant 271 to osmotic shock. These results clearly show that light-activated Pba modify the mechanical properties of the viral envelope by increasing its stiffness. This Pba-induced increase in the 272 273 envelope rigidity likely prevents the membrane deformation needed to undergo virus-cell fusion. 274 Knowing that there might be an effect of the light, the spike-induced cell-cell fusion assay as 275 shown in Figure 4C was repeated with short light exposure of the spike-transfected cells every 2 276 h after addition of Pba. Even with regular exposure to the light, no effect of Pba was seen on the 277 spike-mediated cell-cell fusion (data not shown), further excluding that Pba additionally targets 278 the spike protein.

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- 280

281 Pba is a broad-spectrum antiviral that targets viral membranes of several enveloped viruses 282 In contrast to viral proteins, viral membranes are derived from the host cell and hence are not 283 virus specific. This suggests that Pba might have broader antiviral activity against enveloped 284 viruses. Indeed, antiviral activities against other viruses have already been reported for Pba or 285 related molecules. These include HCV, HIV (Human immunodeficiency virus), and IAV 286 (Influenza A virus) (26–28). To confirm the broad-spectrum activity of Pba, its antiviral activity 287 was tested on pseudotyped viral particles with envelope proteins of VSV (vesicular stomatitis 288 virus), HCV, SARS-CoV-2, and MERS-CoV. Pseudoparticles were pre-treated with 0.5, 1 or 2 µM Pba and exposed or not to the light for 30 min prior to inoculation. The results clearly 289 290 showed that Pba inhibited pseudoparticle infection regardless of the nature of the viral envelope 291 protein, but only under light conditions (Figure 7A). Next, the antiviral activity of Pba was tested for coxsackievirus (CVB4, non-enveloped), Sindbis virus (SINV, enveloped), hepatitis C virus (HCV, enveloped), and yellow fever virus (YFV, enveloped). Whereas Pba was not active on the non-enveloped virus CVB4, it showed a clear antiviral effect against the 3 enveloped viruses HCV, YFV and SINV (Figure 7B). Taken together, these results confirm the light-dependent activity of Pba on enveloped viruses and suggest that the lipid membrane is the most likely target of the compound.

298

# Other chlorophyll-derived products and photosensitizers possess a light-dependent anti coronaviral activity

301 Pba is a break-down product of chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is metabolized into different compounds 302 including Pba, pyropheophorbide a (pyroPba), and chlorin e6. We wondered if these products activity. Furthermore, we selected nine porphyrins or 303 would also have antiviral 304 metalloporphyrins structurally related to Pba (N-methyl protoporphyrin IX, N-methyl 305 mesoporphyrin IX, Zn-protoporphyrin IX, tin-mesoporphyrin IX, temoporfin, phthalocyanine, 306 hemin chloride, HPPH, and 5,15-DPP), and one photosensitizer without related structure (Rose 307 Bengale) to determine if similar antiviral activity against coronaviruses could be identified. The 308 toxicity and antiviral activity of these compounds were investigated (Figure S4). Chlorophyll b, 309 phthalocyanine and 5,15-DPP were not active at the tested concentrations. Three molecules, 310 hemin chloride, temoporfin and Rose Bengale had a moderate antiviral activity. The antiviral 311 activity of the six most active compounds was tested both under normal white light conditions 312 and in the dark, clearly showing that, similar to Pba, the antiviral activity of most molecules 313 tested was also light-dependent (Figure S3). Interestingly, N-methyl protoporphyrin IX and N-314 methyl mesoporphyrin IX showed an antiviral activity in dark conditions, but much lower than 315 under light exposure. PyroPba was toxic at tested concentrations, thus dose-response experiments 316 with lower concentrations were performed to determine precise  $CC_{50}$  and  $IC_{50}$ . This was also

317	done for all the active compounds. The $CC_{50}$ and $IC_{50}$ of the different compounds were compared
318	and only pyroPba was more active against HCoV-229E than Pba (Table 1) with an $IC_{50}$ of 0.35
319	$\mu M.$ However, this compound is also more toxic with a $CC_{50}$ of 2.67 $\mu M$ and a selective index of
320	7.6. Thus, our results show that porphyrin-related compounds have antiviral activity against
321	HCoV-229E but that Pba and pyroPba are the most active under normal white light exposure.

322

### Table 1. Inhibitory and cytotoxic concentrations, and selective index of photosensitizers against HCoV-229E

325

Molecules	IC <sub>50</sub> (µM)	CC <sub>50</sub> (µM) 24 h	SI
Pba	0.54	6.08	11.2
PyroPba	0.35	2.67	7.6
Chlorin e6	0.72	21.4	29.7
HPPH	1.14	8.13	7.1
N-methyl protoporphyrin IX	1.21	ND > 80	>66.1
N-methyl mesoporphyrin IX	1.25	ND > 80	>64
Zn protoporphyrin IX	0.79	16.64	21.0
Rose Bengale	2.86	ND > 80	27.9

326

327

# Pba reduces SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV replication in human primary airway epithelial cells

As shown above, Pba is able to inhibit SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV infection under white light 330 exposure in cell culture. To determine if Pba could be used in vivo, its antiviral activity was tested 331 in a preclinical model, the human primary airway epithelial cells. These cells, Mucilair<sup>TM</sup>, are 332 333 primary bronchial epithelial cells reconstituted in a 3D structure to mimic bronchial epithelium with an air-liquid interface. Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> cells were inoculated with SARS-CoV-2 or MERS-CoV 334 335 in the presence of Pba at 0.25 or 2.5 µM. Remdesivir at 5 µM was used as a positive control. At 336 72 h post-inoculation, viral titers were determined and viral RNA levels were quantified. Viral RNA levels of SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV were significantly decreased in cells in the 337

338 presence of Pba at 0.25 and 2.5 µM, respectively (Figure 8A). Similarly, viral titers of both viruses were decreased of more than 1xLog10 in the presence of Pba at 2.5 µM (Figure 8B). In 339 parallel, the toxicity of Pba was measured in Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> by measuring lactate deshydrogenase 340 341 (LDH) secretion and trans-epithelial electrical resistance. Cells were incubated with the molecule 342 in the same condition as the infection assay. Cells treated with lysis buffer were used as a control. 343 No toxicity was observed up to 72h in the cells treated with Pba compared to the control (Figure 344 8C and 8D). In cells treated with lysis buffer, no LDH secretion was observed at 48h and 72h 345 because the cells were dead. Taken together, these results confirm the antiviral activity of Pba 346 against highly pathogenic human CoVs and its potential activity in vivo.

347

#### 348 Discussion

By screening plant extracts for their antiviral activity against coronaviruses, the present study 349 350 identified Pba as the active antiviral compound in the crude methanol extract from M. opositifolius after bioguided fractionation. It was demonstrated that Pba is active against 351 352 various human CoVs, including SARS-CoV-2, HCoV-229E and MERS-CoV, as well as other 353 enveloped viruses, including HCV, SINV and YFV, and various pseudotyped particles. 354 Furthermore, we characterized Pba as a broad-spectrum antiviral photosensitizer causing PDI of 355 all tested enveloped viruses by production of singlet oxygen species that most probably increase 356 the rigidity of the lipid bilayer of the viral envelope.

Pba is a product of chlorophyll breakdown which is abundantly present in various plants (such as spinach) and marine algae. In general, the chlorophyll content in plants may vary and depends on the season, the part of the plant, the maturity of the organs and many other factors (29, 30). Chlorophyll is degraded into Pba by chlorophyllase and some plants with high chlorophyllase content may contain more Pba (31, 32). Pba is well documented for its potential as anti-cancer agent in photodynamic therapy (PDT). It is known to have a low toxicity, to selectivelyaccumulate in tumours and to have a high adsorption at 665 nm (33, 34).

For many years, photosensitizers have mainly been used as antitumor therapy, for which many 364 365 photosensitizers have already been proven to be clinically safe and some are currently approved 366 for use in humans (35). Although reports on the PDI of viruses go back to 1960, where it was shown that some photosensitive dyes, such as methylene blue, had an antiviral effect, it is only in 367 368 the last decades that photosensitizers have gained considerable interest as antimicrobial (bacteria, 369 fungi, and viruses) agents, due to their strong antimicrobial effects and low toxicity in normal 370 tissue (36, 37). A major advantage of those molecules is that, due to their direct damaging effect 371 on the micro-organism, they are insensitive to the onset of resistance of the microorganism 372 against the compound, the latter being a major problem in today's research on antivirals and 373 antibiotics. With the present study, we add Pba to the list of photosensitizers with considerable 374 antiviral effects, at least against enveloped viruses. This antiviral effect is not new, since the 375 antiviral activity of Pba has already been demonstrated before against several enveloped viruses, 376 including HCV, Influenza A, herpes simplex-2 virus, and HIV-1 (26–28). Zhang et al (28) also 377 showed a direct action on the viral particle, which is in line with our results. In our study, we 378 show that the coronavirus' envelope remains intact after treatment with Pba up to  $10 \ \mu M$  for 30379 min in the light, that Pba treatment does not affect attachment, but that the virus-cell fusion is 380 impaired probably due to the rigidification of the virus membrane upon light exposure. In 381 addition, there seemed to be a slight antiviral effect at high concentrations (more than  $10 \ \mu M$ ) 382 even in dark conditions. In contrast to our results, some papers show that Pba has a virucidal 383 activity by damaging the virus envelope, thereby inhibiting attachment (28). For HCV and HIV-1, Pba and chlorophyll a derivates were applied after virus infection and were shown to act on 384 385 replication corresponding to a mode of action different than the one reported in our study. 386 Furthermore, none of those reports showed a mechanism of action dependent on light exposure, and hence did not show that the antiviral effect is mediated by PDI of the particle. It is important to note that under usual experimental conditions, cell cultures were not protected from light, thus is likely that the vast majority of the reports on antiviral activity of Pba were performed under light exposure. Due to the lack of control conditions in the dark or information on the time of (unnoticed) light exposure in the above mentioned reports on Pba, it is very hard to compare our data with the literature at this moment. More in depth studies will be needed to understand and compare the action of Pba on different viruses, in both light and dark conditions.

It is interesting to note that Pba (or highly related compounds such as pyroPba) has been isolated from different plant species and different organisms including marine algae (38), rendering Pba a very attractive antiviral due to its high availability. Moreover, it has been postulated that Pba can transport a metal ion like zinc inside the cell and that zinc can inhibit viral replication (39) which might be another advantage to use these molecules as antivirals. In our study, it was confirmed that neither natural nor commercial Pba used in our experiments contained a metal ion, so future studies should be performed with zinc Pba to demonstrate this hypothesis.

401 Here, we show that Pba inhibits virus-cell fusion, probably by targeting and photodynamically 402 damaging the viral membrane. With the help of cryo-EM, we demonstrated that the treatment of 403 virions with Pba and exposed to the light did not affect their shape despite an osmotic shock. This 404 is an indirect demonstration of an increased rigidity of the viral envelope upon Pba treatment. 405 This feature was already demonstrated using a biophysical approach with lipophilic 406 photosensitizers with antiviral activity (24, 40). It was postulated that the increased rigidity 407 impairs membrane bending required for viral fusion (41). Contrary to the cell membrane, the 408 viral envelope is not able to undergo regeneration, which renders the PDI virus specific and 409 insensitive to the onset of resistance. Very recently, Tummino et al. suggested that many 410 repurposed drugs targeted as SARS-CoV-2 antivirals are cationic amphiphilic drugs (CAD), 411 which induce phospholipolysis (42). CAD are host target antivirals that have an action on cell 412 phospholipids, provoke phospholipidosis and disrupt double membrane vesicles necessary for 413 viral replication. The mechanism of action of the CAD is different from the one of Pba. Pba is a 414 virus target antiviral, and it was never reported to have a phospholipidosis activity. Pba most 415 probably induces an oxidation of the viral envelope phospholipids and, as it was shown by 416 cryoEM in our study, does not induce phospholipidosis.

417

418 In the present study, several other compounds structurally related to Pba and to other known 419 photosensitizers were also screened for their anti-coronavirus activity in order to find out whether 420 other compounds would have a more potent effect. Several of those compounds, including 421 pyroPba, chlorin e6, or HPPH, N-methyl protoporphyrin IX, N-methyl mesoporphyrin IX, and 422 Zn-protoporphyrin IX had a light-dependent antiviral effect, but only pyroPba turned out to be 423 more active than Pba. However, pyroPba was also more toxic, and hence the final selectivity 424 index was not higher than that of Pba. Several chlorophyll derivates like pyroPba and pheophytin 425 a have already been demonstrated to be active against IAV, herpes simplex-2 virus, HCV, RSV 426 (respiratory syncytial virus), and SARS-CoV-2 (26, 27, 43). The authors studied the mechanism 427 of action of pyroPba against IAV and showed that the molecule targets the membrane of the virus 428 and not the surface glycoproteins, a mechanism which is consistent with the one that we observed 429 for Pba in our study. A requirement for photo-activation of pyroPba was not investigated nor 430 mentioned by Chen et al. (43). Chlorophyllides, chlorophyll precursors, are another class of 431 chlorophyll derivates that have been shown to have antiviral activity against several viruses 432 including hepatitis B virus (44-46). Other porphyrins have already been described for their antiviral activity (25, 47). Interestingly, three photosensitizers which have been shown to be 433 434 active against VSV, including N-methyl protoporphyrin IX, N-methyl mesoporphyrin IX, and 435 Zn-protoporphyrin IX, were also identified in our screen (48). The authors clearly demonstrated 436 that these compounds inactivated VSV after photoactivation via singlet oxygen release. We did 437 not demonstrate the mechanism of action of these three molecules against HCoV-229E but we also demonstrated that they are active after photoactivation. Very recently, protoporphyrin IX and 438 439 verteporfin were identified as inhibitors of SARS-CoV-2 (49, 50). Both studies showed that 440 protoporphyrin IX is active at an early step of infection, probably the entry step. Gu et al. postulated that the interaction of the compounds with ACE2 might impair the interaction of the 441 virus with its receptor (49). Lu et al. showed that protoporphyrin IX is active against several 442 443 enveloped viruses but that the activity of protoporphyrin IX against IAV is not dependent on light activation (50). Chlorin e6 is one of the most active compounds against HCoV-229E identified in 444 445 this study. The antiviral activity of chlorin e6 against enveloped viruses such as HBV (Hepatitis 446 B virus), HCV, HIV, DENV (dengue virus), MARV (Marburg virus), TCRV (tacaribe virus) and 447 JUNV (Junin virus) has been already demonstrated (46). Interestingly the authors also showed 448 that the molecule is inactive against non-enveloped viruses, suggesting that it targets the viral 449 envelope.

450 As mentioned above, many other photosensitizers have been studied for their antiviral activity 451 (25, 41), and for some of them, the PDI was clearly demonstrated as the mechanism of action (41, 452 51). In light of the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, photosensitizers have received renewed 453 attention as antiviral strategies to face this pandemic, and the use of those substances for the 454 treatment of COVID-19 or the inactivation of SARS-CoV-2 on surfaces or in water has been 455 postulated (52, 53). Pba might have some advantages above the already described 456 photosensitizers, as it is a highly available natural product and active under normal light 457 conditions. Importantly, it does not require a very specific wavelength-dependent illumination 458 treatment, at least not when applied on surfaces/mucosae exposed to the environmental light, with 459 an absorption at 667 nm. However, the light-dependency of such molecules might render their 460 application as therapeutic agents for internal organs (such as lungs for SARS-CoV-2) more 461 challenging. Indeed, additional illumination will make its application as real therapy more 462 complex, though not impossible because PDT is already used for the treatment of lung cancer (54). Efforts should be made for the development of specific device allowing PDT for COVID 463 464 patients. Nonetheless, we believe that broad-spectrum, low-toxic, non-resistance inducing 465 molecules such as Pba can certainly prove their value to reduce environment-to-person and person-to-person transmission of microorganisms when applied as e.g a spray for 466 467 decontamination of surfaces or when formulated for topical application in nose and mouth. Very 468 recently, a study describing such topical application of synthetic SARS-CoV-2 fusion inhibitor 469 has demonstrated that the topical treatment of upper respiratory tract infections might prove its 470 value in reducing virus transmission, particularly in cases where many people gather (55). In 471 contrast to the SARS-CoV-2 fusion inhibitor described by de Vries et al. (55), Pba is a widely 472 commercially available natural molecule with broad-spectrum activity against many enveloped 473 viruses. Therefore, one should explore whether it can exert similar effects upon topical 474 administration to the nose or oral cavity. If so, Pba might help to make people less susceptible to 475 and/or less contagious upon upper respiratory infections with enveloped viruses, many of them 476 causing seasonal outbreaks of respiratory disease such as common colds and flu.

Given that 1) onset of resistance to this product is very unlikely, 2) the activity of the compound is not dependent of envelope variants, 3) coronaviruses and other enveloped viruses can cause major problems in animals and 4) there is a potential risk for virus transmission from those animal to humans, the possibility to formulate Pba in such a way that also veterinary medicine and facilities with large numbers of animals can benefit from the strong antiviral properties that this molecule might have in the environment (decontamination of air, water and surfaces) should additionally be explored.

484

#### 485 Materials and Methods

#### 486 Chemicals

487 Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM), Opti-MEM, phosphate buffered saline (PBS), 4',6-diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI), were purchased from Life Technologies. Goat and foetal 488 489 bovine sera (FBS) were obtained from Eurobio. Pheophorbide a (Pba) >90% pure, pyroPba, 490 chlorin e6, HPPH, N-methyl protoporphyrin IX, N-methyl mesoporphyrin IX, and Zn 491 protoporphyrin IX were from Cayman chemicals (Merck Chemicals, Darmstadt, Germany). 492 Remdesivir (GS-5734) was from Selleck Chemicals (Houston TX). Mowiol 4-88 was obtained 493 from Calbiochem. Rose Bengale, trolox and other chemicals were from Sigma (St. Louis, MO). 494 Stocks of compounds were resuspended in dimethylsulfoxide (DMSO) at 50 mM. Plant extracts 495 were resuspended in DMSO at 25 mg/mL.

496

#### 497 Antibodies

Mouse anti-HCV E1 mAb A4 (56) and mouse anti-YFV E mAb 2D12 (anti-E, ATCC CRL-1689) were produced *in vitro* by using a MiniPerm apparatus (Heraeus). Mouse anti-dsRNA mAb (clone J2) was obtained from Scicons. Mouse anti-SARS-CoV-2 spike protein mAb were obtained from GeneTex. Polyclonal rabbit anti-SARS-CoV-2 nucleocapsid antibodies were from Novus. Cyanine 3-conjugated goat anti-mouse IgG and HRP-labeled goat-anti rabbit IgG antibodies were from Jackson Immunoresearch.

504

#### 505 Cells and culture conditions

Huh-7, Vero-81 (ATCC number CCL-81) and Vero-E6 were grown in DMEM with glutaMAX-I
and 10% FBS in an incubator at 37°C with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Vero-81 cells were subcloned to obtain a
better overall infection rate. The primary human bronchial epithelial cells Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> were from
Epithelix (Geneva, Switzerland) and maintained in Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> culture medium (Epithelix) as
recommended by the manufacturer.

511

#### 512 Plant collection and extraction

The fifteen plants were collected in the Bafing region (North-West Côte d'Ivoire, Touba 513 514 department). They were authenticated at the Centre National de Floristique (CNF), University of 515 Félix Houphouët Boigny de Cocody (Abidjan), where voucher specimens were deposited in an Herbarium. M. oppositifolius voucher number is UCJ006172. Plants were cleaned and air-dried at 516 constant temperature (26°C) for 1 to 2 weeks at the Nangui Abrogoua University (Abidjan). They 517 518 were then powdered and stored in the dark until extractions. For each plant, 20 g of dried powder 519 were mixed with 100 mL methanol for 24 h. After filtration, the grounds were extracted again 520 twice in the same way. The 3 resulting filtrates were combined and dried under vacuum at 40°C. 521 These extracts were then dissolved in DMSO for antiviral assays.

522

#### 523 Bioguided fractionation of Mo extract and Pba identification

524 For *Mallotus oppositifolius*, three other solvents were used to extract more compounds from these 525 plant leave: methylene chloride (MC) for the first extraction of the dried leaves, then methanol to 526 extract the first ground, and ethanol/water (50:50) to extract the second ground. The 527 corresponding extracts were tested against HCoV-229E-Luc. Since the MC extract was the most 528 active, it was fractionated by chromatography (CPC), leading to 10 fractions (F1-10) that were 529 tested again. F7 was selected for further fractionation by another chromatography (HPLC) and 530 led to 9 partitions (7.1-7.9). Partition 7.7 (the most active against HCoV-229E) purity and 531 identity was determined by UPLC-MS and NMR (more details in supplementary materials).

532

#### 533 Viruses

The following viral strains were used: HCoV-229E strain VR-740 (ATCC), and a recombinant
HCoV-229E-Luc (kind gift of Pr. V. Thiel) (57); SARS-CoV-2 (isolate SARS-CoV-

536 2/human/FRA/Lille\_Vero-81-TMPRSS2/2020, NCBI MW575140) was propagated on Vero-81-537 TMPRSS2 cells. MERS-CoV was recovered by transfecting the infectious clone of MERS-CoV-538 EMC12 (kindly provided by Dr Luis Enjuanes) in Huh-7 cells. A cell culture-adapted strain 539 (JFH1-CSN6A4) of HCV was produced as previously described (58). A recombinant Sindbis 540 virus (SINV) expressing HCV E1 glycoprotein was employed as previously described (59). 541 Yellow fever virus strain 17D (YFV) was obtained from Dr Philippe Desprès (Institut Pasteur de 542 Paris, France). Coxsackievirus B4 strain E2 (CVB4) was provided by Dr Didier Hober 543 (Université de Lille, France).

544

#### 545 Cell toxicity assay

 $6 \times 10^4$  Huh-7, Vero-E6 and Vero-81 cells were seeded in 96-well plates and incubated for 16 h at 546 547 37°C 5% CO<sub>2</sub> incubator. The cells were then treated with increasing concentrations of the 548 compound of interest. One hour after inoculation, cells were taken out of the incubator to be 549 exposed to the white light of the biosafety cabinet (BSC) for 10 min, after which cells were 550 further incubated in the dark at 37°C 5% CO<sub>2</sub> for 23 h. The BSC's light source lamp consists of 551 one fluorescent tube of 36W, 3350 lumen white light. An MTS [3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-5-552 (3-carboxymethoxyphenyl)-2-(4-sulfophenyl)-2H-tetrazolium]-based viability assay (Cell Titer 553 96 Aqueous non-radioactive cell proliferation assay, Promega) was performed as recommended 554 by the manufacturer. The absorbance of formazan at 490 nm was detected using a plate reader 555 (ELX 808 Bio-Tek Instruments Inc). Each measure was performed in triplicate and each 556 experiment was repeated at least 3 times.

557

558 Micilair<sup>TM</sup> toxicity assays

559 LDH secretion assay

560 Mucilair<sup>TM</sup>, three wells per condition, were incubated with Pba in 100  $\mu$ l Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> culture 561 medium, or 50  $\mu$ l of lysis solution (Cytotoxicity LDH assay kit-WST, Dojindo) at the apical 562 surface for 1 h. Pba or lysis solution was removed and the cells were placed in the incubator for 563 72 h. At 24 h, 48 h and 72 h. LDH secretion was measured in the basolateral medium according 564 to the manufacturer's instructions, by recording the absorbance of WST-formazan at 490 nm as 565 described. The results are expressed relative to the LDH secretion values obtained in the lysed 566 wells, for which a value of 100% toxicity was attributed.

567

#### 568 Trans-epithelial electrical resistance

569 Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> were incubated with Pba and lysis solution as described above. Trans-epithelial 570 electrical resistance was measured using a volt/ohm meter and electrode (Millicell ERS2, 571 Millipore) at 24 h, 48 h and 72 h. 200  $\mu$ l of prewarmed Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> culture medium was added at 572 the apical surface prior resistance measurement. Data are expressed relative to control untreated 573 cells.

574

#### 575 HCoV-229E infection inhibition assays

#### 576 *Luciferase assay*

577 HCoV-229E-Luc was first mixed with the crude extracts or the compounds at the appropriate 578 concentrations for 10 minutes. Huh-7 cells and Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells were inoculated with 579 HCoV-229E-Luc at a MOI of 0.5 in a final volume of 50 µL for 1 h at 37°C in the presence of 580 the plant crude extracts or the different compounds. The virus was removed and replaced with 581 culture medium containing the extracts or the different compounds for 6 h at 37°C. Cells were lysed in 20 µL of Renilla Lysis Buffer (Promega, Madison, USA) and luciferase activity was 582 583 quantified in a Tristar LB 941 luminometer (Berthold Technologies, Bad Wildbad, Germany) 584 using Renilla Luciferase Assay System (Promega) as recommended by the manufacturer.

This experiment was either performed under white light exposure, in which the virus and the compounds were exposed to the light of the BSC lamp. To maximize light exposure, the tubes were laid flat on the bench of the BSC. For dark condition, the light of the BSC and the room was shut down and all the tubes and plates were covered with foil paper.

#### 589 HCoV-229E titers

590 Huh-7 and Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells seeded in 24-well plates were inoculated with HCoV-229E at 591 a MOI of 0.5 in the presence of Pba at different concentrations for 1 h at 37°C. The inoculum was 592 removed and replaced with culture medium containing Pba and the cells were incubated at 37°C 593 for 8 h (for TMPRSS2 condition) or 10 h (without TMPRSS2). Supernatants were collected and 594 serial dilutions were performed and used to infect naive Huh-7 cells in 96-well plates. Six days 595 after infection, cytopathic effect was determined in each well to calculate TCID<sub>50</sub> titers by using 596 the Reed and Muench method.

597

#### 598 SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV infection inhibition assays

599 Vero-E6 and Huh-7 cells seeded in 24-well plates 24 h before inoculation were inoculated with 600 SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV, respectively, at a MOI of 0.3 in the presence of Pba at different 601 concentrations for 1 h at 37°C. Then, the inoculum was removed by 3 washings with DMEM and 602 fresh medium containing different Pba concentrations was added for 16 h at 37°C. Cell 603 supernatants were collected and the amount of infectious virus was determined by infectivity 604 titration. Therefore, Vero-E6 (SARS-CoV-2) and Huh-7 (MERS-CoV), seeded in 96-well plates, were inoculated with 100  $\mu$ L of 1/10 serially diluted supernatants (ranging from 10<sup>-1</sup> to 10<sup>-8</sup>). 605 606 Cells were incubated with the virus dilutions for 5 days at 37°C and 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Then, the 50% tissue culture infectious dose (TCID<sub>50</sub>) was determined by assessing the CPE in each well by 607 608 light microscopy and the 50% end point was calculated according to the method of Reed and 609 Muench.

610

#### 611 Time-of-addition assay

612 To determine at which stage of the replication cycle Pba executed its effect, a time-of-addition 613 assay was performed for which  $1\mu$ M Pba (and 10  $\mu$ M chloroquine as a control for SARS-CoV-2) 614 was added at different time points before (referred to as the condition 'pre-treatment cells'), during (referred to as the condition 'inoculation'), or after inoculation. For the latter condition, 615 616 Pba and chloroquine were not added before and during inoculation, but only directly after 617 removal of the inoculum (referred to as the condition 'p.i. - end'), or from 1 h or 2 h after 618 removal of the inoculum onwards (referred to as the condition '1 h p.i.-end' and '2 h p.i.-end, 619 respectively) and were left in the medium for the rest of the incubation time (i.e until 6 h p.i. for 620 HCoV-229E and 16 h p.i. for SARS-CoV-2). For this experiment, Huh-7-TMPRSS2 or Vero-81 621 cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E-Luc or SARS-CoV-2 at a MOI of 0.5 and 0.05, 622 respectively. One hour after inoculation, cells for all conditions were washed 3 times to remove 623 the unbound particles. HCoV-229E-luc, luciferase activity was quantified as described ahead. For 624 SARS-CoV-2, cells were washed once with PBS and lysed in 200 µL of non-reducing 2x 625 Laemmli loading buffer. Lysates were incubated at 95°C for 30 min to inactivate the virus and 626 lysates were kept at -20°C until western blot analysis (see below). For each time point, DMSO 627 was taken as a control, and all experiments were repeated 3 times.

628

#### 629 Western blot detection of the SARS-CoV-2 nucleocapsid expression

Sixteen hours after inoculation, cells were washed once with PBS and lysed in 200 µL of nonreducing 2x Laemmli loading buffer. Lysates were incubated at 95°C for 30 min to inactivate the virus and the proteins were subsequently separated on a 12% polyacrylamide gel by SDS-PAGE. Next, proteins were transferred to a nitrocellulose membrane (Amersham), and the membranes were subsequently blocked for 1 h at RT in 5% (w/v) non-fat dry milk in PBS with 0.1% (v/v) Tween-20. Membranes were incubated overnight at 4°C with polyclonal rabbit anti-SARS-CoV2 nucleocapsid antibodies in 5% (w/v) non-fat dry milk in PBS with 0.1% (v/v) Tween-20. After
being washed 3 times with PBS with 0.1% (v/v) Tween-20, membranes were incubated for 1 h at
RT with HRP-labeled goat-anti rabbit IgG antibodies, after which membranes were washed 3
times. N proteins were visualized by enhanced chemiluminescence (Pierce<sup>TM</sup> ECL, ThermoFisher
Scientific). Quantification was performed by using Image J and its gel quantification function.

641

#### 642 Infection assay with other viruses

Vero (YFV, SINV, CBV4) or Huh-7 (HCV) cells grown on glass coverslips were infected with 643 viral stocks diluted so as to obtain 20-40% infected cells in control conditions. The cells were 644 645 fixed at a time that allowed for a clear detection of infected cells vs non-infected cells, and avoided the detection of reinfection events, thus limiting the analysis to a single round of 646 647 infection (30 h p.i. for HCV, 20 h p.i. for YFV, 6 h p.i. for SINV, 4 h p.i. for CVB4). The cells 648 were fixed for 20 min with 3% PFA. They were then rinsed with PBS and processed for immunofluorescence as previously described (60) using primary mouse antibodies specific to 649 650 HCV E1 (for both HCV and SINV), YFV E, or dsRNA (for CVB4), followed by a cyanine-3-651 conjugated goat anti-mouse IgG secondary antibody for the detection of infected cells. Nuclei were stained with DAPI. Coverslips were mounted on microscope slides in Mowiol 4-88-652 653 containing medium. Images were acquired on an Evos M5000 imaging system (Thermo Fisher 654 Scientic) equipped with light cubes for DAPI, and RFP, and a 10× objective. For each coverslip, 655 a series of six 8-bit images of randomly picked areas were recorded. Cells labelled with anti-virus 656 mAbs were counted as infected cells. The total number of cells was obtained from DAPI-labelled 657 nuclei. Infected cells and nuclei were automatically counted using macros written in ImageJ. 658 Infections were scored as the ratio of infected over total cells. The data are presented as the 659 percentage of infection relative to the control condition.

660

#### 661 Effect of Pba on pseudotyped virion entry

662 Particles pseudotyped with either SARS-CoV-2 S (SARS-2pp), MERS-CoV S proteins 663 (MERSpp), HCoV-229E-S (HCoV-229Epp), genotype 2a HCV envelope proteins (HCVpp), or 664 the G envelope glycoprotein of vesicular stomatitis virus (VSV-Gpp) were produced as previously described (22, 61). Pseudotyped virions were pre-treated with Pba for 30 min at room 665 666 temperature under the BSC's light or covered in foil and then used to inoculate Huh-7 cells in 96-667 well plates for 3 h. The inoculum was removed and cells were further incubated with culture 668 medium for 45 h. Cells were lysed and luciferase activity was detected by using a Luciferase 669 Assay kit (Promega) and light emission measured by using a Tristar LB 941 luminometer 670 (Berthold Technologies).

671

#### 672 White light exposure kinetics

HCoV-229E-Luc or SARS-CoV-2 were pre-treated with Pba at room temperature and exposed to
BSC's white fluorescent light during different period of time. To maximize light exposure, tubes
were laid flat under the BSC's light. Next, infection was quantified for each virus as described
previously.

677

#### 678 Fusion assay

Cells were preincubated for 30 min in the presence of 25 mM NH<sub>4</sub>Cl at 37°C to inhibit virus entry through the endosomal route, and then were transferred to ice. In the meantime, the virus was preincubated under light with Pba and 25 mM NH<sub>4</sub>Cl for 10 min and then allowed to bind to the cells at 4°C for 1 h in DMEM containing 0.2% BSA, 20 mM Hepes, and 25 mM NH<sub>4</sub>Cl. Cells were then warmed by addition of DMEM containing 3  $\mu$ g/mL trypsin, 0.2% BSA, 20 mM Hepes, and 25 mM NH<sub>4</sub>Cl and were incubated for 5 min in a water bath at 37°C. The cells were rinsed and further incubated for 30 min in culture medium containing 25 mM NH<sub>4</sub>Cl, and then
the medium was replaced by normal culture medium. Seven hours after inoculation, luciferase
activity was detected by using a Renilla Luciferase Assay Kit (Promega).

688

#### 689 Cell-cell fusion assay by transient expression of the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein

690 Vero-81 cells were seeded on coverslips in 24-wells 16 h before transfection. Cells were 691 transfected with 250 ng of a pCDNA3.1(+) vector encoding for the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein using the TransIT<sup>®</sup>-LT1 Transfection Reagent (Mirus Bio). Six hours post transfection (p.t.), 692 693 transfection medium was replaced by normal medium containing 1 µM Pba or DMSO. Twenty-694 four hours p.t., cells were fixed with 3% paraformaldehyde in PBS for 20 min at RT and syncytia 695 were visualized by immunofluorescence, by incubating the cells with a monoclonal anti-SARS-696 CoV-2-spike antibody in 10% normal goat serum, followed by incubation with Cyanine-3-697 conjugated goat anti-mouse IgG antibodies. Nuclei were visualized with 1 µg/ml of 4',6diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI), and coverslips were mounted in Mowiol<sup>®</sup> mounting medium. 698 699 Pictures were obtained with an Evos M5000 imaging system (Thermo Fisher Scientific).

700

#### 701 Attachment assay

Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells seeded in 24-well plates were inoculated with HCoV-229E at a MOI of 4
on ice in the presence of 4.1 or 8.2 μM Pba under the light of the BSC. 1 h after inoculation, cells
were washed 3 times with cold PBS, and lysed using LBP lysis buffer for RNA extraction
following manufacturer's instructions (NucleoSpin<sup>®</sup> RNA plus extraction kit, Macherey-Nagel).
Reverse transcription was then performed on 10 μL of RNA using High Capacity cDNA Reverse
Transcription kit (Applied Biosystems). 3 μL of cDNA were used for real-time reversetranscription polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR) assay using specific primers and probe

targeting the N gene (forward primer 5'-TTCCGACGTGCTCGAACTTT-3', reverse primer 5'CCAACACGGTTGTGACAGTGA-3' and probe 5'-6FAM-TCCTGAGGTCAATGCA-3') and
subjected to qPCR amplification with Taqman Master mix.

712

#### 713 Quencher Assay

HCoV-229E-Luc was mixed with 10 mM Trolox or NaN<sub>3</sub> after which 0.5 or 1  $\mu$ M Pba was added and the mixture was exposed to light for 10 min. The mixture was used to inoculate Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells for 1h. Inoculum was replaced with DMEM and cells were kept in the dark at 37°C 5% CO<sub>2</sub> for 7 h and then lysed to quantify luciferase activity as described above.

718

#### 719 CryoEM

HCoV-229E was produced by inoculating a confluent Huh-7 T75 Flask at MOI of 0.008 in 720 721 DMEM supplemented with 5% FBS and put at 33°C 5% CO<sub>2</sub> for 5 days. Supernatant was 722 harvested and treated with DMSO or 10 µM Pba, and further kept in the dark or exposed to light 723 for 30 min. Then NaCl was added to a final concentration of 400 mM final to induce an osmotic 724 shock. Viruses were fixed in 4% PFA. For cryo-EM experiments of the particles, lacey carbon 725 formvar 300 mesh copper grids were used after a standard glow discharged procedure. Plunge 726 freezing was realized using the EM-GP apparatus (Leica). Specimens were observed at -175 °C 727 using a cryo holder (626, Gatan), with a ThermoFisher FEI Tecnai F20 electron microscope 728 operating at 200 kV under low-dose conditions. Images were acquired with an Eagle 4k x 4k 729 camera (ThermoFisher FEI).

730

#### 731 Primary airway cell infection quantification

The air interface of Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> (Epithelix) was rinsed with 100  $\mu$ L of Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> culture medium for 10 min 3 times to remove mucosal secretion. The cells were then inoculated at the apical membrane with SARS-CoV-2 or MERS-CoV at a MOI of 0.2 in the presence of compounds for 1 h at 37°C. Inoculum was removed and the cells were rinsed with PBS. In parallel, compounds were added in the basolateral medium. 72 h post-infection, viruses secreted at the apical membrane were collected by adding 200  $\mu$ L of medium in the apical chamber. Viral titers were determined as described above. In parallel, cells were lysed with lysis buffer from the kit NucleoSpin<sup>®</sup> RNA Plus (Macherey Nagel), and total RNA extracted following manufacturer's instructions, eluted in a final volume of 60  $\mu$ L of H<sub>2</sub>O, and quantified.

741 For SARS-CoV-2, one-step qPCR assay was performed using 5 µL of RNA and Takyon Low rox one-step RT probe Mastermix (Eurogentec) and specific primers and probe targeting E gene, 742 743 forward primer 5'-ACAGGTACGTTAATAGTTAATAGCGT-3', reverse primer 5'-744 ATATTGCAGCAGTACGCACACA-3' and probe FAM-ACACTAGCCATC-745 CTTACTGCGCTTCG-MGB.

746 For MERS-CoV and RPLP0 reference gene, 10 µM of RNA were used for cDNA synthesis using 747 High Capacity cDNA Reverse Transcription kit (Applied Biosystems). 3 µL of cDNA were used 748 for real-time reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR) assay using specific 749 probes. For MERS-CoV, the following primers and probe targeting N gene were used, forward 750 primer 5'-GGGTGTACCTCTTAATGCCAATTC-3', reverse primer 5'-751 TCTGTCCTGTCTCCGCCAAT-3' and probe 5'-FAM-ACCCCTGCGCAAAATGCTGGG-752 MGBNFQ-3' and subjected to qPCR amplification with Taqman Master mix. For RPLP0, 753 Taqman gene expression assay (Life Technologies) was used according to the manufacturer 754 instruction. SARS-CoV-2 E and MERS-CoV N gene expression were quantified relative to 755 RPLP0 using  $\Delta\Delta$ Ct method. A value of 1 was arbitrary assigned to infected cells without 756 compound.

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#### 758 Statistical analysis and IC<sub>50</sub> and CC<sub>50</sub> calculation

Values were graphed and  $IC_{50}$  calculated by non-linear regression curve fitting with variable slopes constraining the top to 100% and the bottom to 0%, using GraphPad PRISM software. Kruskal Wallis nonparametric test followed by a Dunn's multicomparison post hoc test with a confidence interval of 95% was used to identify individual difference between treatments. P values < 0.05 were considered as significantly different from the control.

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968 FIGURE LEGENDS

969

970 Figure 1. Identification of Pba as active compound in *Mallotus oppositifolius* using bioguided 971 fractionation of plant extracts. (A) Huh-7 cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E in the presence of 972 various plant extracts at 25 µg/mL. Cells were lysed 7 h post-inoculation and luciferase activity 973 quantified. (B) Huh-7 cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E in the presence of sub-extracts of Mo 974 (methylene chloride, MC; ethanol/water (50:50), EtOH/w; water, H<sub>2</sub>0; left), fractions of Mo MC sub-975 extract (middle), or sub-fractions of F7 fraction (right panel) at 25 µg/mL. Cells were lysed 7 h post-976 inoculation and luciferase activity quantified. (C) Huh-7 cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E-Luc in 977 the presence of Pba extracted from Mo (Pba F7.7) or commercial Pba (Pba com) at different 978 concentrations. At 1 h p.i., cells were washed and fresh compounds were added to the cells for 6 h after 979 which cells were lysed to quantify luciferase activity. Data are expressed relative to the control DMSO. 980 Results are expressed as mean  $\pm$  SEM of 3 experiments.

981

982 Figure 2. Pba inhibits various HCoVs. For infection assays, cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E 983 (Huh-7 cells), SARS-CoV-2 (Vero-E6 cells) and MERS-CoV (Huh-7 cells) in presence of various 984 concentrations of Pba. At 1 h p.i, cells were washed and fresh compounds were added to the cells for 9 h 985 (HCoV-229E) or 16 h (SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV) and the supernatants were collected for infectivity 986 titration. For toxicity assays, cells were incubated with Pba at different concentrations for 24 h. MTS assay 987 was performed to monitor cell viability. For both infection and toxicity tests, cells were exposed to the 988 light of the cabinet for 10 min, once upon inoculation, once after a 1 h incubation. Results are expressed as 989 mean  $\pm$  SEM of 3 experiments.

990

991 Figure 3. Pba inhibits viral entry by a direct action on the viral particle. (A) Huh-7 and Huh-7-992 TMPRSS2 cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E-Luc in the presence of various concentrations Pba. At 993 1 h p.i, cells were washed and fresh compounds were added to the cells for 6 h after which the cells were 994 lysed to quantify luciferase activity. Data are expressed relative to the control DMSO. (B) Pba at 2 µM 995 was added at different time points during infection of Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells by HCoV-229E-Luc, either 996 1 h before inoculation (pre-treatment), or 1 h during inoculation (Inoculation), or for 6 h post-inoculation 997 (p.i.-end), after 1 h post-inoculation till the end (1 h p.i.-end), or 2 h post-inoculation till the end (2 h p.i.-998 end). Cells were lysed 7 h after the inoculation and luciferase activity quantified. (C) A similar experiment 999 was performed in Vero-81 cells inoculated with SARS-CoV-2 in the presence of Pba at 1 µM or 1000 chloroquine at 10 µM at different time points. Cells were lysed 16 h post-inoculation and the viral 1001 nucleocapsid protein was detected by Western blot. The graph represents the quantification of the band 1002 intensity corresponding to the N protein, relative to the DMSO control for each time point. (D) Huh-7 1003 cells were inoculated with HCoV-229E-Luc in the presence of 0.2 or 2 µM Pba, or with HCoV-229E-Luc 1004 previously treated with 2  $\mu$ M Pba and then diluted 10 times, leading to a concentration of 0.2  $\mu$ M Pba for 1005 the inoculation period (2  $\mu$ M > 0.2  $\mu$ M). The amount of virus used for inoculation was kept constant in the 1006 different conditions and all the samples were exposed to the light for 10 min. At 7 h post-inoculation, cells 1007 were lysed and luciferase activity was quantified. \*, P<0.05; \*\*\*, P<0.005.

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1010 Figure 4. Pba inhibits viral entry at the fusion step. (A) Huh-7-TMPRSS2 cells were inoculated with 1011 HCoV-229E for 1 h at 4°C in the presence of DMSO, or 4.1 and 8.2 µM Pba. Cells were washed thrice 1012 with ice-cold PBS, and total RNA was extracted. Bound HCoV-229E virions were detected by 1013 quantification of HCoV-229E gRNA by qRT-PCR. Relative binding is expressed as the percentage of the control (DMSO) for which the 100% value was arbitrarily attributed. Mean values  $\pm$  SEM (error bars) of 1014 three independent experiments are presented. n.s., not significant. (B) HCoV-229E was incubated with 1015 1016 Pba at different concentration and was bound to Huh-7 cells for 1 h in the absence (control) or presence 1017 (trypsin) of NH<sub>4</sub>Cl at 4°C. In the later condition, fusion was induced by 3 µg/mL trypsin for 5 min at 37 1018  $^{\circ}$ C in the presence of NH<sub>4</sub>Cl. Cells were lysed 7 h post-infection and luciferase activity quantified. 1019 Infectivity is expressed as the percentage of the control (DMSO) for which the 100% value was arbitrarily 1020 attributed. Mean values  $\pm$  SEM (error bars) of three independent experiments are presented. (C) Vero-81 1021 cells transiently expressing SARS-CoV-2 spike protein were incubated with or without Pba at 1 µM from 1022 6 to 24 h p.i., after which syncytia were visualized by immunofluorescence. Images were acquired on an 1023 Evos M5000 imaging system (Thermo Fisher Scientific).

1024

1025 Figure 5. The antiviral activity of Pba depends on light exposure and its ability to generate singlet 1026 oxygen species. HCoV-229E-Luc (A) and SARS-CoV-2 (B) were incubated with Pba at given 1027 concentration under the light of the laminar flow cabinet. At different time points of light exposure, the 1028 mixture was used to inoculate Huh-7 cells or Vero-81 cells, respectively. At 7 h (HCoV-229E-Luc) or 16 1029 h (SARS-CoV-2) post-inoculation, cells were lysed and infection quantified as described previously. (C) 1030 Pba at 0.5 or 1 µM was mixed with 10 mM Trolox or 10 mM NaN<sub>3</sub> in DMEM and HCoV-229E-Luc was 1031 added to the mixture prior to inoculation of Huh-7 cells for 1 h at 37°C. Inoculum and compounds were 1032 removed and replaced with culture medium for 6 h. Cells were lysed and luciferase activity quantified. 1033 Infectivity is expressed as the percentage of infection relative to the control (DMSO) to which the 100% 1034 value was arbitrarily attributed. Mean values  $\pm$  SEM (error bars) of three independent experiments are 1035 presented.

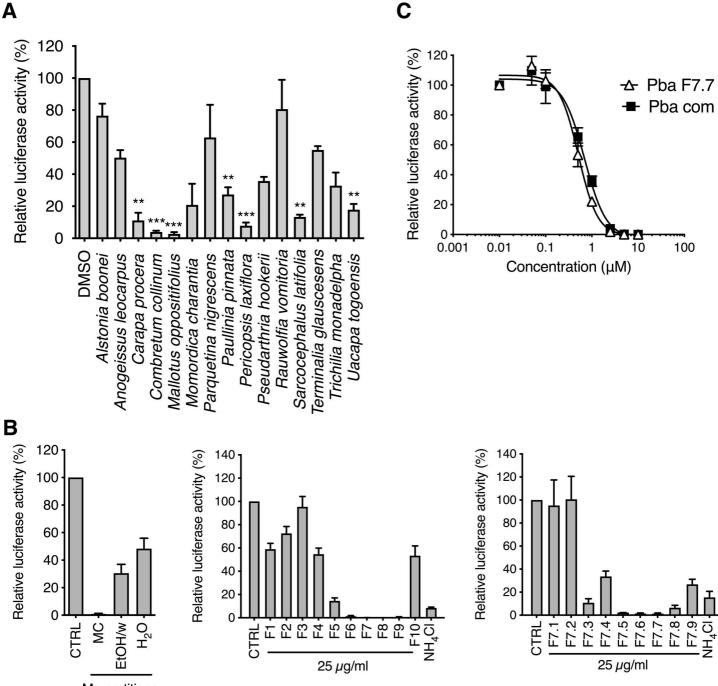
1036

Figure 6. Pba renders virions resistant to osmotic shock. HCoV-229E were incubated in the presence
or absence of Pba at 10 μM with or without 30 min light exposure, after which the particles were
subjected to normal medium conditions (100 mM NaCl) or to an osmotic shock of 400 mM NaCl for 30
sec. Virions were fixed with PFA and samples were treated for CryoEM observation. Images are
representative of 30 independent images of 2 independent experiments. Scale bar: 50 nm.

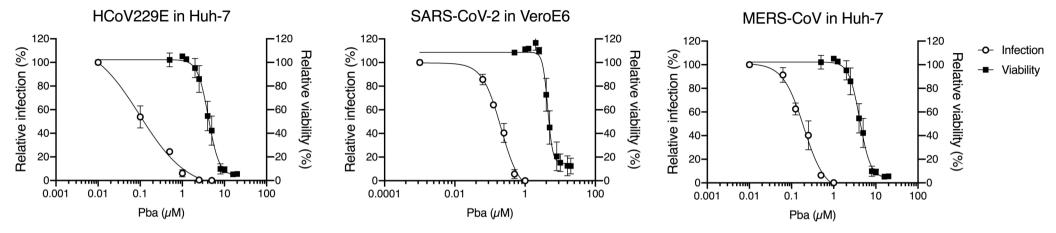
1043 Figure 7. Pba is a broad-spectrum antiviral agent against enveloped viruses. (A) MERSpp, HCoV-1044 229Epp, VSVpp, and SARS-2pp were preincubated with Pba at the indicated concentration either under 1045 light for 30 min (Light) or without light (Dark) prior to inoculation of Huh-7 cells expressing ACE2 and 1046 TMPRSS2 for 2 h. At 46 h post-inoculation, cells were lysed and luciferase activity was quantified. 1047 Infectivity is expressed as the percentage relative to the control (DMSO) to which the 100% value was 1048 arbitrarily attributed. Mean values  $\pm$  SEM (error bars) of three different experiments are presented. (B). 1049 Different viruses were incubated with Pba at 1 and 2.5 µM under light condition for 30 min prior to 1050 inoculation. Cells were fixed at different time points depending on the virus (see Materials and Methods 1051 section for details) and subjected to immunofluorescence labelling. Infectivity is expressed as the

- 1052 percentage relative to the control (DMSO). Mean values  $\pm$  SEM (error bars) of three different experiments 1053 are presented.
- Figure 8. Antiviral efficacy of Pba in human primary bronchial epithelial cells. Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> cells were 1054 inoculated with SARS-CoV-2 or MERS-CoV in the presence of Pba at 0.25 or 2.5 µM for 1 h at the apical 1055 1056 side. The cells were left for 10 min under the light of the cabinet before being put in the incubator. 1057 Inoculum was removed 1 h post-inoculation. Remdesivir (Rem) at 5 µM was added in the basolateral 1058 medium. The cells were additionally exposed to the light for 10 min at 24 h, 48 h and 72 h post-1059 inoculation. 72 h post-inoculation, viruses were collected from the apical surface, and cells were lysed to 1060 extract RNA. Viral RNA was quantified by qRT-PCR and viral titers were determined by infectivity titrations for SARS-CoV-2 (A) and MERS-CoV (B). For RNA quantification, data are expressed relative 1061 1062 to the control DMSO. Results are expressed as mean  $\pm$  SEM of 3 experiments. Viral titers are representative of three independent experiments. Toxicity of Pba was measures in Mucilair<sup>TM</sup> treated with 1063 1064 Pba at 0.25 and 2.5  $\mu$ M by measuring either LDH secretion (C) or trans-epithelial electrical resistance (D) 1065 at 24 h, 48 h and 72 h incubation. As a control, cells were lysed with lysis solution as described in 1066 materials and methods section. Results are expressed as mean ± SEM of 2 experiments. \*, P<0.05; \*\*\*, 1067 P<0.005; n.s., not significant.

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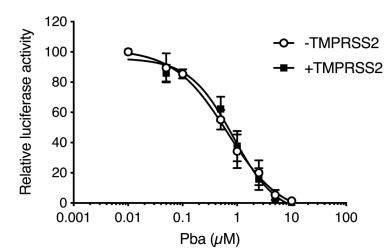


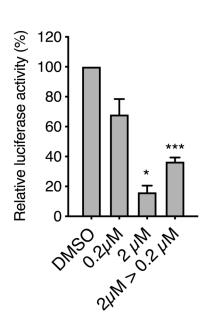






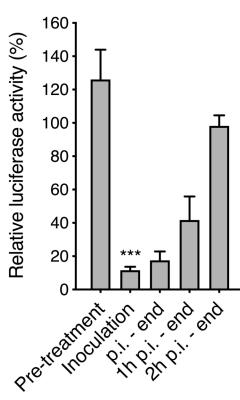


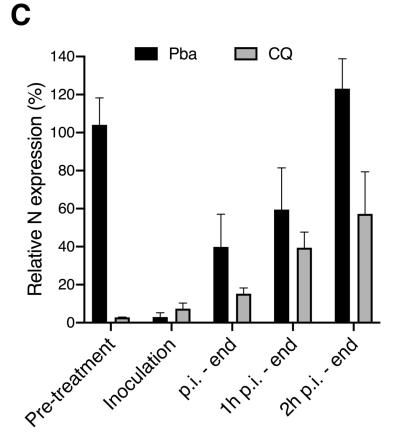




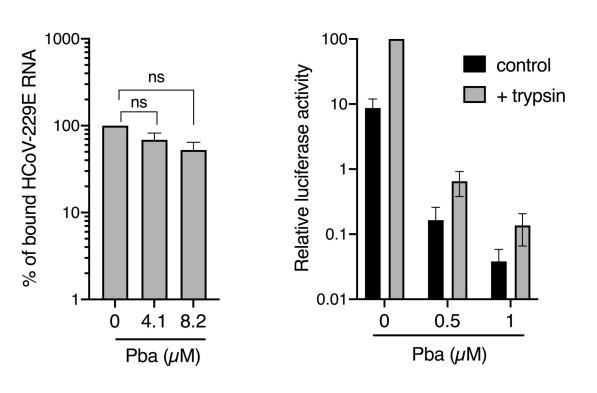
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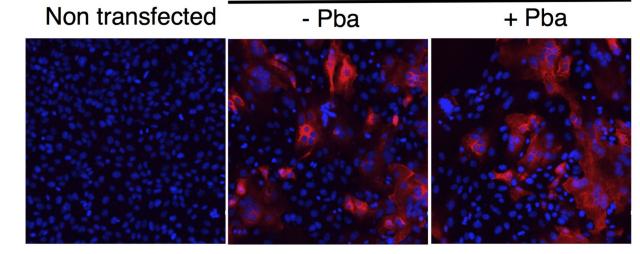
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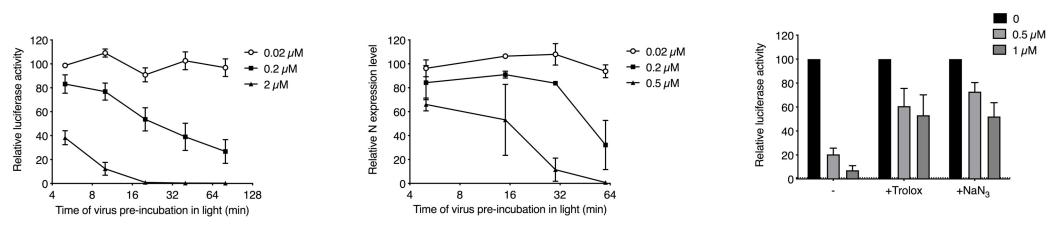


С

Α

+ Spike





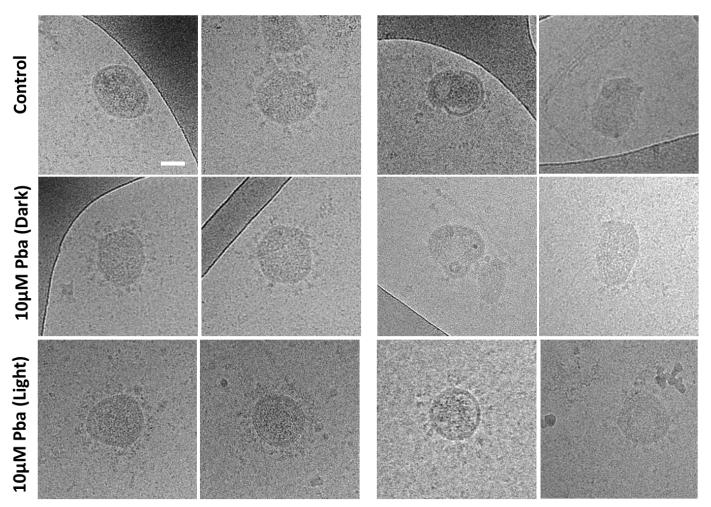
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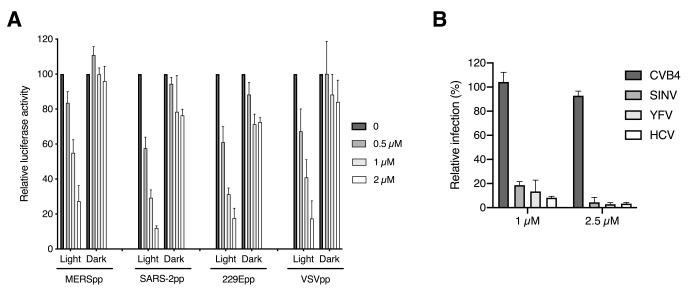
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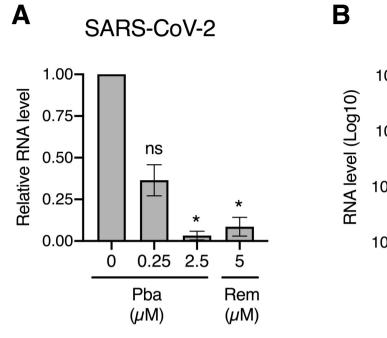
Α

## 100 mM NaCl

## 400 mM NaCl







2.5

5

Rem

(µM)

0.25

Pba

(µM)

0

10<sup>3</sup>

10<sup>2.</sup>

10<sup>1</sup>

10<sup>0</sup>-

10<sup>-1</sup>

Relative titers (Log10)



