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## **Surface Proteome of Plasma Extracellular Vesicles differentiates between SARS-CoV-2 and Influenza Infection**

Wilhelm Bertrams<sup>1§</sup>, Fabienne K. Roessler<sup>2§</sup>, Rikke Bæk<sup>3</sup>, Anna Lena Jung<sup>1,4,5</sup>, Katrin Laakmann<sup>1</sup>, Malene Møller Jørgensen<sup>3,6</sup>, Mareike Lehmann<sup>1,5,7,8</sup>, Barbara Weckler<sup>9</sup>, Leon N. Schulte<sup>1,5</sup>, Gernot Rohde<sup>10</sup>, Nadav Bar<sup>2</sup>, Grit Barten (for Members of the CAPNETZ study group)<sup>11</sup>, Bernd Schmeck<sup>1,4,5,7,9,12,13</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Lung Research, Universities of Giessen and Marburg Lung Center (UGMLC), Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg, Germany

<sup>2</sup>Department of Chemical Engineering, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Clinical Immunology, Aalborg University Hospital, 9000 Aalborg, Denmark

<sup>4</sup>Core Facility Flow Cytometry - Bacterial Vesicles, Philipps-University Marburg, Marburg, Germany

<sup>5</sup>Member of the German Center for Lung Research (DZL), Marburg, Germany

<sup>6</sup>Department of Clinical Medicine, Aalborg University Hospital, 9220 Aalborg, Denmark

<sup>7</sup>Institute for Lung Health (ILH), Giessen, Germany

<sup>8</sup>Comprehensive Pneumology Center (CPC), Institute of Lung Health and Immunity (LHI), Helmholtz Zentrum München, Member of the German Center for Lung Research (DZL), Munich, Germany

<sup>9</sup>Department of Medicine, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, University Medical Center Giessen and Marburg, Philipps-University, 35043 Marburg, Germany

<sup>10</sup>Goethe University Frankfurt, University Hospital, Medical Clinic I, Department of Respiratory Medicine, Frankfurt/Main, Germany, and CAPNETZ STIFTUNG, Hannover, Germany

<sup>11</sup>CAPNETZ STIFTUNG, Hannover, Germany

<sup>12</sup>Center for Synthetic Microbiology (SYNMIKRO), Philipps-University, 35043 Marburg, Germany

<sup>13</sup> Member of the German Center for Infection Research (DZIF), Marburg, Germany

Corresponding author: Bernd Schmeck (bernd.schmeck@uni-marburg.de)

<sup>§</sup>These authors contributed equally.

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

## **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** Small extracellular vesicles (sEVs) play a role in the pathophysiology of viral respiratory infections, and may be suitable biomarkers for COVID-19 and Influenza infections or targets for treatment. We investigated differences in the surface proteome of plasma sEVs in patients with COVID-19 and Influenza.

**Methods:** In a discovery cohort with 117 patients, we used a random forest (RF) classifier in order to discriminate COVID-19 and Influenza patients based on routine clinical parameters. Furthermore, plasma samples from these patients were analysed with an EV Array containing 33 antibodies to capture sEVs, which were then visualized with a combination of CD9, CD63, and CD81 antibodies. We applied a RF classifier and a random depth-first search (RDFS) approach to extract markers with the best discriminatory potential. Data were then validated in an independent set of patient samples on a chip-based ExoView platform.

**Results:** In the initial cohort of 117 patients, leukocyte numbers, and heart rate discriminated best between COVID-19 and Influenza infection. In the plasma samples, 32 EV surface markers could be detected. Feature panels containing CD9, CD81, and CD141 allowed a discrimination between COVID-19 and Influenza. Consecutively, increased CD9 abundance was validated in a second, independent cohort, with the ExoView technology. The increased CD9 signal in Influenza patients was confirmed and shown to be mostly driven by CD9/CD41a double positive sEVs, hinting at a thrombocyte origin.

**Discussion:** We identified leukocyte numbers and heart rate, as well as CD9 as a sEV surface marker to differentiate COVID-19 from Influenza patients.

Keywords: COVID-19, Influenza, machine learning, extracellular vesicles

## **Introduction**

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome-related coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has resulted in tremendous morbidity, mortality, and socio-economical disturbance. As of May 2023, there have been almost  $8 \times 10^8$  confirmed global cases of COVID-19, and almost 7 million fatalities (<https://covid19.who.int/>). Pending many unresolved clinical and pathophysiological issues, severity of disease seems to be paralleled by an imbalance between interferon mechanisms (1) and neutrophil activation (2), as well as pro-coagulant events (3).

Coronaviruses are a group of single-stranded positive-sense RNA viruses. An infection with the new SARS-CoV-2 is characterized by a range of symptoms including fever, dry cough, and general malaise (4). Patients with severe COVID-19 develop acute respiratory distress syndrome and acute lung injury, leading to increased morbidity and mortality caused by damage to the alveolar tissue, leading to inflammation and pneumonia (5).

The co-occurrence of COVID-19 and Influenza, another seasonal RNA virus of the airways, poses a potential global health burden, even though it is presently a rare event (6). While surveillance and vaccination are paramount to public healthcare (7), early correct diagnosis upon a patient's presentation in the clinic is another building block of a conclusive healthcare (8). This co-occurrence of Influenza A virus with SARS-CoV-2 requires timely distinction between both diseases in the clinic. Patients that are hospitalized routinely undergo screening of a multitude of health-relevant biological parameters. We address the value of these parameters for early differentiation between COVID-19 and Influenza. Furthermore, soluble, blood-borne small extracellular vesicles (sEVs) have emerged as important players in various physiological and pathological processes, including viral infections (9). In the context of COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, there is growing evidence that sEVs released from infected cells play a crucial role in the pathogenesis of the disease (10). sEVs contain a variety of bioactive molecules, including proteins, nucleic acids, and lipids, which can be transferred to recipient cells and modulate their function. Studies have shown that sEVs released from SARS-CoV-2 infected cells can contribute to the systemic inflammation, cytokine storm, and endothelial dysfunction observed in severe COVID-19 cases (11). Moreover, sEVs may serve as potential biomarkers for disease diagnosis, prognosis, and as therapeutic targets. Understanding the role of sEVs in COVID-19 disease may offer new insights into the pathogenesis of the disease and pave the way for the development of new diagnostic and therapeutic strategies. The surface protein decoration of these sEVs is subject to

alteration, dependent on the state of their cell of origin. It has previously been published that circulating EVs from SARS-CoV-2 patients have increased pro-coagulant activity when compared to healthy donors (12). This suggests that sEVs are subject to change in the wake of an infection.

We hypothesize that SARS-CoV-2 and the subsequent immune response shape the composition of EV surface marker proteins in a specific way that allows discrimination of a SARS-CoV-2 infection from other infectious diseases of the lung. We therefore investigated the sEV surface proteome of patients suffering from SARS-CoV-2 or Influenza infection in two independent cohorts and different methodology. We could show that more CD9 positive sEVs exist in plasma samples of Influenza patients compared to plasma of COVID-19 patients, and that they are probably of thrombocytic origin.

## **Methods:**

### **Patient samples:**

Initial plasma samples from patients with acute COVID-19 (n=100) and Influenza (n=17) (Table 1) in our initial cohort were obtained from the German Competence Network of community acquired pneumonia (CAPNETZ) (13). Equally, plasma samples were obtained from the validation cohort (COVID-19 n = 8, Influenza n=6, Table S1). Plasma samples and clinical data were accessed through a research project submitted to the CAPNETZ STIFTUNG (application number: 2020-04-23-P9CM). CAPNETZ inclusion criteria are fulfilment of one or more of the following criteria: Cough, purulent sputum, positive auscultation findings, fever. Exclusion criteria are hospitalisation more than 48 h prior to diagnosis of pneumonia, or active pulmonary tuberculosis within the last two months. Of 131 total patients, 127 have been recruited across Germany, while 4 patients have been recruited in Switzerland. All patients have been recruited before March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021. Therefore, no patient had received a COVID vaccination. 19 patients (4 Influenza patients and 15 COVID patients) had a seasonal Influenza vaccination in the past 13 months. The study was carried out following definitions of Good Clinical Practise, according to the declaration of Helsinki. Signed informed consent was obtained from every single individual for prospective biobanking. Institutional Review Board approval of every single center was obtained. A central IRB approval is available by the Ethics Committee of the Hannover Medical School; Project approval number: 301-2008. Routine parameters of the initial cohort were used for discriminating patients with acute COVID-19 from influenza infection. Where necessary, units of clinical parameters were converted for standardization purposes (Table S2).

**Table 1 Patient characteristic of the study cohort (EV Array).**

	<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>Influenza</b>
Patient Number	n = 100	n = 17
Age	55 (41, 68)	48 (38, 61)
Gender		
f	41 (45%)	6 (35%)
m	59 (55%)	11 (65%)
BMI	26.6 (24.0, 30.3)*	26.3 (23.5, 31.2)§
CRP[mg/l]	51 (19, 102)§	134 (44, 208)
ICU	8 (8%)	0 (0%)

Median (IQR)

\*Unknown = 8, §Unkown=2, §Unknown=2

**EV antibody microarray**

See supplementary methods. Data were deposited on the figshare database, DOI 10.6084/m9.figshare.28009130.

**ExoView analysis**

Plasma samples from the validation cohort were spun 2 times at 10,000 x g to clear potential contaminants. ExoView chips with CD9, CD63 and CD81 (tetraspanins) as well as CD41a capture antibodies were purchased from NanoView Biosciences and measured on an ExoView R100 imaging platform according to the manufacturer's protocol as described elsewhere (14). Chips were pre-scanned before loading with patient plasma samples to establish a baseline for the measurement. CD9, CD63 and CD81 fluorescent antibodies included in the kit were used for detection.

**Feature ranking**

All steps are described in the supplementary methods and were implemented using MATLAB (R2020b, The MathWorks, Inc.) and its Statistics and Machine Learning Toolbox. As the SVMs with radial kernel performed best regarding reduced number of surface protein markers while maintaining a high performance assessed by the AUC, these ML models were used in the RDFS approach (Table S3).

To account for the imbalance between the COVID-19 (n = 100) and Influenza (n = 17) cohorts, we applied oversampling of the Influenza cases before train-validation split and model training (repeating the analysis

with oversampling after train-validation split yielded similar results). This approach ensured a more balanced class distribution and prevented bias of the random forest classifier toward the majority (COVID-19) class. Influenza patients were randomly selected and duplicated until a total number of 50 Influenza patients was reached (new ratio: 2:1). After oversampling, the dataset contained 100 COVID-19 patients and 50 Influenza patients. Patient comorbidities (respiratory or pulmonary disease, vascular or cerebrovascular disease, chronic disease, malignant disease, other disease) were included in the model to assess their confounding potential.

### **Statistics**

Statistical methods were employed as indicated. For analysis of the ExoView data, 2-way ANOVA was used.  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant.

## **Results:**

### **Characterisation of the patient cohort**

From a German multi-center discovery cohort (CAPNETZ), clinical and laboratory data and plasma samples from 100 COVID-19 patients and 17 Influenza patients were retrieved. Both patient groups were very similar in terms of age, gender and BMI distribution (Table 1).

To create a benchmark for our surface marker analysis, we first assessed the discriminatory potential of routinely collected clinical and laboratory parameters in distinguishing COVID-19 from Influenza patients. In order to account for the heterogeneous nature of the routine parameters (different measurement scales), we employed a random forest (RF) classifier to identify parameters with discriminatory potential between COVID-19 and Influenza. The RF classifier was trained on 44 parameters and its performance was assessed using 10-fold cross-validation (CV). The classifier achieved an excellent separation between COVID-19 and Influenza patients on both training (AUC:  $1.00 \pm 0.42 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ) and validation data (AUC:  $1.00 \pm 13.50 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ). Ranking diagnostic parameters by their importance for the RF classifier in distinguishing the two patient groups, we found leukocyte value, systolic blood pressure and heart rate at 3 days post admission to be the three highest ranking diagnostic parameters (Figure 1A). While leukocyte values were significantly increased in Influenza patients vs. COVID-19 patients ( $p < 0.001$ ), COVID-19 patients showed a significant increase in heart rate 3 days after admission vs. Influenza patients

( $p < 0.001$ , Figure 1B). Systolic blood pressure showed no significant difference between the two patient groups ( $p > 0.05$ , Figure 1B). From the remainder of the 10 highest ranking routine parameters (Figure 1A), the heart rate at admission ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the thrombocyte values ( $p < 0.05$ ) were significantly increased in COVID-19 compared to Influenza patients, while CRP was reduced ( $p < 0.01$ , Figure S1A). Comorbidities had very low importance values (respiratory or pulmonary disease: 0.31, vascular or cerebrovascular disease: 0.21, chronic disease: 0.22, malignant disease: 0.23, other disease: 0.23), highlighting their minor contribution to the model.

To further test which number of ranked routine parameters would be sufficient to distinguish COVID-19 from Influenza patients with a high accuracy, we trained RF classifiers on different subsets of routine parameters and compared their performance (Figure S1B). With the eight highest ranking parameters (out of 44), a high efficacy was reached on both the training and validation data, resulting in a very clear distinction between the two groups ( $AUC_{\text{training}}: 1.00 \pm 0.86 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ,  $AUC_{\text{validation}}: 0.99 \pm 16.46 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ). A subsequent addition of more routine parameters did not lead to a recognizable improvement.

When grouping COVID-19 by their ICU admission, COVID-19 ICU patients tended to be similar to Influenza patients (Figure S2). Notably, CRP levels were similar between COVID-19 ICU and Influenza patients, while they were significantly lower in COVID-19 patients who had not been admitted to ICU ( $p < 0.001$ ). This pattern was also true for the leukocyte value ( $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, COVID-19 ICU patients were significantly different from Influenza patients in terms of thrombocytes value ( $p < 0.001$ ), while non-ICU COVID-19 patients showed intermediate levels. Thus, the increased thrombocyte levels in COVID-19 patients were primarily driven by the subset of COVID-19 patients that were admitted to ICU.

### **Patient differentiation based on sEV surface marker proteins**

In plasma samples from COVID-19 and Influenza patients, abundance data were obtained for 32 surface marker proteins. Two different feature selection methods were used to identify surface marker proteins that allowed discrimination between COVID-19 and influenza (Figure 2A). We first used the RF classifier which we also had employed for the clinical data in order to extract surface marker proteins with discriminatory potential. Using only EV surface marker proteins, the RF classifier reached a comparable performance ( $AUC_{\text{training}}: 1.00 \pm 0.00$ ,  $AUC_{\text{validation}}: 0.99 \pm 25.23 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ) to the 44 clinical parameters. Ranking the surface marker proteins by importance identified CD62E as the most prominent distinguishing feature, followed by ICAM-1 and CD41 (Figure 2B). These three surface protein markers together with CD151 (ranked fourth) were enough to distinguish between COVID-19 and Influenza

patients with a performance comparable to all 32 markers ( $AUC_{\text{training}}: 1.00 \pm 0.00$ ,  $AUC_{\text{validation}}: 1.00 \pm 8.43 \times 10^{-3}$ ) (Figure S3). CD62E was significantly different between COVID-19 and Influenza patients ( $p < 0.05$ , Figure 2C).

We also tested the feature-selection approach RDFS which selects subsets of features based on the performance of a SVM (Figure 2A). Ranking the sEV surface protein markers by their appearance in the selected subsets, the RDFS identified CD9, CD81 and CD141 as most frequently selected markers (Figure 2D). CD9 was not significantly different on sEVs from Influenza patients compared to sEVs from COVID-19 patients (Figure 2E). Furthermore, we tested CD63, CD81 and CD141. CD63 and CD81 only showed marginal differences on the EV Array (Figure S4), but we included them in the subsequent validation experiments, as they are all tetraspanins and classical EV marker proteins, such as CD9. When we stratified into ICU admission, the COVID-19 ICU patients differ significantly from non-ICU COVID-19 patients and Influenza patients in terms of CD9 ( $p < 0.05$ ), CD62E ( $p < 0.01$ ), CD63 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and CD81 ( $p < 0.01$ ) expression, suggesting their main potential in more severe COVID-19 cases (Figure S5). A combination of routine parameters and sEV markers as input for an RF classifier led to a similar performance ( $AUC_{\text{training}}: 1.00 \pm 0.00$ ,  $AUC_{\text{validation}}: 0.99 \pm 19.0 \times 10^{-3}$ ) compared to the two separate approaches described before. The 10 highest ranking parameters of this combined approach are shown in Figure S6 .

### **Validation of sEV surface marker proteins in an independent validation cohort**

We collected and measured eight new plasma samples from COVID-19 patients and six new plasma samples from Influenza patients (see Table S1 for patient characteristics) on the ExoView platform. Combining the results from our feature rankings, we visualized CD9 and CD81, which were both in the top list of the RDFS approach (Figure 2D), and CD63 (found by RF, Figure 2B) on EVs that were captured by anti-CD41a, anti-CD9, anti-CD81 or anti-CD63 antibodies. We included surface markers that did not show strong differences on the original array as controls. The exemplary ExoView staining patterns for a sample from a COVID-19 patient and an Influenza patient are shown (Figure 3A). Significantly more particles were captured in Influenza samples, especially by the CD9 capture spot ( $p < 0.001$ , Figure 3B). While particle size was comparable between Influenza and COVID-19 samples (Figure 3C), the fluorescence indicative of CD9 was significantly increased on Influenza samples vs. COVID-19 samples ( $p < 0.05$ , Figure 3D). This confirmed the tendency that we already observed on the EV Array by median (Figure 2E).

### **Association between clinical parameters and CD9**

As our validation data suggest CD9 as a differential marker between COVID-19 and Influenza samples, we tested the association of CD9 with the highest-ranking routine parameters from our RF approach (Figure 1A). We controlled for sex, age and smoking status as potentially confounding variables. The only laboratory parameter with a significant association with CD9 was the thrombocyte value ( $p < 0.05$ , Table S4, Figure S7). Furthermore, comorbidities only correlated weakly with EV surface markers levels of CD9 ( $r < 0.21$  in all cases), CD63 ( $r < 0.12$  in all cases), and CD81 ( $r < 0.12$  in all cases),

### **Discussion:**

In this study, we analysed routine clinical and laboratory parameters as well as the surface marker decoration of extracellular vesicles that we gained from the plasma of patients suffering from COVID-19 and Influenza. We extracted eight routine parameters by a RF approach that were, taken together, excellent discriminators between COVID-19 and Influenza. The discriminatory power of leukocyte value and thrombocyte value was sufficient to differentiate COVID-19 patients with ICU admission, COVID-19 patients without ICU admission, and Influenza patients (all without ICU admission). We furthermore identified a set of sEV surface molecules by applying two feature-selection approaches (RF or RDFS) that showed the potential to differentiate between COVID-19 and Influenza disease. CD9 was one of the most prominent sEV surface molecule that was found by both feature-selection approaches alike. We therefore chose to confirm CD9 as a discriminating sEV surface marker, and additionally measured CD81 and CD63, on an ExoView platform. We could show that the total particle count was higher in Influenza samples, especially when detecting CD9 positive vesicles. We could thereby corroborate CD9 as a valid marker to differentiate between vesicles from COVID-19 and Influenza patients. Furthermore, we show CD9, CD62E, CD63 and CD81 levels to be induced in COVID patients that had been admitted to ICU vs. non-ICU COVID patients and Influenza patients, suggesting these surface proteins to be markers of disease severity.

It has previously been shown that CD9 is increased on circulating vesicles from COVID-19 patients when compared to healthy donors. Furthermore, the same study showed a pro-coagulant activity of these vesicles due to high levels of CD142 (tissue factor), as measured by flow cytometry. Therefore, it was hypothesised that these vesicles act as initiators of the coagulation cascade (12). We have found slightly higher levels of CD9 on vesicles from Influenza patients compared to vesicles from COVID-19 patients. This observation was more pronounced when we limited our observation to CD9/CD41 double positive vesicles, yielding insight into a specific subset of sEV that was inaccessible with the EV array technique. CD41 suggested platelet origin of these EVs. Compared to CD9, CD142 was only weakly detected in our assay, so we do not find evidence of sEV pro-coagulant activity due to CD142. While the small sample size of influenza patients precludes a disease-specific conclusion, we show a significant global positive association between CD9 and the thrombocyte value. This observation corroborates our hypothesis of the thrombocytic origin of the CD9 positive vesicles we observe. It has been described before that Influenza virus activates platelets in a mouse model (15, 16). Furthermore, it has been hypothesized that platelets serve to carry Influenza virions to sites that are distant to the primary infection site (17). It is therefore conceivable that the high load of sEVs with probable platelet origin that we observe in plasma samples of Influenza patients is a virulence feature of Influenza virus infection. Besides correlation with the thrombocyte value, there was also a tendency of CD9 to correlate with other clinical parameters, such as body temperature, sodium value, and CRP, but not to a significant extent.

Additional to surface marker decoration, also the cargo of vesicles has been shown to be a function of infection. Analysis of bronchoalveolar lavage fluid (BALF) from patients with influenza-induced ARDS revealed an EV-associated miRNA profile linked to disease severity. Notably, among nine dysregulated miRNAs in BALF sEVs, miR-17-5p was highly upregulated in both patient samples and in exosomes from influenza-infected lung epithelial cells. Functionally, transfer of miR-17-5p via exosomes to naive lung cells downregulated the antiviral factor Mx1 and enhanced viral replication, underscoring a potential biomarker and mechanistic role for this miRNA in severe influenza (18). A 2021 cohort study (54 influenza patients: 25 A and 29 B) profiled serum exosomal microRNAs (miRNAs) and found distinctive changes during infection. Influenza B patients showed 76 miRNAs significantly altered versus healthy controls, while influenza A patients had 26 miRNAs changed. Several of these miRNAs (e.g., hsa-miR-326, miR-15b-5p, miR-150-5p) correlated strongly with inflammatory cytokine levels such as IL-6, IL-17A, and IL-1 $\beta$  (19).

Other EV markers that we have not addressed in detail include for example the ESCRT proteins (20), and a wide variety of lipids (21).

As patients present at different time-points after symptom onset, parameter kinetics might vary. Further specific limitations of our study include the lack of a severity index to subgroup the patients into a more severe and less severe group. We have therefore used the ICU admission as a proxy for disease severity, which is limited to the EV surface array cohort. Also, the imbalanced dataset of the EV Array measurement, leaning strongly toward the COVID-19 samples, constitutes a limitation. Furthermore, the investigation of sEV surface markers by vesicle array did not yield clear individual markers with discriminatory potential between COVID-19 and Influenza samples. Only their aggregation into a group and additional testing on an Exoview platform with independent samples revealed CD9 as most potent discriminator found by all our approaches. Our study focuses on the differences in vesicle surface marker decoration between COVID and Influenza infection and therefore does not have a healthy control group. We have addressed the comparison of sEV surface marker decoration in lung infection vs. healthy donors in a previous study (22).

While COVID-19 strain evolution would have been a very intriguing parameter to include into our models, the time of patient recruitment, which was before March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021, predates the onset of COVID-19 strain diversification.

In summary, we can show CD41/CD9 positive sEVs to be more abundant in Influenza infection vs. COVID-19 infection. Furthermore, CD9 abundance significantly associated positively with the thrombocyte value. Thrombocyte numbers are an important clinical parameter, as they indicate risk for vascular thrombosis (16). Our finding might aid diagnostic work in the clinic to early on differentiate between COVID-19 and Influenza, which is crucial for adequate patient treatment. Additionally, differences in surface marker abundance between COVID-19 and Influenza disease might help elucidate the respective pathophysiology and even provide therapeutic disease-specific targets in the future.

As we do see differences in surface marker abundance, it is tempting to speculate that also the vesical cargo (protein and RNA) might be different between the two disease entities. In the future, we will elaborate on this question in order to substantiate our claim that sEVs from plasma are different between COVID-19 and Influenza disease.

**Declarations:**

Ethics approval:

A central IRB approval is available by the Ethics Committee of the Hannover Medical School; Project approval number: 301-2008.

Consent:

Signed informed consent was obtained from every single individual for prospective biobanking.

Availability of data and material:

The EV Array dataset that supports the findings of this study is available on the figshare database under <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.30454670> (23). Linked supplemental methods are available under <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.28574225.v1>.

Competing interests:

The authors have nothing to declare.

Authors contributions:

WB and FKR performed the experiments, did the calculations and wrote the manuscript

RB and MJ performed and analysed the EV Array and proofread the manuscript

ALJ and KL interpreted the ExoView analyses and proofread the manuscript

ML, BW, LNS, and GR provided expertise on Influenza and COVID-19 disease and proofread the manuscript

GB (for Members of the CAPNETZ study group) provided samples and clinical data, as well as project administration.

NB and BS acquired funding, supervised the project and proofread the manuscript

All authors read and approved the final manuscript

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This work has been presented on the 12th DZL Annual Meeting, 5–7 June 2024, Germany, as a poster ([https://dzl.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/DZL2024\\_Abstract\\_Book-1.pdf](https://dzl.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/DZL2024_Abstract_Book-1.pdf))

#### **Figure Legends**

**Figure 1: Identification of differential clinical diagnostic markers between COVID-19 and Influenza patients.** (A) Routinely collected diagnostic clinical parameters were systematically investigated by a random-forest feature-selection approach. The top 10 clinical markers are shown, ranked by their mean feature importance + SD. (B) Differences between COVID-19 (n=100) and Influenza (n=17) patients for the three highest ranking clinical markers are shown. Data are shown as 25th to 75th percentiles (boxes) and 5th to 95th percentile (whiskers). The median is shown as a horizontal line. Statistical significance was assessed by Mann-Whitney Test. \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

**Figure 2: Identification of differential sEV marker panels between COVID-19 and Influenza patients.** All 32 surface marker intensities from the EV microarray across 17 Influenza and 100 COVID-19 patients were systematically investigated by EV antibody microarray (A). Top 10 ranked EV surface marker proteins, selected by our feature-selection approach using random forest (B) or RDFS with SVM (D) are shown. The markers are ranked by their mean feature importance + SD (B) or the number of

appearance (in %) in the resulting subsets of features, which were selected by using a SVM with radial kernel (D). The top-listed marker (CD62E, C; CD9, E) is shown as 25th to 75th percentiles (boxes) and 5th to 95th percentile (whiskers). The median is shown as a horizontal line. Statistical significance was assessed by Mann-Whitney Test. \* $p < 0.05$

**Figure 3: Validation of selected surface markers in a validation cohort by Exoview.** COVID-19 (n=8) and Influenza (n=6) plasma samples were additionally measured as validation cohort on an ExoView platform to confirm selected markers from the protein array results. Exoview images are exemplary depicted of a COVID-19 and Influenza sample. Detection antibodies are indicated by colour (A). Particle count distribution for each disease is shown as a function of capture antibody (x-axis) and detection antibody indicated per panel (mean count + SD is shown). Particle counts in Influenza samples were higher, especially on particles that stained CD9-positive (B), while vesicle size was equal between COVID-19 and Influenza patient samples (C). The fluorescence indicative of CD9 was significantly increased on Influenza samples vs. COVID-19 samples (D). Significance was assessed by 2-way ANOVA. MIgG served as isotype control. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*\* $p < 0.0001$

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### **Members of the publishing CAPNETZ study network 2023**

Members of the CAPNETZ study group except the authors:

A. Fuchs, M. Engelmann, G. Paul, M. Ayoub, K. Groehl, K. Riedl (Augsburg); D. Stolz (Basel / Freiburg); W. Bauer, E. C. Diehl-Wiesenecker, I. von Wunsch-Rolshoven Teruel, N. Galtung, N. Suttorp, M. Witzenrath, C. Wildberg, C. Pley, E. Zessin (Berlin); S. Schmagel (Cottbus); B. Schaaf, J. Kremling, D. Nickoleit-Bitzenberger, H. Azzoui, M. Hower, F. Hempel, K. Prebeg, K. Popkirova (Dortmund); M. Kolditz, B. Schulte-Hubbert, S. Langner (Dresden); C. Bellinghausen, A. Grünewaldt, A. Endres, C. Frigerio, B. Fiedler (Frankfurt), M. Panning (Freiburg); T. Welte, I. Pink, N. Drick, T. Fühner, M. van't Klooster, T. Steinberg, G. Barten-Neiner, W. Kröner, O. Unruh, N. Adaskina, F. Eberhardt, C. Julius, T. Illig, N. Klopp (Hannover); M. Pletz, B. T. Schlenvoigt, C. Bahrs, A. Moeser, J. Ankert (Jena); U. Sommerwerck, T. Wintermantel (Cologne); D. Drömann, P. Parschke, K. Franzen, J. Rupp, F. Waldeck, N. Käding (Lübeck); C. Spinner, J. Erber, F. Voit, J. Schneider (Munich); M. Falcone, G. Tiseo (Pisa); D. Heigener, I. Hering (Rotenburg/Wümme); W. Albrich, F. Rassouli, B. Wirth (St. Gallen); C. Neurohr (Stuttgart); A. Essig, S. Stenger, M. Wallner (Ulm); H. Burgmann, L. Traby, L. Schubert; and all study nurses.

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### **Members of the CAPNETZ study network 2023 (with details of the institution)**

Members of the CAPNETZ study group except the authors:

A. Fuchs, M. Engelmann, G. Paul, M. Ayoub, K. Groehl, K. Riedl (III. Medical Clinic, University Hospital Augsburg); D. Stolz (Clinic of Pneumology, University Hospital Basel, Switzerland / Clinic of Pneumology, University Hospital Freiburg); W. Bauer, E. C. Diehl-Wiesenecker, I. von Wunsch-Rolshoven Teruel, N. Galtung (Central Emergency Admission / Medical Admission Ward, Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin); N. Suttorp, M. Witzenrath, C. Wildberg, C. Pley, E. Zessin (Clinic of Pneumology, Respiratory Medicine and Intensive Care Medicine with Study Area of Sleep Medicine, Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin); S. Schmagel (Pneumology Section of II. Medical Clinic, Carl-Thiem Hospital Cottbus); B. Schaaf, J. Kremling, D. Nickoleit-Bitzenberger, H. Azzoui, M. Hower, F. Hempel, K. Prebeg, K. Popkirova

(Pneumology, Infectiology and Internal Intensive Care Medicine, Medical Clinic Nord, Dortmund); M. Kolditz, B. Schulte-Hubbert, S. Langner (Medical Clinic I / Department of Pneumology, University Hospital Dresden); C. Bellinghausen, A. Grünewaldt, A. Endres, C. Frigerio, B. Fiedler (Medical Clinic I - Pneumology/Allergology, University Hospital of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Frankfurt), M. Panning (Institute of Virology, University Hospital Freiburg); T. Welte, I. Pink, N. Drick (Department of Pneumology, Hannover Medical School, Hannover); T. Fühner, M. van't Klooster, T. Steinberg (Clinic of Pneumology, Intensive Care and Sleep Medicine, Siloah Hospital, Hannover), G. Barten-Neiner, W. Kröner, O. Unruh, N. Adaskina, F. Eberherdt, C. Julius (CAPNETZ Office, Hannover); T. Illig, N. Klopp (Hannover Unified Biobank, Hannover Medical School); M. Pletz, B. T. Schlenvoigt, C. Bahrs, A. Moeser, J. Ankert (Institute for Infection Medicine and Hospital Hygiene (IIMK), University Hospital Jena); U. Sommerwerck, T. Wintermantel (Cellitinnen-Severinsklosterchen Augustinerinnen Hospital, Cologne); D. Drömann, P. Parschke, K. Franzen (Medical Clinic III, Pneumology, University Medical Center Schleswig-Holstein, Lübeck); J. Rupp, F. Waldeck, N. Käding (Clinic of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology, University Hospital Schleswig-Holstein, Lübeck); C. Spinner, J. Erber, F. Voit, J. Schneider (Clinic of Internal Medicine II, Infectiology, University Hospital rechts der Isar, Technical University of Munich); M. Falcone, G. Tiseo (Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, Università di Pisa); D. Heigener, I. Hering (Department of Pneumology, Agaplesion Diakonieklinikum Rotenburg); W. Albrich, F. Rassouli, B. Wirth (Department of Infectiology and Hospital Hygiene, Kantonsspital St. Gallen, Switzerland); C. Neurohr (Department of Pneumology and Respiratory Medicine, Robert Bosch Hospital, Stuttgart); A. Essig, S. Stenger (Institute of Medical Microbiology and Hygiene, University Hospital Ulm), M. Wallner (2mt Software, Ulm); H. Burgmann, L. Traby, L. Schubert, (University Clinic of Internal Medicine I, Medical University of Vienna); and all study nurses.

Figure 1

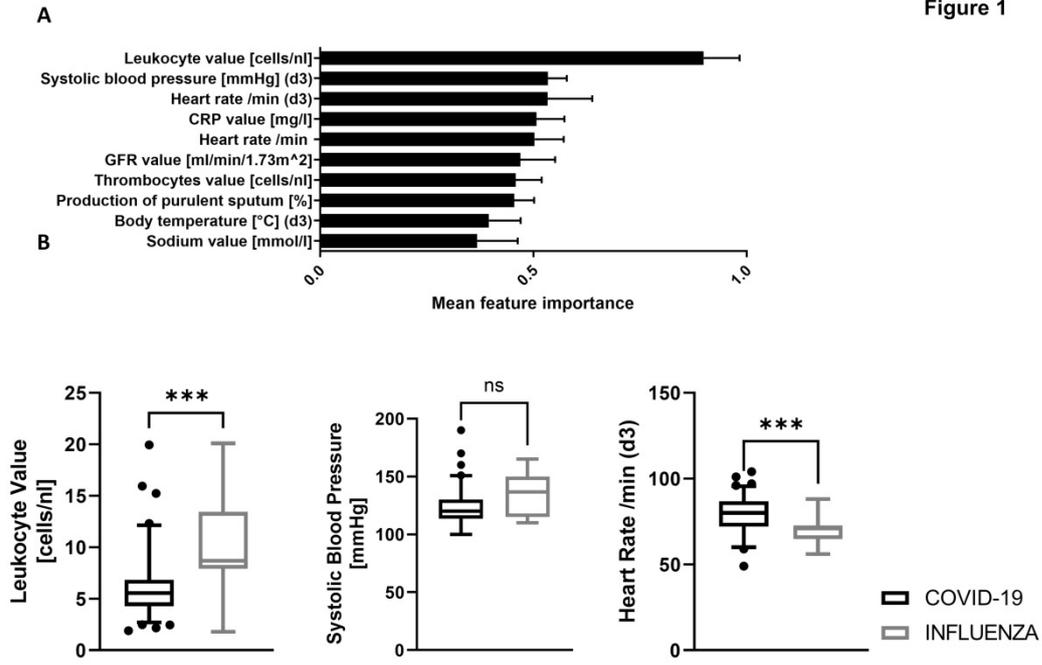
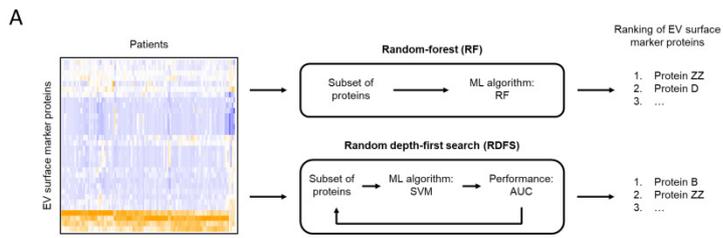
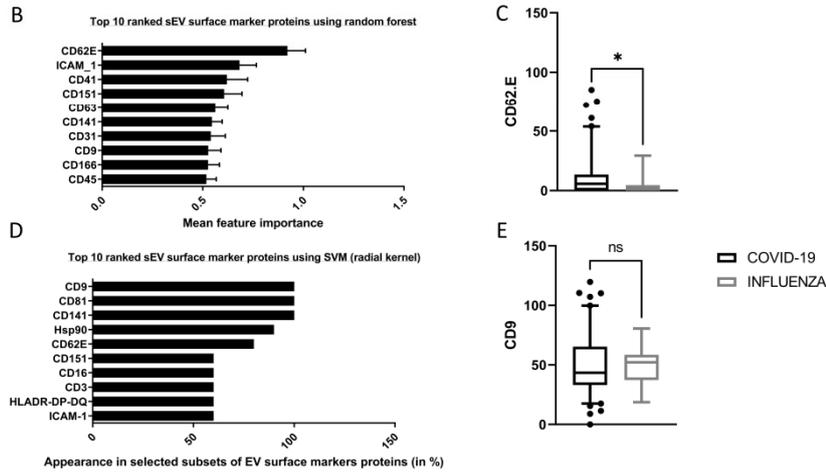


Fig 1

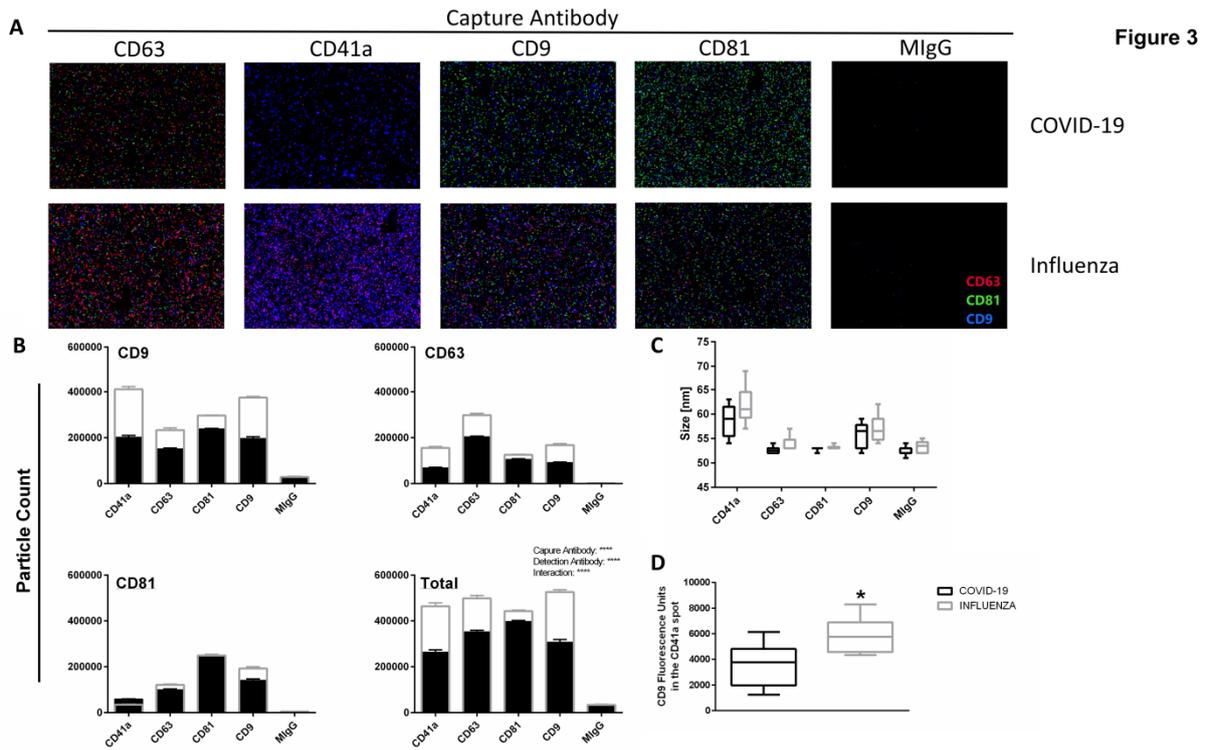
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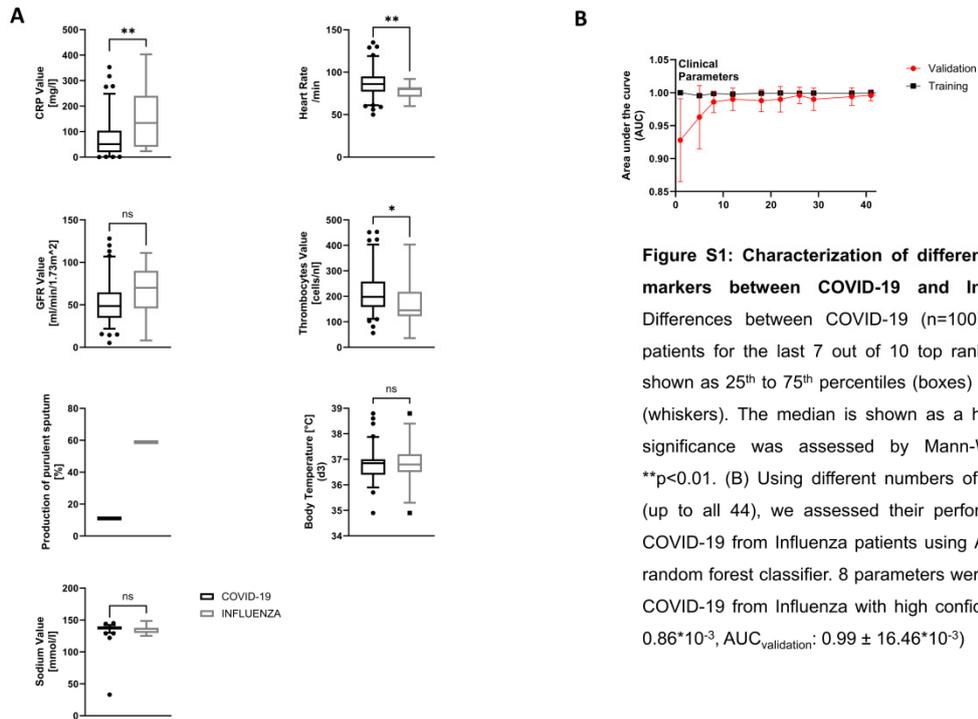
**Figure 2**



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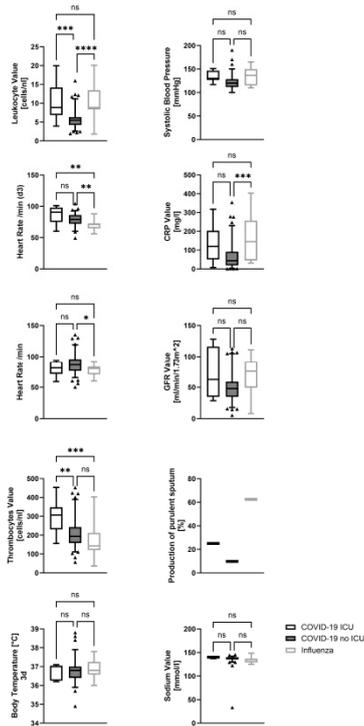


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FigureS1

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**Figure S2: Characterization of differential clinical diagnostic markers between COVID-19 and Influenza patients with stratification into ICU admission.** Differences between COVID-19 (n=100) and Influenza (n=17) patients for the 10 top ranked clinical markers are shown as 25<sup>th</sup> to 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles (boxes) and 5<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile (whiskers). The median is shown as a horizontal line. COVID-19 patients are subclustered into ICU admission (n=8) and no ICU admission (n=92). No Influenza patient was admitted to ICU. Statistical significance was assessed by ordinary One-Way-ANOVA with Tukey multiple comparison testing. \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001.

FigureS2

	<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>Influenza</b>
<b>Patient Number</b>	n = 8	n = 6
<b>Age</b>	71 (67, 76)	67 (56, 81)
<b>Gender</b>		
f	2 (25%)	1 (17%)
m	6 (75%)	5 (83%)

BMI	29.3 <sup>*</sup> (28.4, 29.3)	27.2 <sup>§</sup> (26.8, 30.4)
CRP[mg/l]	75 (43, 84) <sup>§</sup>	31 (24, 56)
ICU	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Median (IQR)		

**Table S1:** Patient characteristics of the validation cohort (Exoview cohort). No documented admission to ICU for either group.

\*Unknown=3, <sup>§</sup>Unknown=1; <sup>§</sup>Unknown=1

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