

Life Sciences Reporting Summary

Nature Research wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form is intended for publication with all accepted life science papers and provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. Every life science submission will use this form; some list items might not apply to an individual manuscript, but all fields must be completed for clarity.

For further information on the points included in this form, see Reporting Life Sciences Research. For further information on Nature Research policies, including our data availability policy, see Authors & Referees and the Editorial Policy Checklist.

► Experimental design

1. Sample size

Describe how sample size was determined.

Each of the n replicates of each experiment is the average of thousands of bacterial cells as a sample size. Each experiment was replicated at least 3 times, but usually $n > 3$. The n for each experiment is indicated in each figure.

2. Data exclusions

Describe any data exclusions.

No data were excluded.

3. Replication

Describe whether the experimental findings were reliably reproduced.

Each experiment was replicated n times (where n is given in each figure for each experiment). Although the exact quantification differs between replicates, the qualitative result is the same, so that it is reasonable to say that the "replication was successful".

4. Randomization

Describe how samples/organisms/participants were allocated into experimental groups.

There were thousands of bacterial cells were sampled for each of the n replicates. Because of the large sample size for each replicate, a representative number of samples were collected for each replicate. There was no allocation of samples into experimental groups, beyond conducting separate biological replicates.

5. Blinding

Describe whether the investigators were blinded to group allocation during data collection and/or analysis.

Blinding of group allocation is irrelevant to our data analysis, because there was no allocation to experimental groups, beyond collecting n replicates, all of which were analyzed equally.

Note: all studies involving animals and/or human research participants must disclose whether blinding and randomization were used.

6. Statistical parameters

For all figures and tables that use statistical methods, confirm that the following items are present in relevant figure legends (or in the Methods section if additional space is needed).

n/a Confirmed

- ☐ ☒ The exact sample size (n) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement (animals, litters, cultures, etc.)
- ☐ ☒ A description of how samples were collected, noting whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
- ☐ ☒ A statement indicating how many times each experiment was replicated
- ☐ ☒ The statistical test(s) used and whether they are one- or two-sided (note: only common tests should be described solely by name; more complex techniques should be described in the Methods section)
- ☐ ☒ A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as an adjustment for multiple comparisons
- ☐ ☒ The test results (e.g. P values) given as exact values whenever possible and with confidence intervals noted
- ☐ ☒ A clear description of statistics including central tendency (e.g. median, mean) and variation (e.g. standard deviation, interquartile range)
- ☐ ☒ Clearly defined error bars

See the web collection on statistics for biologists for further resources and guidance.

► Software

Policy information about availability of computer code

7. Software

Describe the software used to analyze the data in this study.

Matlab (version R2016b) was used to analyze data. A detailed description of the analysis is provided in the Materials and Methods section.

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the paper but not yet described in the published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers upon request. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). *Nature Methods* guidance for providing algorithms and software for publication provides further information on this topic.

► Materials and reagents

Policy information about availability of materials

8. Materials availability

Indicate whether there are restrictions on availability of unique materials or if these materials are only available for distribution by a for-profit company.

All materials that were used in this study are available from standard commercial suppliers or from the corresponding author.

9. Antibodies

Describe the antibodies used and how they were validated for use in the system under study (i.e. assay and species).

All antibodies that were used are listed in the Materials and Methods section, including part numbers and supplier information.

10. Eukaryotic cell lines

a. State the source of each eukaryotic cell line used.

not applicable

b. Describe the method of cell line authentication used.

not applicable

c. Report whether the cell lines were tested for mycoplasma contamination.

not applicable

d. If any of the cell lines used are listed in the database of commonly misidentified cell lines maintained by ICLAC, provide a scientific rationale for their use.

not applicable

► Animals and human research participants

Policy information about studies involving animals; when reporting animal research, follow the ARRIVE guidelines

11. Description of research animals

Provide details on animals and/or animal-derived materials used in the study.

not applicable

12. Description of human research participants

Describe the covariate-relevant population characteristics of the human research participants.

not applicable