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1. Description

Components	1 mL monoclonal Anti-IL-21 antibodies, human conjugated to various dyes. PE 130-096-868 APC 130-096-882
Clone	3A3-N2 (isotype: mouse IgG1).
Capacity	100 tests or up to 10 ⁹ total cells.
Product format	Antibodies are supplied in buffer containing stabilizer and 0.05% sodium azide.
Storage	Store protected from light at 2–8 °C. Do not freeze. The expiration date is indicated on the vial label.

1.1 Background information

Interleukin 21 (IL-21) is secreted by a certain subset of CD4⁺ T cells, called T follicular helper (T_{FH}) cells, also characterized by the expression of CXCR5 and ICOS and the lineage-specific transcription factor BCL6. But IL-21 production can also be found in other T_H cell lineages and natural killer T (NKT) cells. IL-21 acts in a autocrine manner on T_{FH} cells and is critical for antibody production by B cells, it enhances natural killer (NK) cell functions, and promotes proliferation of CD8⁺ T cells.

1.2 Applications

- Identification and enumeration of IL-21-producing cells by flow cytometry or fluorescence microscopy.
- Identification and enumeration of IL-21-producing antigen-specific T cells upon restimulation with the respective antigen or detection of IL-21-producing T cells upon polyclonal restimulation.
- Analysis of cytokine production of rare cells by solid-phase staining technology, in combination with magnetic enrichment of cells. For details refer to section 2.3.2.

1.3 Recommended antibody dilution

- Anti-IL-21 antibodies should be used at a dilution of 1:10.

1.4 Reagent requirements

- Buffer: Prepare a solution containing phosphate-buffered saline (PBS), pH 7.2, 0.5% bovine serum albumin (BSA), and 2 mM EDTA by diluting MACS[®] BSA Stock Solution (# 130-091-376) 1:20 with autoMACS[®] Rinsing Solution (# 130-091-222). Keep buffer cold (2–8 °C).
 - ▲ **Note:** EDTA can be replaced by other supplements such as anticoagulant citrate dextrose formula-A (ACD-A) or citrate phosphate dextrose (CPD). BSA can be replaced by other proteins such as human serum albumin, human serum, or fetal bovine serum (FBS). Buffers or media containing Ca²⁺ or Mg²⁺ are not recommended for use.
- Culture medium, e.g., RPMI 1640 (# 130-091-440) containing 5% human serum, for example, autologous AB serum (do not use BSA or FBS because of non-specific stimulation!).
- Reagents for cell culture and stimulation, e.g., CytoStim (# 130-092-172, # 130-092-173) and CD40 antibodies pure – functional grade (# 130-094-133) to avoid downregulation of CD154. For details refer to the respective data sheet. For more information about antigens refer to www.miltenyibiotec.com.
- Secretion inhibitor, e.g., brefeldin A.
- (Optional) FcR Blocking Reagent, human (# 130-059-901) to avoid Fc receptor-mediated antibody labeling.
- Inside Stain Kit (# 130-090-477) for the fixation and permeabilization of cells.
- (Optional) Fluorochrome-conjugated antibodies for cell surface staining, e.g., CD4 (VIT4)-VioBlue[®] (# 130-094-153), CD4 (VIT4)-FITC (# 130-092-358), CD4 (VIT4)-PE (# 130-092-373), or CD4 (VIT4)-APC (# 130-092-374). For more information about antibodies refer to www.miltenyibiotec.com/antibodies.
- Fluorochrome-conjugated antibodies for intracellular staining of activation markers, e.g., CD154-VioBlue (# 130-096-217), CD154-PE (# 130-092-289), or CD154-APC (# 130-092-290).
- (Optional) Fixation and Dead Cell Discrimination Kit (# 130-091-163) for cell fixation and flow cytometric exclusion of dead cells.

Additional requirements for intracellular cytokine staining in combination with magnetic cell separation (refer to protocol 2.3.2)

- MACS MicroBeads of choice, e.g., CD4 MicroBeads (# 130-045-101).
- MS Columns and suitable MACS Separator (MiniMACS™, OctoMACS™, VarioMACS™, or SuperMACS™ II Separator).
▲ **Note:** Column adapters are required to insert certain columns into the VarioMACS or SuperMACS II Separators. For details refer to the respective MACS Separator data sheet.
- (Optional) Pre-Separation Filters, 30 µm (# 130-041-407) to remove cell clumps.

2. Protocols

2.1 Sample preparation

To detect and isolate cytokine-secreting cells, best results are achieved by starting the assay with fresh PBMCs or with other leukocyte-containing single-cell preparations from tissues or cell lines. Alternatively, frozen cell preparations can be used. For details refer to the protocols section at www.miltenyibiotec.com/protocols.

When working with anticoagulated peripheral blood or buffy coat, peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) should be isolated by density gradient centrifugation, for example, using Ficoll-Paque™.

▲ **Note:** To remove platelets after density gradient separation, resuspend cell pellet in buffer and centrifuge at 200×g for 10–15 minutes at 20 °C. Carefully aspirate supernatant. Repeat washing step.

When working with tissues or lysed blood, prepare a single-cell suspension using standard methods.

For details refer to the protocols section at www.miltenyibiotec.com/protocols.

▲ Dead cells may bind non-specifically to MACS MicroBeads. To remove dead cells, we recommend using density gradient centrifugation or the Dead Cell Removal Kit (# 130-090-101).

2.2 *In vitro* stimulation of T cells

▲ Always include a negative control in the experiment. The sample should be treated in exactly the same manner as the stimulated sample, except for the addition of the stimulus.

▲ A positive control should also be included in the experiment, for example, a sample stimulated with PMA and ionomycin.

▲ Do not use media containing any non-human proteins, such as BSA or FBS, because of non-specific stimulation.

1. Wash cells by adding medium and centrifuge at 300×g for 10 minutes. Aspirate supernatant.
2. Resuspend cells at a density of 10⁷ per mL in culture medium containing 5% human serum. Plate cells in dishes at a density of 5×10⁶ cells/cm². For details refer to section 4. Appendix: Flask and dish sizes for *in vitro* stimulation of T cells.
3. Add an antigen or control reagent in the appropriate concentration, for example, PMA (20 ng/mL) and ionomycin (1 µg/mL).
4. Incubate cells for 2 hours at 37 °C and 5% CO₂.
5. Add 1 µg/mL brefeldin A and incubate for an additional 4 hours at 37 °C and 5% CO₂.

6. Collect cells carefully by pipetting up and down when working with smaller volumes or by using a cell scraper. Rinse the dish with cold buffer. Check microscopically for any remaining cells, if necessary, rinse the dish again.

2.3 Intracellular immunofluorescent cytokine staining protocols

2.3.1 Intracellular staining of cells in suspension

▲ It is recommended to stain 10⁶ cells per sample. When working with up to 10⁷ cells, use the same volumes as indicated. When working with higher cell numbers, scale up all reagent volumes and total volumes accordingly (e.g. for 2×10⁷ nucleated cells, use twice the volume of all indicated reagent volumes and total volumes).

1. Wash up to 10⁷ cells by adding 1–2 mL of buffer and centrifuge at 300×g for 10 minutes. Aspirate supernatant completely.
2. (Optional) Stain cell surface antigens that are sensitive to fixation with appropriate antibodies according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Then wash cells by adding 1–2 mL of buffer and centrifuge at 300×g for 10 minutes. Aspirate supernatant completely.
3. Resuspend up to 10⁷ cells in 500 µL of buffer.
4. Add 500 µL of Inside Fix (Inside Stain Kit). Mix well and incubate for 20 minutes in the dark at room temperature.
5. Centrifuge at 300×g for 5 minutes. Aspirate supernatant carefully.
6. Wash cells by adding 1 mL of buffer and centrifuge at 300×g for 5 minutes. Aspirate supernatant carefully.
7. (Optional) Stain cell surface antigens that are sensitive to permeabilization with appropriate antibodies according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Then wash cells by adding 1–2 mL of buffer and centrifuge at 300×g for 10 minutes. Aspirate supernatant completely.
8. Wash cells by adding 1 mL of Inside Perm (Inside Stain Kit) and centrifuge at 300×g for 5 minutes. Aspirate supernatant carefully.
9. Resuspend cells in 90 µL of Inside Perm. Add 10 µL of the Anti-IL-21 antibody.
10. (Optional) Add additional staining antibodies to the solution, for example, 10 µL of CD4 (VIT4)-FITC (# 130-092-358) and 10 µL of CD154-VioBlue (# 130-096-217).

▲ **Note:** For efficient permeabilization upon intracellular staining the volume of Inside Perm should be at least 5× the volume of staining antibodies.

11. Mix well and incubate for 10 minutes in the dark at room temperature.
12. Wash cells by adding 1 mL of Inside Perm and centrifuge at 300×g for 5 minutes. Aspirate supernatant carefully.
13. Resuspend cell pellet in a suitable amount of buffer for analysis by flow cytometry or fluorescence microscopy. Store cells at 2–8 °C in the dark until analysis. Mix well before flow cytometric acquisition.

▲ **Note:** Samples may be stored at 2–8 °C in the dark for up to 24 hours.

▲ **Note:** Do not use propidium iodide (PI) or 7-AAD staining.

2.3.2 Intracellular staining in combination with magnetic cell separation (solid phase intracellular staining)

▲ Work fast, keep cells cold, and use pre-cooled solutions. This will prevent capping of antibodies on the cell surface and non-specific cell labeling.

▲ Volumes for magnetic labeling given below are for up to 10^7 total cells. When working with fewer than 10^7 cells, use the same volumes as indicated. When working with higher cell numbers, scale up all reagent volumes and total volumes accordingly (e.g. for 2×10^7 total cells, use twice the volume of all indicated reagent volumes and total volumes).

▲ For optimal performance it is important to obtain a single-cell suspension before magnetic labeling. Pass cells through 30 μm nylon mesh (Pre-Separation Filters, 30 μm # 130-041-407) to remove cell clumps which may clog the column. Moisten filter with buffer before use.

▲ The recommended incubation temperature is 2–8 °C. Higher temperatures and/or longer incubation times may lead to non-specific cell labeling. Working on ice may require increased incubation times.

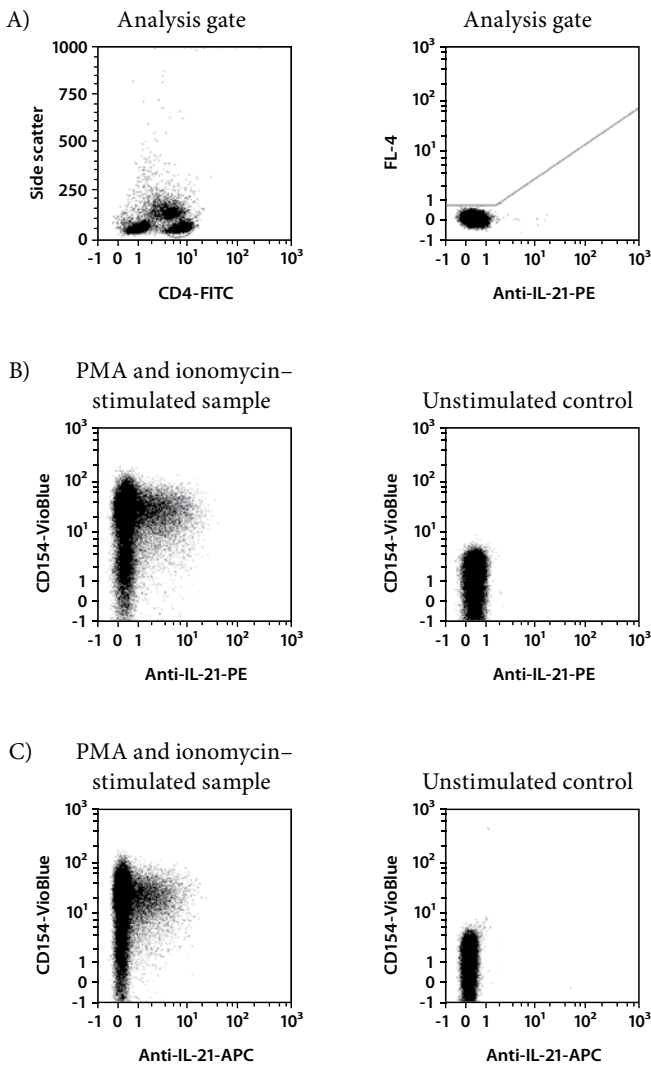
▲ Always wait until the column reservoir is empty before proceeding to the next step.

1. Wash cells by adding 1–2 mL of buffer per 10^7 cells and centrifuge cell suspension at $300 \times g$ for 10 minutes. Aspirate supernatant completely.
2. Resuspend cell pellet in 80 μL of buffer per 10^7 total cells.
3. Add 20 μL of MACS MicroBeads, e.g., CD4 MicroBeads (# 130-045-101), per 10^7 total cells.
▲ **Note:** For details on the procedure refer to the respective MACS MicroBeads data sheet.
4. Mix well and incubate for 15 minutes in the refrigerator (2–8 °C).
5. (Optional) Counterstain cell surface antigens with antibodies that are sensitive to fixation according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
6. Wash cells by adding 1–2 mL of buffer per 10^7 cells and centrifuge at $300 \times g$ for 10 minutes. Aspirate supernatant completely.
7. Resuspend cells in 500 μL of buffer.
8. Place MS Column in the magnetic field of a suitable MACS Separator.
9. Prepare column by rinsing with 500 μL of buffer.

10. Apply cell suspension onto the column. Collect flow-through containing unlabeled cells.
11. Wash column with $3 \times 500 \mu\text{L}$ of buffer. Collect unlabeled cells that pass through and combine with effluent from step 10.
12. Remove column from the separator and place it on a suitable collection tube.
13. Pipette 500 μL of buffer onto the column. Immediately flush out the magnetically labeled cells by firmly pushing the plunger into the column.
14. Add 500 μL of Inside Fix to the eluted cell fraction and incubate for 20 minutes at room temperature.
15. Place a second MS Column in the magnetic field of a suitable MACS Separator and prepare column by rinsing with 500 μL of buffer.
16. Apply the fixed cell suspension onto the column.
17. Wash cells by rinsing the column with $1 \times 500 \mu\text{L}$ of buffer, followed by $2 \times 500 \mu\text{L}$ of Inside Perm.
18. Prepare a solution of 10 μL of Anti-IL-21 antibodies and 90 μL of Inside Perm.
19. (Optional) Add additional staining antibodies to the solution, e.g., 10 μL of CD4 (VIT4)-FITC (# 130-092-358) and 10 μL of CD154-VioBlue (# 130-096-217).
▲ **Note:** Do not exceed the total solution volume of 150 μL .
20. Apply the solution onto the column and incubate for 10 minutes at room temperature.
▲ **Note:** The MACS Column has a flow-stop mechanism that will retain the solution in the column.
21. Wash cells by rinsing the column with $2 \times 500 \mu\text{L}$ of Inside Perm followed by $1 \times 500 \mu\text{L}$ of buffer.
22. Remove column from the separator and place it on a suitable collection tube.
23. Pipette 500 μL of buffer onto the column. Immediately flush out the magnetically labeled cells by firmly pushing the plunger into the column.
24. Cells are now ready for analysis. Store cells at 2–8 °C in the dark until analysis. Mix well before flow cytometric acquisition.
▲ **Note:** Samples may be stored at 2–8 °C in the dark for up to 24 hours.
▲ **Note:** Do not use propidium iodide (PI) or 7-AAD staining.

3. Examples of immunofluorescent staining with Anti-IL-21 antibodies

Human PBMCs were incubated with or without PMA and ionomycin for 6 hours. After 2 hours, brefeldin A was added. The cells were harvested, fixed, permeabilized, and intracellularly stained with Anti-IL-21 antibodies conjugated to PE (B) or APC (C) as described and analyzed by flow cytometry using the MACSQuant[®] Analyzer. Cell surface staining was performed with CD4 (VIT4)-FITC and CD154-VioBlue. Gating was performed according to CD4 expression and side scatter properties of the cells. Cell debris was excluded from the analysis in a fluorescence 4 (FL-4) versus fluorescence 3 (FL-3) dot plot (A).



4. Appendix: Flask and dish sizes for *in vitro* stimulation of T cells

For *in vitro* stimulation of T cells (refer to 2.2) the cells should be resuspended in culture medium, containing 5% of human serum, at a dilution of 10⁷ cells/mL. The cells should be plated at a density of 5×10⁶ cells/cm². Both the dilution and the cell density are important to assure optimum stimulation.

The following table lists culture plate, dish and flask sizes suitable for different cell numbers. It also indicates the appropriate amount of medium to add.

Total cell number	Medium volume to add	Culture plate	Well diameter
0.15×10 ⁷	0.15 mL	96 well	0.64 cm
0.50×10 ⁷	0.50 mL	48 well	1.13 cm
1.00×10 ⁷	1.00 mL	24 well	1.60 cm
2.00×10 ⁷	2.00 mL	12 well	2.26 cm
5.00×10 ⁷	5.00 mL	6 well	3.50 cm
Total cell number	Medium volume to add	Culture dish	Dish diameter
4.5×10 ⁷	4.5 mL	small	3.5 cm
10.0×10 ⁷	10.0 mL	medium	6 cm
25.0×10 ⁷	25.0 mL	large	10 cm
50.0×10 ⁷	50.0 mL	extra large	15 cm
Total cell number	Medium volume to add	Culture flask	Growth area
12×10 ⁷	12 mL	50 mL	25 cm ²
40×10 ⁷	40 mL	250 mL	75 cm ²
80×10 ⁷	80 mL	720 mL	162 cm ²
120×10 ⁷	120 mL	900 mL	225 cm ²

All protocols and data sheets are available at www.miltenyibiotec.com.

Warnings

Reagents contain sodium azide. Under acidic conditions sodium azide yields hydrazoic acid, which is extremely toxic. Azide compounds should be diluted with running water before discarding. These precautions are recommended to avoid deposits in plumbing where explosive conditions may develop.

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