

Laboratory/Institute: Institute for Advanced Biosciences (INSERM U1209 /CNRS UMR 5309/Université Grenoble Alpes)

Team: Environmental epidemiology applied to development and respiratory health

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Location: IAB, Site Santé, Allée des Alpes. 38700 La Tronche (Grenoble)

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Title: Associations between maternal tobacco smoking during pregnancy and cord blood DNA methylation using gene candidate and epigenome-wide approaches

Description

Maternal tobacco smoking during pregnancy is a real burden and public health issue as its prevalence is estimated to be around 16% in Western Countries. Maternal tobacco smoking is related to numerous pregnancy complications affecting mothers and fetuses (such as extrauterine pregnancy, low intrauterine growth, prematurity, low birth weight for gestational age) but also to later child health, cognitive development and behavior (Zeitlin et al. 2015, Nakamura et al. 2020, Nakamura et al. 2021).

A few underlying mechanisms have been proposed. They include alterations in epigenetic mechanisms such as DNA methylation (DNAm). DNA methylation does not change DNA sequences of nucleotides; can be replicated through cell divisions and can be either reversible or persist via biological memory (Rousseaux et al. 2020). DNA methylation can be altered by environmental factors ranging from diet to maternal stress and to pollutants such as arsenic, persistent organic pollutant, endocrine disruptors, air pollutants, and tobacco smoke, especially during the earlier stages of the child's development as the epigenome undergoes considerable reprogramming during gametogenesis and the preimplantation embryonic stage (Abraham et al. 2018, Nakamura et al. 2021, Rousseaux et al. 2020).

In a recent study conducted by our team, on 568 placenta samples of women from the EDEN cohort study (Heude et al. 2015), either actively smoking during their pregnancy, formerly exposed to tobacco smoking, or not exposed to tobacco smoking during pregnancy (Rousseaux 2020), 152 differentially methylated regions (DMRs) were identified with "reversible" alterations of DNA methylation, which were only present in the placenta of current smokers, whereas 26 DMRs were also found altered in former smokers who had quit smoking prior to pregnancy and whose placenta had not been exposed directly to cigarette smoking. This study was partly replicated in another sample of 341 placenta samples of women from the EDEN cohort study. Altogether, these data suggested that tobacco smoking during pregnancy could impact the transcription of genes normally regulated by mechanisms involving DNA methylation as well as how it could affect the development and growth of the fetus.

However, epigenetic marks are known to be tissue-specific and highly specific to cell types in tissues. Up to date, to our knowledge, only one study was able to study the effects of maternal tobacco smoking during pregnancy on DNA methylation using several tissues.

The aim of this internship is to test the associations between maternal tobacco smoking during pregnancy and cord blood DNA methylation levels, using both candidate genes (ie. hits identified in our previous studies using placenta samples) and epigenome wide (EWAS) approaches.

Candidate profile and required skills

- M2/Engineering degree in Public Health (Biostatistics, Epidemiology, etc.), Statistics or Bioinformatics, Biology with a strong background in statistics and/or R programming
- Interests in epigenetic epidemiology
- Statistics and/or epidemiology: multivariate regression analyses
- Programming: R or an equivalent programming language
- English: you should be able to read publications written in English
- French: not mandatory

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References

Abraham, E., Rousseaux, S., Agier, L., Giorgis-Allemand, L., Tost, J., Galineau, J., ... & EDEN mother-child cohort study group. (2018). Pregnancy exposure to atmospheric pollution and meteorological conditions and placental DNA methylation. *Environment international*, 118, 334-347.

Heude, B., Forhan, A., Slama, R., Douhaud, L., Bedel, S., Saurel-Cubizolles, M. J., ... & Thiebaugeorges, O. (2016). Cohort Profile: The EDEN mother-child cohort on the prenatal and early postnatal determinants of child health and development. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 45(2), 353-363.

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Yuan, V.; Price, E.M.; Del Gobbo, G.; Mostafavi, S.; Cox, B.; Binder, A.M.; Michels, K.B.; Marsit, C.; Robinson, W.P. Accurate Ethnicity Prediction from Placental DNA Methylation Data. *Epigenet. Chromatin* 2019, 12, 1–14.

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