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## Titanium Dioxide Nanoparticles: A Novel Approach for Inhibiting Human Papillomavirus

Sharafaldin Al-Musawi<sup>1\*</sup>, Abbas. K. Almansorri<sup>2</sup>, Hider. M. H. Al-Shirifi<sup>3</sup>, Bara B Ahmed<sup>2</sup>, Adawiya J. Haider<sup>4\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Food Sciences, Al-Qasim Green University, Babylon, Iraq

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Biotechnology, Al-Qasim Green University, Babylon, Iraq

<sup>3</sup>Dept. of Environmental Health, College of Environmental Sciences, Al-Qasim Green University, Babylon, Iraq

<sup>4</sup>Laser Science and Technology Branch, Department of Applied Sciences, University of Technology, Baghdad, Iraq

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### Abstract

Nanotechnology products such as titanium dioxide nanoparticles (TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs) can be used for viral infections because of their unique characteristics. The current study aimed to determine the impact of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on HPV type 1 and 2 infections. The characterization of these NPs was performed using dynamic light scattering (DLS), field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM), high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM), and X-ray diffraction (XRD). The MTT assay was used to determine the toxic impacts of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on BHK-21 cells. The efficiency of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs was performed using several parameters, including TCID<sub>50</sub> and RT-PCR assays. An indirect immunofluorescence assay (IFA) was performed to estimate the inhibitory impact of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on viral antigen expression, and Acyclovir was used as a reference medicine. When the human papilloma type 1 and 2 viruses exposed to TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs at high doses (100 µg/mL) produced 0.3, 1.1, 2.3, and 3.3 log<sub>10</sub> TCID<sub>50</sub> decreases in infective virus load when compared with control viruses (P<0.0001), these TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs doses were related to 24.9%, 35.1%, 47.2%, 59.5%, and 66.6% inhibition percentages that were determined depending on the viral titer as compared to virus control. It is concluded that TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs have strong potential for the treatment of face and labial lesions caused by papillomaviruses 1 and 2 and could be used in topical formulations.

**Keywords:** Papillomavirus, Titanium oxide, nanoparticles, Antiviral Activity, drug-resistant

### جزئیات ثاني أكسيد التيتانيوم النانوية: نهج جديد لتثبيط فيروس الورم الحليمي البشري

شرف الدين الموسوي<sup>1\*</sup>, عباس المنصوري<sup>2</sup>, حيدر الشريفي<sup>3</sup>, براء أحمد<sup>2</sup>, عدوية ج حيدر<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>كلية علوم الأغذية، جامعة القاسم الخضراء، بابل، العراق

<sup>2</sup>كلية التقانات الاحيائية، جامعة القاسم الخضراء، بابل، العراق

<sup>3</sup>كلية علوم البيئة، جامعة القاسم الخضراء، بابل، العراق

<sup>4</sup>قسم العلوم التطبيقية، فرع علوم و تكنولوجيا الليزر، الجامعة التكنولوجية، بغداد، العراق

\*Email: [dr.sharaf@biotech.uoqasim.edu.iq](mailto:dr.sharaf@biotech.uoqasim.edu.iq)

### الخلاصة

يمكن استعمال منتجات تقنية النانو مثل الجسيمات النانوية لثاني أكسيد التيتانيوم للعدوى الفيروسية بخصائصها الفريدة. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تحديد تأثير أكسيد التيتانيوم على عدوى فيروس الورم الحليمي البشري من النوع 1 و 2. تم إجراء توصيف الجسيمات النانوية باستعمال تشتت الضوء الديناميك، المجهر الإلكتروني لمسح الانبعاث الميداني، المجهر الإلكتروني الانتقالي عالي الدقة وانحراف الأشعة السينية. تم استعمال اختبار MTT لتحديد التأثيرات السامة للجسيمات النانوية على خلايا BHK-21. تم إجراء كفاءة أكسيد التيتانيوم باستعمال العديد من المعلمات، بما في ذلك فحوصات TCID50 و RT-PCR. تم إجراء مقارنة الكفاءة المناعية غير المباشرة لتحفيز التأثير المثبط لأكسيد التيتانيوم على تعبير المستضد الفيروسي، واستعمال الأسيكولوفير كدواء مرجعي. ينتج عن فيروسات الورم الحليمي البشري من النوع 1 و 2 التعرض لأكسيد التيتانيوم جرعة عالية (100 ميكروغرام / مل) 0.3 ، 1.1 ، 2.3 ، 3.3 لوغاريتم TCID50 ينخفض في الفيروسات المعدية عند المقارنة مع فيروسات التحكم (  $P < 0.0001$  )، ارتبطت جرعات TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs بنسبة 24.9% ، 35.1% ، 47.2% ، 59.5% ، و 66.6% نسبة تثبيط، والتي تم تحديدها اعتمادًا على العيار الفيروسي مقارنةً بالسيطرة على الفيروسات. يمكن استعمال علاج آفات الوجه والشفرين الناتجة عن فيروس الورم الحليمي 1 و 2 في التركيبات الموضعية.

## 1. Introduction

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is considered one of the most sexually transmitted diseases in the world. It is a small, epitheliotropic, non-enveloped dsDNA virus that infects epithelial cells in a wide variety of higher vertebrates and induces cellular proliferation [1, 2]. HPVs have been found in more than 199 different types, with approximately half of them infecting the genital tract [3]. Some types of HPV have been linked to cervical cancer, while others have only been linked to a small number of malignancies in a large number of cases. This has led to the designation of high-risk and low-risk HPVs. In addition, these types of skin cancers are present in both normal skin and non-melanoma skin cancers [4]. HPV does not spread via toilet seats, although certain warts do so through the floor [5]. HPV (1 and 2) are responsible for developing common warts in certain infected persons, as shown in our work [6]. Cultivated warts on the skin are frequent in youngsters and are caused by HPV (1 and 2), although they disappear on their own after a few weeks to many months [6]. A regular occurrence is the reoccurrence of a wart infection. During the last decade, nanoscience has been widely employed worldwide in various applications [7]. NPs were created to treat infectious disorders and have special physical characteristics [8–10]. The main causes of these are the NP scale, which affects bioavailability and blood circulation time, and the wide-ranging surface-to-volume proportion. Such characteristics make the NPs potentially ideal for research and improving therapeutic effects [11–15]. It has been observed that the efficiency of traditional medicines is rapidly eroding, particularly in the case of viral infections, owing to the development of resistance, which might be related to a quicker adaptation in peripheral protein sequence that results in a new-fangled viral strain [16–20]. Because they have shown better and unique characteristics than their bulk material counterparts, titanium oxide nanoparticles (TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs) have attracted considerable attention. These nanoparticles exhibit quantum size effects, which are characterized by the fact that materials' chemical and physical characteristics are highly reliant on the size of the particles [21–24]. When exposed to nonlethal ultraviolet light less than 385 nm, TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs decompose organic, photocatalytic substances by generating and constant liberation of hydroxyl radicals and superoxide ions. TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs' antimicrobial effect is related to their crystal structure, size, and shape. The mechanism postulated for TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs is oxidative stress generated by ROS. As a consequence, ROS induce site-specific DNA damage [25]. Madhubala et al. exhibited that the cell viability of some human cells treated with TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs was significantly reduced at higher doses, as observed by the MTT assay. So the low

concentration of these NPs didn't have any toxic effects on the cells [26]. The use of nanometer-sized TiO<sub>2</sub> particles has been shown to increase the antimicrobial activity of TiO<sub>2</sub> [27]. The study's goal was to create methodologies for estimating the antiviral effects of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs against HPV. In this study, for the investigation of the cytotoxic effects of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on BHK-21 cells, the MTT test was utilized. The efficiency of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs was measured using a variety of criteria, including the TCID<sub>50</sub> and RT-PCR, among others. To assess the preventing effect of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on viral antigen expression, IFA was carried out with Acyclovir serving as a reference medication.

## 2. EXPERIMENTAL WORK

### 2.1 Materials

TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs was given by Merck, Germany. In order to create varying amounts of concentration, suspensions of the NPs in Dulbecco's modified Eagle (Shangdong, China) were prepared and ultra-sonicated to reduce the aggregation. Acyclovir was given by Sigma (USA), added to DMEM, and used as a reference drug against HPV at various levels in this study.

### 2.2. Characterization of TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs

DLS (Malvern Instruments Ltd., Malvern, UK), FESEM (Hitachi S-4160, Japan), HRTEM (Carl Zeiss AG-Zeiss EM900, Germany), and XRD (SIEMENS-D5000) analysis were utilized to evaluate the NP scale morphology and structure.

### 2.3. Culture of virus and cell:

BHK-21 cells were provided by the ATCC. BHK-21 cells were grown in DMEM supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum from Gibco, USA. 1 mM sodium pyruvate, 2 mM L-glutamine, 100 IU/mL penicillin, and 100 g/mL streptomycin (Sigma, USA). The cells were cultivated at 37 °C in an incubator with 5% CO<sub>2</sub> humidity. It was decided to use an existing stock of the papillomavirus from Tehran University's Virology Department in Tehran, Iran. The viruses were grown in BHK-21 cells and leveled using the tissue culture infectious dose 50% (TCID<sub>50</sub>) technique [28], then stored in vials at 70 °C.

### 2.4. Cytotoxicity assay:

Based on our previous study [16], the MTT assay was used to find out how TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs affected the health of BHK-21 cells. A total of 100,000 cells/mL of BHK-21 cells were seeded on a flat-bottomed microtiter plate 96-well (Nalge Nunc (Naperville, IL)) and incubated at 37°C for one day. Each of the three plates was treated with different levels of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs (20–140 g/mL). Afterwards, incubation of the plate for three hours at 37°C in an atmosphere without light after two days of incubation at 37°C with 10 L of MTT reagent (5 mg/mL) (Roche, Germany) added to each well. It was next necessary to remove the MTT solution. Then, 50 L of plain dimethyl sulfoxide (Sigma, USA) was added to each well of the plate and agitated for 10 minutes at (25%). Finally, reading of the plate was done by the microplate reader at 550 nm (Synergy 4, USA), and the rate of cell survival for the used levels was computed concerning the normal cells.

### 2.5. Antiviral activity:

BHK-21 cells in confluent monolayers on a 96-well microtiter plate were treated with 100 TCID<sub>50</sub>/mL papillomavirus for 60 minutes at 37 °C in a humidified atmosphere containing 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Afterwards, the viral inocula were removed, and the monolayers were washed several times with PBS to eliminate any remaining viruses. Afterwards, the infected cells were treated with 100 L of various noncytotoxic doses of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs, then incubated on the plate for two days at 37 °C with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Additionally, cell control and viral control were studied. Our

experiment was carried out for Acyclovir. After that, the incubation time is specified, treating the cells with a single freezing-thawing cycle to release the virus particles connected with the cells. Finally, the lysates were collected from the wells and used for the TCID<sub>50</sub> and quantitative RT-PCR tests, as previously described [11].

## 2.6. RT-PCR:

DNA extraction of papillomavirus is carried out by the gDNA Extraction Mini Kit (Qiagen, UK) by using a pair of primers (5'-GAGAACTGCAATGTTTCAGGACC3-3' and 5'-TGTATAGTTGTTTGCAGCTCTGTGC3-3') on a 65-bp fragment of the L1 region by quantitative RT-PCR. The temperature conditions are adapted as [29–30]. RT-PCR was done by Rotor-Gene Q (Qiagen, UK). The plasmid includes 65-bp DNA, while the L1 gene is represented as a template. Amplification of the segment was then cloned into the pGH vector by Generay Biotech (a Shanghai company, China). The stock solution was used as a standard solution, which is made from a template (4) µg with dilution buffer (40) µL. The template DNA concentration was evaluated by NanoDrop (Fisher, USA), and the total number of DNA copies was calculated by the website (<http://cels.uri.edu/gsc/cndna.html>). The serial dilution of the stock solution was tenfold so as to form the curves. Papillomavirus copies were determined as standard references.

## 2.7. Indirect immunofluorescence assay:

Sterile glass (Sigma-Aldrich, USA) was used to put into the wells of a 24-well growth plate to cultivate BHK-21 cells (Qiagen, UK). For 60 minutes at 37 °C, the cells were treated with 200 L of a papillomavirus solution containing 100 TCID<sub>50</sub>/mL papillomavirus solution. It was then replaced with ZnO-NPs at the greatest noncytotoxic concentration feasible, and the plate was incubated at 37 °C for a day. Controls were employed in this experiment as cell controls and virus controls. The cells were treated with papillomavirus antibody after 14 hours of incubation, followed by 15 minutes of acetone fixation and 45 min at ambient temperature, before the cells were rinsed triplicate in PBS and incubated for forty min at 25 °C with goat anti-human IgG conjugated with (FITC) from Sigma-Aldrich (USA). The cells were then washed in triplicate in PBS and treated for another 40 minutes at 25 °C (Tokyo, Japan) [21, 31–33].

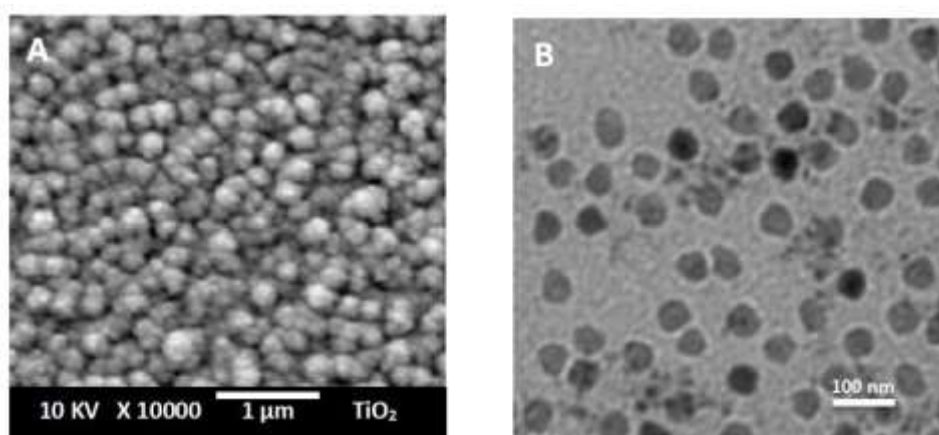
## 2.8. Statistical analysis:

The mean of three different experiments is represented by the data, while the error bars represent the SD. GraphPad Prism was used to conduct a one-way analysis of variance and Tukey's multiple test for forming significant differences at p-values less than 0.05.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Characterization

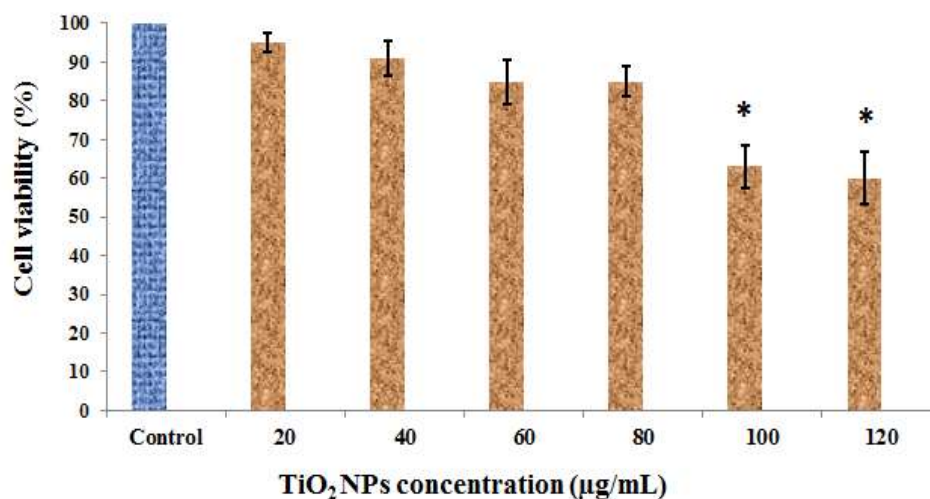
The structural and morphological evaluation of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs performed by FE-SEM and TEM revealed different particle shapes and sizes, with a spherical shape with a mean size of 50 nm (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** FESEM image of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs (10 kx) (A); TEM image of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs (B). The morphological and structural examination of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs showed particle shape and size, with a semi-spherical shape with a mean size of 50 nm

### 3.2. MTT results:

The findings demonstrate that when the concentration of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs was increased to 120 g/mL, the cell viability decreased to 60.03% compared to control cells (Figure 2). The MTT test was used to determine the cytotoxic impact of TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles on BHK-21 cells that had been infected with the papillomavirus. (See Figure 2 for an example.) That demonstrates the vitality of BHK-21 cells when exposed to concentrations of 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, and 120 g/mL of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs ( $P = 0.0001$ ), respectively. As a consequence of increasing the TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs concentration to 120 g/mL, the viability of the cells was reduced to 48.32% compared to the control cells. Vertical lines in a graph show the median values of three separate trials. As previously reported, antiviral experiments were performed at TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticle concentrations with less than 10% cytotoxic impact [37–40].

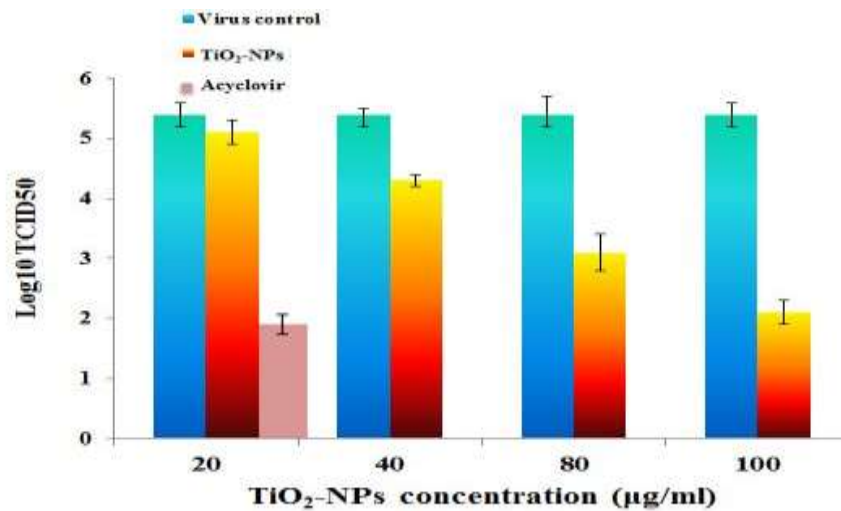


**Figure 2:** toxic effect of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on BHK-21 cell by MTT techniques showed an increase in TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs concentration to 120 μg/mL, while the cell viability decreased to 60.03%. The vertical lines are the mean values of the three experiments

### 3.3. Evaluation of antiviral activity

When compared to acyclovir, both the viability of BHK-21 cells and the TCID<sub>50</sub> test used to measure how well TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs killed the infectious papilloma titer were higher. Papilloma

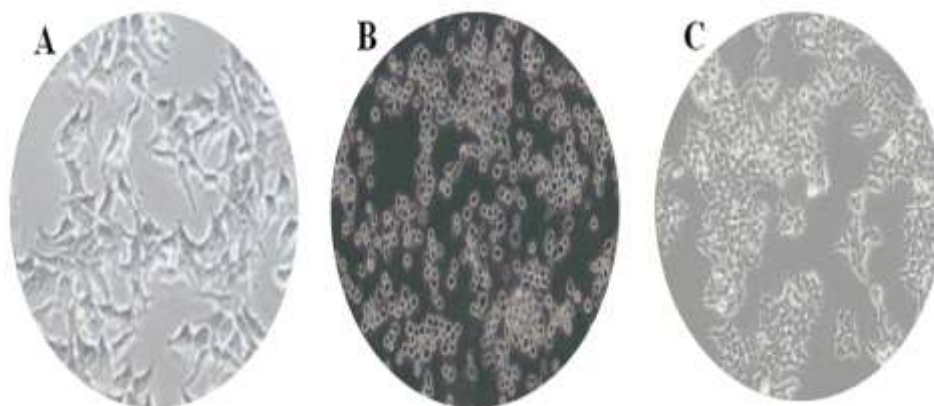
virus-infected BHK-21 cells were exposed to TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles at levels of 20, 40, 80, and 100 g/mL. Compared to the viral control, the infectious titer of Papillomavirus dropped by 0.3, 1.1, 2.3, and 3.3 log<sub>10</sub> TCID<sub>50</sub>, respectively (Figure 3)



**Figure 3:** Antiviral activity of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on Papilloma virus by TCID<sub>50</sub> technique as compared with Acyclovir. The exposed Papillomavirus of the infected cells with 20, 40, 80, and 100 µg/mL TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs produced 0.3, 1.1, 2.3, and 3.3 log<sub>10</sub> TCID<sub>50</sub> decreases in the Papillomavirus as compared to virus control

### 3.4. Cytopathic effects:

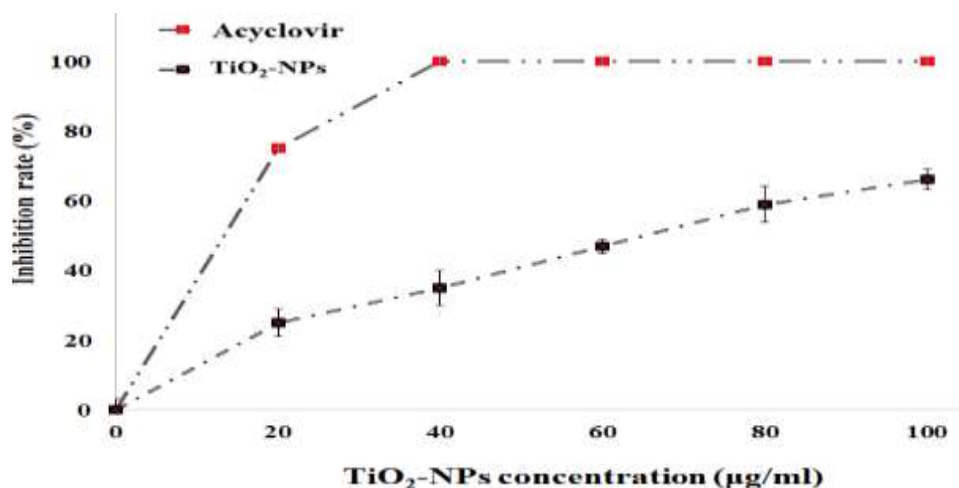
Pathological effects on BHK-21 cells caused by Papillomavirus infection were observed in this work, indicating that infected Papillomavirus BHK-21 cells with 100 g/ml of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs exhibited the presence of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs in the pathologically affected cells. The creation of syncytia and cell rounding are three separate cytopathic effects that occur in the organism's body. Infected Vero cells with Molluscum contagiosum were treated with TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs, and the cytotoxic effects of the infection were minimized. Notably, the TiO<sub>2</sub>-NP at the highest level tested (100 g/ml) was linked with a cytotoxic impact on the BHK-21 cells in the range of 10% to 15% cytotoxicity [41–43]. As a result, the morphology of the cells has been changed in specific locations compared to the control cells, which is not connected to the papilloma virus-induced cytopathic effects (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs were used to inhibit the papilloma virus-induced cytopathic effect on BHK-21 cells in vitro. TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs were used to treat papilloma virus-infected cells. (A) cell control; (B) viral control; and (C) papilloma virus-infected cells with 100 g/ml of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs

### 3.5. Real Time PCR:

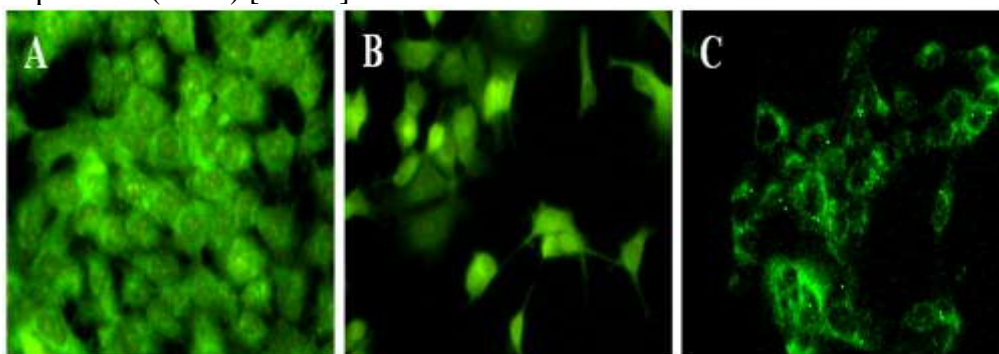
RT-PCR was used to analyze the influence of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on the papilloma viral load. A 127-bp fragment of the US3 gene of the papillomavirus was amplified using SYBR Green Quantitative PCR Master Mix to determine the effect of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on the papilloma viral load. This is seen in Figure 5, which depicts the effect of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on papilloma viral load as assessed by real-time PCR. When applied to Papillomavirus viral load, TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs at the levels of 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100 g/mL resulted in 24.9%, 35.1%, 47.2%, 59.5%, and 66.6% inhibition rates, respectively, which were assessed based on the viral load.



**Figure 5:** shows the effects of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs against the papilloma virus using RT-PCR. TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs at the 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100 µg/mL concentrations led to 24.9%, 35.1%, 47.2%, 59.5%, and 66.6% inhibition percentages, which were estimated to depend on the papilloma viral load

### 3.6. IFA assay:

It was decided to use an IFA test to evaluate the inhibitory effects of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on the antigens expressed by the papillomavirus on the surface of the BHK-21 cells. By employing the immunofluorescence test, we were able to determine the influence of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs on the expression of Molluscum contagiosum antigens on BHK-21 cells in this experiment (IFA). According to the results of virus control, cell control, and papilloma-infected cells with 100 g/mL TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs experiments, the level of fluorescence signals in Papilloma virus-infected cells with TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs was lower than the level of fluorescence signals in the virus-control cells, showing that TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs had a substantial antiviral effect on the expression of Papillomavirus antigens. Green dots in Figure 6C represent viral antigens expressed in distinct cell compartments stained with anti-IgG coupled with fluorescein isothiocyanate to visualize viral antigen expression (FITC) [44–51].



**Figure 6:** Immunofluorescence assay (A): treated infected cells with HPV; (B) and (C): intensity of fluorescence signals in papilloma virus-infected cells with TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs

#### 4. Discussion:

Nanoparticles have been extensively investigated for their potential uses in various sectors, including medication delivery systems and antibacterial agents [50]. Furthermore, nanoparticles have been shown to have broad-spectrum antiviral activity, suggesting that they may have a multi-targeting mode of action [51–53]. It has been reported that the antibacterial activity of TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles against multi-antibiotic-resistant strains of *E. coli*, *P. aeruginosa*, *S. aureus*, and *P. putida*, as well as exposed spores of Bacillus to UV and fluorescent rays, increased with an increase in the TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs level. The effects of UV were more successful due to the appropriate bandgap energy of UV light and the greater hydroxyl radical level on the coated film surface. TiO<sub>2</sub> showed photocatalytic effects. Therefore, it is used in several applications, such as waste water and air purification, as a self-cleaning or antimicrobial agent, or for self-disinfecting substances [54]. Because of their considerable side effects and the rising occurrence of medicine-resistant strains throughout therapy [55], the present antiviral medications against HPV are weakening, and the production of new anti-HPV agents is needed. Comparing nanoparticles for therapeutics to traditional treatments, there are various benefits, including efficiency at lower doses, powerful antiviral action against medicine-resistant viruses, cheap cost of manufacturing, and appropriateness for various coating types [56, 57]. According to the findings of this research, TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles effectively inhibit the activity of papillomavirus types 1 and 2. The antiviral activity of TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles was investigated using HPV types 1 and 2. During the inhibition tests, BHK-21 cells and/or virus solutions were treated with TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles at various periods to determine the various phases of viral infection that may be prevented. The results demonstrated that TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs decrease HPV infections by blocking the attachment, preventing the virus entrance inside the cells, and preventing the virus from spreading among the cells.

#### 5. Conclusions:

In summary, according to our findings, we show for the first time that TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs are associated with significant antiviral potency against HPV. TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs appear to possess wide anti-HPV efficacy, presenting new pharmaceutical possibilities. The antiviral behavior of TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs is considered to be described by a number of experimental processes, including the TCID<sub>50</sub> test, antiviral efficacy, inhibiting the Papilloma virus-induced cytopathic effect, gene expression inhibition percentage, and antigen expression. It is concluded that TiO<sub>2</sub>-NPs have strong potential for the treatment of face and labial lesions caused by papillomaviruses 1 and 2 and could be used in topical formulations.

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