Review

The inactivation and destruction of viruses by reactive oxygen species generated through physical and cold atmospheric plasma techniques: Current status and perspectives

Neha Kaushik a,1, Sarmistha Mitra b,1, Eun Jung Baek c, Linh Nhat Nguyen d,e, Pradeep Bhartiya d, June Hyun Kim a, Eun Ha Choi d,⇑, Nagendra Kumar Kaushik d,⇑

a Department of Biotechnology, College of Engineering, The University of Suwon, Hwaseong 18323, Korea
b Department of Anatomy, Dongguk University College of Medicine, Gyeongju 38066, Korea
c Department of Laboratory Medicine, College of Medicine, Hanyang University, Seoul 04763, Korea
d Department of Electrical and Biological Physics, Plasma Bioscience Research Center, Kwangwoon University, Seoul 01897, Korea
e Laboratory of Plasma Technology, Institute of Materials Science, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, 18 Hoàng Quoc Viet, Hanoi 100000, Viet Nam

Highlights

- Reactive oxygen species (ROS) can be employed in assisting host defense against viruses.
- ROS-based strategies provide application for effective sterilization and disinfection.
- Cold plasma delivery system as an eco-friendly tool for virus destruction.
- These techniques can kill viruses by their surface modification to prevent host infection.
- ROS as therapeutic mediators against infection is a promising avenue for treatment.

Abstract

Background: Outbreaks of airborne viral infections, such as COVID-19, can cause panic regarding other severe respiratory syndrome diseases that may develop and affect public health. It is therefore necessary to develop control methods that offer protection against such viruses.

Aim of Review: To identify a feasible solution for virus deactivation, we critically reviewed methods of generating reactive oxygen species (ROS), which can attack a wide range of molecular targets to induce antiviral activity, accounting for their flexibility in facilitating host defense mechanisms against a comprehensive range of pathogens. Recently, the role of ROS in microbial decontamination has been critically investigated as a major topic in infectious diseases. ROS can eradicate pathogens directly by inducing oxidative stress or indirectly by promoting pathogen removal through numerous non-oxidative mechanisms, including autophagy, T-cell responses, and pattern recognition receptor signaling.

Key scientific concepts of review: In this article, we reviewed possible methods for the in vitro generation of ROS for virus inactivation and deactivation.
of ROS with antiviral activity. Furthermore, we discuss, in detail, the novel and environmentally friendly cold plasma delivery system in the destruction of viruses. This review highlights the potential of ROS as therapeutic mediators to modernize current techniques and improvement on the efficiency of inactivating SARS-CoV2 and other viruses.

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Introduction

Diseases and health conditions caused by microorganisms have always been a challenge in the medical sciences. Bacteria, fungi, and viruses can invade human hosts and disrupt the normal physiological balance by producing toxic by-products. Viruses are intracellular pathogens that contain either DNA or RNA as genetic material [1] and virus-borne diseases are currently one of the most serious concerns faced in medical sciences. For centuries, viral diseases have been responsible for several deaths and in the eighteenth century, the poxvirus killed over 100 million people in Europe [2]. Similarly, in 1901, 1918, and 2014, yellow fever, the Spanish flu, and the Ebola outbreak caused by the flavivirus [3], the H1N1 [4], and the Ebola viruses, respectively, killed millions of people worldwide [5,6]. Recently, in 2019, the novel coronavirus originated in Wuhan, China [7] and was declared a global pandemic according to the World Health Organization (WHO) [8,9]. The main drawback of viral infections is that the virus can hijack the cellular machinery of the host and nucleic acid (DNA and RNA)-based viruses have advanced defense mechanisms for escaping host recognition [10]. As viruses are pathogens with a comparatively rapid mutative rate, particularly RNA viruses, virus–host co-evolution relies on rapid identification, the host’s immune system response, and virus–employed evasion mechanisms, resulting in a constant interaction between escape/spread and immunity/clearance. To that effect, there are various mechanisms by which the host senses and responds to viral infections [11,12].

Over the last few decades, large-scale vaccination programs have been conducted to combat viral infections, such as polio [13], smallpox [14], and hepatitis [15]. These vaccinations have been the most successful strategy for preventing these deadly viral diseases to date [16,17]. However, biochemical agents that are effective against viral infections have been used to develop antiviral medications. Biochemical antiviral therapeutics are mainly used for common viral infections and are popular as alternative treatment approaches. Apart from vaccination, other preventive measures are also important in protection against viral diseases, such as social distancing and quarantining when exposed, as isolation is a basic step that minimizes the spread of viruses in a community. To inactivate or kill viruses in certain environments or reduce viral spread among people, other strategies have been invented and implemented. Disinfectants, organic and inorganic chemicals, and nanomaterials are used to inactivate viruses, whereas alcohol, different types of surfactants, and oxidizing agents are widely used as sterilizing agents against viruses [18]. Recently, the application of different metal nanoparticles for virus inactivation has gained attention [19]. In addition, physical methods, such as radiation, lasers, photodynamic therapy (PDT), and non-thermal atmospheric plasma, have been used for disinfection in industrial environments (Fig. 1). These “virucidal” chemicals and techniques can destroy viral cells and modify their surface structures to prevent them from infecting potential host cells.

In this review, we summarize the currently available and commonly used methods for disinfection and the possible application of new strategies to efficiently inactivate viruses in the environment using reactive oxygen nitrogen species–based techniques [20]. Currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to find an effective sterilization technique that significantly reduces the spread of viruses. To that effect, the potential of cold plasma technology has been discussed for effective virus deactivation in future applications.

Reactive oxygen species (ROS) and their role in anti-viral responses

Metabolites derived from nitric oxide (NO•) and superoxide (O₂•−) play significant roles in antiviral defense; however, they may also damage the host. In fact, certain levels of these metabolites may aid viral replication because of their mitogenic effects on cells [21]. Cellular ROS generation is often induced by both exogenous and endogenous stimuli, as ROS act as key cell-signaling molecules for normal biological development. However, ROS formation may also damage many cellular organelles and processes, ultimately interrupting the normal physiology of cells. An essential concept to keep in mind when assessing the oxidative stress levels of a cell is whether an elevated oxidant status prompts biomolecule damage and determines the threshold vital to cellular processes via redox signaling [22]. ROS can be generated by various drugs and conventional physical means, such as X-rays and gamma radiation, including PDT. As these methods have been extensively investigated, this review focuses more on cold plasma-induced ROS generation mechanisms.

In cold plasma, a wide variety of reactive species are formed, based on numerous parameters, such as the feeding gas, configuration of the target material, energy source, and distance between the target and plasma source during plasma discharges. A schematic diagram of the reactive species produced within the discharge area and the plasma–liquid interface is displayed in Fig. 2. Primary reactive species, such as nitric oxide radicals (NO•), excited nitrogen (N), hydroxyl radicals (OH), superoxide radicals (O₂•−), and singlet oxygen (O₂)², are directly generated in the plasma discharge zone because of the interaction between free electrons and the feeding gas molecules. These species have limited lifetime; however, their concentration in the discharge area is extremely high. More importantly, several studies show that the intensity of the OH radicals produced in ambient air is extreme [23 24 25]. The species are further converted to prolonged reactive species, such as hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), nitrite (NO₂⁻), ozone, and nitrate (NO₃⁻), in the ambient atmosphere. The primary reactive species may react with ambient air molecules, eventually producing stable species. Among these, H₂O₂ is very dispersible and stable inside water, whereas NO and NO₂ are transformed to NO₂ and NO₃, respectively. It is worth mentioning that the chemistry behind reactive oxygen and nitrogen species generation varies widely depending on different plasma discharge conditions. A short description of the main reactive species produced in plasma discharges is provided below.

Atomic oxygen

Atomic oxygen (O) is a monatomic oxygen that is highly reactive and can rapidly bond with surrounding molecules. In atmospheric-pressure plasma, atomic oxygen can be generated
by the collision of O₂ molecules with metastable plasma working gas (M*) and excimers (M₂*) [26].

\[
M^* + O_2 \rightarrow M + 2O \quad (M: \text{He, Ne, Ar})
\]

\[
M_2^* + O_2 \rightarrow 2 M + 2O
\]

Atomic oxygen can also be formed through the electron-impact dissociation of the O₂ molecule [27].

\[
e^- + O_2 \rightarrow O + O + e^-
\]

It exhibits a strong emission at 777 nm, which can be easily observed using a simple optical emission spectrometer.

**Hydroxyl radical**

The hydroxyl radical (•OH) is a strong oxidizing agent and one of the main reactive oxygen species that contributes to the plasma-liquid interactions. In a plasma system, •OH radicals are formed by the dissociation of water molecules in both the ambient environment and liquid phase [26].

\[
M^* + H_2O \rightarrow M + H^* + \cdot OH \quad (M: \text{He, Ne, Ar})
\]

\[
M_2^* + H_2O \rightarrow 2 M + H^* + \cdot OH
\]
e\textsuperscript{−} + H\textsubscript{2}O\textsuperscript{−}→OH + H + e\textsuperscript{−}.

The plasma-induced ultra-violet water photolysis process with an energy of 4–6 eV can also generate \textsuperscript{1}OH in bulk liquid [25].

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{UV} + \text{H}_2\text{O} & \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O}\textsuperscript{−} \\
\text{UV} + \text{H}_2\text{O}\textsuperscript{−} & \rightarrow \text{H} + \text{•OH} \\
\text{H}_2\text{O}\textsuperscript{−} & \rightarrow \text{OH} + \text{H} + e\textsuperscript{−} \\
\text{OH}^{-} & \rightarrow \text{OH} + e\textsuperscript{−}
\end{align*}
\]

Other important pathways of \textsuperscript{1}OH generation are as follows [28]:

\[
\begin{align*}
e\textsuperscript{−} + \text{O}_2 & \rightarrow O\textsuperscript{(3P)} + O\textsuperscript{(1D)} \\
O\textsuperscript{(1D)} + \text{H}_2\text{O} & \rightarrow 2\text{•OH} \\
\text{NO} + \text{HO}_2 & \rightarrow \text{•OH} + \text{NO}_2 \\
\text{O}_2 + \text{H} & \rightarrow \text{•OH} + \text{O}
\end{align*}
\]

The hydroxyl radical is one of the most common ROS in cold atmospheric-pressure plasma systems. In addition to its high chemical reactivity, \textsuperscript{1}OH can provide important physical parameters for plasma. It exhibits an emission signature at 309 nm, which can be used to calculate the gas temperature of the plasma system [29].

**Superoxide/Hydrogen peroxide**

Superoxide (O\textsubscript{2}•) and its protonated form, hydrogen superoxide (HO\textsubscript{2}•), play important roles in microbial cell inactivation and related cellular processes. Superoxide radicals can be produced by plasma through electron-impact collisions [27].

\[
e\textsuperscript{−} + \text{O}_2 \rightarrow \text{O}_2\textsuperscript{−}
\]

Superoxide is also generated by the reaction between plasma-generated \textsuperscript{1}OH and ozone [30].

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{•OH} + \text{O}_1 & \rightarrow \text{HO}_2 + \text{O}_2 \\
\text{in aqueous environments, } \text{O}_2 \text{ and } \text{HO}_2 \text{ are in chemical equilibrium:} & \\
\text{O}_2\textsuperscript{−} + \text{H}_2\text{O} & \rightarrow \text{HO}_2 + \text{OH}^{-}
\end{align*}
\]

The concentration of O\textsubscript{2}/HO\textsubscript{2} in plasma is relatively lower than that of other dominant ROS products, yet they are important factors in biomedical applications of plasma systems [27]. It is believed that H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} is produced in cells under normal and stressful conditions, such as UV radiation, chilling, wounding, and infection. Owing to the fact that H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} does not have any unpaired electrons, it may freely cross cellular membranes and subsequently induce oxidation. Bienert et al. [31] suggested that H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} is a single ROS that may diffuse through aquaporin inside the cellular membrane and is more stable than other ROS. Therefore, ROS act as signal molecules that help regulate particular biological developments, increasing tolerance to several environmental stresses [32]. As mentioned, H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} is a stable molecule that is formed under humid conditions owing to the combination of OH radicals. Examples of H\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{2} and OH reaction mechanisms are as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{OH} + \text{OH} & \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O}_2 \\
\text{H}_2\text{O}_2 + \text{OH} & \rightarrow \text{HO}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}
\end{align*}
\]

In addition to direct plasma discharge to target samples, plasma-activated medium (PAM) can be generated by exposing a biological liquid to electrical discharge under atmospheric conditions. When plasma is produced in ambient atmosphere, it generates a large concentration of reactive species. These RONS are important species that make the cold plasma technique applicable in numerous biomedical fields. For plasma-related biomedical applications, a certain target can demand off-site or on-site exposure conditions. In on-site conditioned treatments, the active plasma plume relatively close to the ambient environment comes in direct contact with biological objects. This method could be valuable for treating critically affected wounds or contagious decontamination. In the off-site method, plasma is directly exposed to biological solutions (supplemented with a diverse range of RONS), which are utilized for specific biomedical applications. Interestingly, these types of plasma-exposed solutions can also be applied to areas where there is no option for plasma production. They can also serve as therapeutic drugs and are termed as plasma-activated solutions (PAS). Notably, the levels of the reactive species generated can be controlled by varying the feeding working gas, flow rate, and applied voltage. Short-lived reactive species can be employed in in-situ treatment settings, whereas long-lived reactive species can be preserved in PAM for further use. Plasma technology is straightforward and affordable, enabling its application in many fields.

**Ozone**

Ozone is an allotrope of oxygen that has strong oxidative activity with a distinctive smell. Under ambient conditions, O\textsubscript{3} is unstable and readily decays into molecular oxygen. It is considered a dangerous gas for human health. In atmospheric-pressure plasma, O\textsubscript{3} can be generated by a third-body collision between O and O\textsubscript{2} in the presence of a third body molecule (M\textsuperscript{'}) [27].

\[
\text{O} + \text{O}_2 + \text{M}' \rightarrow \text{M} + \text{O}_3
\]

Even with low stability, O\textsubscript{3} can exist for several minutes to hours in an ambient environment; thus, controlling the generated O\textsubscript{3} concentration by the plasma sources within the safety condition is necessary. However, O\textsubscript{3} shows low water solubility, which makes it less important than other ROS in plasma-liquid interactions.

**Methods for viral deactivation**

**Existing physical techniques to eliminate viruses**

**Ultra-violet radiation**

Several physical methods have been adopted for the decontamination of different viral species, including irradiation, X-rays, and PDT (Table. 1). Irradiation offers a low-energy, environmentally friendly, and safe method of killing viruses under well-controlled circumstances with the advantage of minimal molecular changes, which is especially important in the preparation of biological reagents. Two distinct advantages of irradiation over other methods are the linearity of the lethal dose effects and the ability to measure the dose to be delivered [33]. The key natural germicide is the sun-produced UV radiation in the atmosphere. In contrast, far-UVC light (207–222 nm) proficiently eradicates pathogens without affecting their normal counterparts [34]. Nucleic acids within viral particles play a vital role in UV absorption and viral inactivation. At a range of 254 nm, UV radiation inactivates and tabulates the susceptibilities of a wide range of viruses, including those with double/single-stranded RNA or double-stranded DNA genomes [35]. Two issues must be considered when solar inacti-
Table 1
A list of well-established physical methods for various virus decontamination.

| Types of radiation | Decontaminating virus | Dose | Source | Reference |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------|--------|-----------|
| Ultraviolet        | SARS-CoV-2            | 207–222 nm Far-UVC light | [34] |
|                    |                       | 207–222 nm PX-UV light | [79] |
|                    | HCoV-OC43             | 222 nm or 3 log10 UV | [80] |
|                    | HCoV-229E             | 254-nm UV | [35] |
|                    | Variety of virus      | 254-nm Far-UVC light | [81] |
|                    | SARS-CoV-2            | 222-nm or 0.9 log10 UVC light | [82] |
|                    | SARS-CoV, CCHFV or NiV| 0.2 J/cm² UV | [83] |
|                    | Animal virus (VSV) and Bacteriophage (MS2) | 2250–3020 Å UV | [37] |
|                    | Herpes simplex virus  | 254-nm UV | [84] |
|                    | MERS CoV              | UV | [85] |
|                    | SARS CoV-1            | 254 nm UVC | [86] |
|                    | Polyoma virus         | 100 erg mm⁻² second⁻¹, voltage-stabilized low pressure mercury vapor lamp. | [51] |
|                    | MNV-1                 | 253.7-nm UV | [87] |
|                    | VLPs                  | 4 kGy Cobalt-60 | [49] |
|                    | VSV                   | Cesium 137 | [49] |
|                    | Calicivirus           | 1 × 10⁸ TCID₅₀/mL Cobalt-60 | [44] |
|                    | CoV-1 and CoV-2       | 1.0 Megard Cobalt-60 | [61] |
|                    | SARS-CoV-2            | 150 Gy Co-60 | [62] |
|                    | SARS-CoV-1            | 2.5 J m⁻¹ s⁻¹ Co-60 | [46] |
| Gamma radiation    | Coronavirus           | 93 ergs/g Cobalt-60 | [88] |
|                    | HIV                   | 37 nm Cobalt-60 | [51] |
|                    | BSL-4 virus           | TCID₅₀/mL Cobalt-60 | [42] |
|                    | LACV                  | 0.5 Mrad Cobalt-60 | [89] |
|                    | Animal virus          | No dose rate Cobalt-60 | [53] |
|                    | Polyoma virus         | No dose rate Cobalt-60 | [53] |
|                    | Vaccinia virus        | No dose rate Cobalt-60 | [53] |
|                    | Newcastle disease virus| No dose rate Cobalt-60 | [54,55,36] |
|                    | Influenza virus       | No dose rate Cobalt-60 | [54,55,36] |
|                    | Arenavirus            | 1–5 Mrad Cobalt-60 | [60] |
|                    | Bunyavirus            | TCID₅₀/mL Cobalt-60 | [60] |
|                    | Coronavirus           | 0.35 megard Cobalt-60 | [90] |
|                    | Filovirus             | 0.25 megards Cobalt-60 | [90] |
|                    | Flavivirus            | 0.29 megards Cobalt-60 | [90] |
|                    | Orthomyxovirus        | 0.55 megards Cobalt-60 | [90] |
|                    | Paramyxovirus         | 1 Megards Cobalt-60 | [90] |
|                    | Akabane virus         | 0.5 µg/mL Hematoporphyrin | [92] |
|                    | Bunyaviridae          | 0.5 µg/mL Hematoporphyrin | [92] |
|                    | Reoviridae            | 0.5 µg/mL Hematoporphyrin | [92] |
|                    | Parvoviridae          | 0.5 µg/mL Hematoporphyrin | [92] |
|                    | Coronavirus           | 0.5 µg/mL Hematoporphyrin | [92] |
|                    | Newcastle disease virus| 0.5 µg/mL Hematoporphyrin | [92] |
|                    | Ainoa                 | 20–0.55 Megarads Cobalt-60 | [89] |
|                    | Akabanea              | 20–0.55 Megarads Cobalt-60 | [89] |
|                    | BEFVa                 | 20–0.55 Megarads Cobalt-60 | [89] |
| Photodynamic therapy| Polio virus           | No dose rate Toluidine blue | [63] |
|                    | Herpesviruses         | No dose rate Toluidine blue | [63] |
|                    | vesicular stomatitis virus | 50 kGy X-ray Irradiator | [94] |
| X-Ray              | Zoonotic viruses (laviviridae, Nairoviridae, Phenuiviridae and Togaviridae) | 50 kGy X-ray Irradiator | [94] |
|                    | Influenza virus       | 90,000 roentgens per minute (r/ min) MACHLET OEG-60 | [72] |
|                    | Polymavirus           | 14.4–48 kloroentgens per minute Holweck X-ray tube | [51] |

SARS-CoV-2: Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2; HCoV-OC43: Human coronavirus OC43; HCoV-229E: Human coronavirus 229E; CCHFV: Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever virus; NiV: Nipah virus; VSV: Vesicular stomatitis virus; HSV: Herpes simplex virus; MERS CoV: Middle eastern respiratory syndrome coronavirus; SARS CoV-1, Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 1; MNV1: Murine norovirus 1; VLPs: Virus-like particles; CoV-1: Coronavirus 1; CoV-2: Coronavirus 2; HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus; BSL-4: Biosafety level 4; LACV: La Crosse virus; NDV: Newcastle disease virus; BEFV: Bovine ephemeral fever virus.
vating bio-threat viruses: 1) assessing the UV sensitivity of different viruses and 2) knowing the number of RNA or DNA bases to determine the sensitivity to UV inactivation at a specified UV [36]. Additionally, significant variance in susceptibility among viral genome types occurs because of pyrimidine dimers, particularly thymine dimers, which are the most naturally toxic UV products. As DNA contains thymine, DNA viruses are highly susceptible to UV damage compared to RNA viruses [37]. Furthermore, the deadly effect of UV could be suppressed by the repair, particularly for double-stranded genomes containing viral structures [38]. The most effective generator of UV beams for microbial applications is a xenon and mercury-vapor arc lamp [39]. A recent study showed that SARS-CoV2 can be effectively inactivated by UVC irradiation. Recent studies have also highlighted the application of UV radiation for decontaminating N95 respirators to ensure safety against COVID-19 [40].

Gamma radiation

Gamma radiation is a type of ionizing radiation that can inactivate both DNA and RNA viruses [41,42]. Gamma rays have the smallest wavelength and greatest energy of the rays in the electromagnetic spectrum [43]. The basic mechanism underlying the inactivation of viruses through irradiation is thought to be the breakdown of nucleic acids (DNA/RNA) by radiolysis or genetic material cross-linking [44]. In other words, it can either directly break down the DNA helix or create free radicals that damage the DNA structure [45]. Gamma irradiation is an effective method for sterilizing pathogenic organisms in the environment [46]. Owing to its strong decontamination capability, gamma radiation is widely applied in the sterilization of medical devices, injectable products, and food samples [47,48]. Gamma radiation for clinical use is mainly generated from radioactive isotopes, such as cobalt-60 and cesium-137, which are also established sources in the biocontainment field. However, it can penetrate food, and thus, its application in food decontamination is regulated very carefully. The highest dose permitted by the Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of fresh produce is 4 kGy. This radiation dose has been found to be successful for bacterial inactivation; however, it appears to be insufficient for norovirus, which requires a higher dose [49]. Many studies have showed the efficiency of gamma radiation to inactivate pathogenic viruses in laboratory environments [42,50]. Gamma radiation sterilization studies of animal viruses include polyoma virus [51], Rous sarcoma [52], vaccinia [53], Newcastle disease [54], influenza [55], smallpox [56], herpes simplex [57], EBOV, and hepatitis A viruses [58].

Owing to the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, many researchers have analyzed the efficiency of gamma radiation in inactivating this virus. Gamma radiation has been reported to play an important role in vaccine preparation via viral inactivation, as it has already shown potential for inactivation efficacy against other enveloped viruses [59]. In addition, specimens of two other members of the COVID family, CoV-1 and CoV-2, are inactivated by gamma irradiation [60,61]. During this pandemic, personal protective equipment (PPE) and respirators need to be sterilized before reuse and gamma radiation has been found to be an effective disinfectant [62].

Photodynamic therapy

Photodynamic therapy is a comparatively recent methodology for the inactivation of native microbes, such as viruses. It uses well-known dyes as functional agents [63]. The PDT effect is perceived whenever an appropriate photosensitizer and O2 are exposed to light; hence, PDT is a local treatment limited to specific infection sites [64]. Once exposed to visible light, photosensitizer compounds react with O2 to produce ROS, including singlet oxygen [65]. These reactive species damage proteins, nucleic acids, and lipids, ultimately leading to cell death. A few studies use well-known photosensitizing molecules for PDT, including chlorophyll, heme, and bacteriochlorophyll [66].

The genetic material of the viruses can be disrupted by PDT as photosensitizers may bind or intercalate with viral nucleic acids. Cationic complexes, such as methylene blue, can penetrate the outer layer of viral structures and eventually be introduced into the genome [67]. Viral proteins naturally endure structural adaptations, such as protein cross-linking. In particular, photooxidative impairment occurs in oxidation-prone amino acids. Moreover, the interaction of a photosensitizer with viral proteins can affect protein folding and consequently disrupt viral function [65,68,69].

X-Rays

X-ray irradiation is an established method for decontamination and food sterilization. High energy can be generated when an electron ray is employed on a metal foil [70]. X-ray irradiation is a very efficient alternative to thermal or chemical decontamination methods. It is a type of ionizing radiation that generates highly penetrating photons and can effectively inactivate viral species of different families, such as Flaviviridae, Nairoviridae, Phenuiviridae, and Togaviridae [71]. A low voltage of +10 in an X-ray machine using a Machlett OEG-60 tube can reduce the survival rate of the influenza virus [72]. A study conducted in 1943 reported that virus-induced papillomas in rabbits regressed following exposure to X-ray irradiation. The study also concluded that X-rays can reduce regression of the virus by blocking cellular division and initiating pathological changes that ultimately kill the virus [73]. For SARS-CoV2, irradiation has become a very effective way to sterilize gloves, surgical masks, PPE, etc. [62].

Advanced cold plasma technique for virus deactivation

To date, the effectiveness of different plasma devices [95] and PAS [96,97] has been well documented [96,98,99]. They have been used for decontamination in the food industry, packaging, pharmaceuticals, and medical field. Cold plasma is an ionized gas containing a wide range of reactive species that can kill microorganisms (Fig. 3). In the last few centuries, plasma has been frequently recognized as an effective antimicrobial agent against multidrug-resistant microorganisms on non-living surfaces or contaminated and septic tissues. Therefore, it has become a promising medical device, but with several clinical issues. In the case of anti-viral activities, most studies have shown that plasma-induced ROS production is the main cause of viral inactivation. Studies on the effects of plasma on virus particles followed a favorable virus inactivation technique to reduce contamination and sterilization [100]. Here, we review the effects of different plasma devices on many viral species and virus-associated syndromes [101].

Plasma application against other viruses

Plasma has been applied to bacteriophages, DNA and RNA viruses. To analyze the mechanism of the impact of plasma application in viruses, a study was conducted in 2018 which analyzed both dielectric barrier discharge (DBD) devices and PAS on bacteriophages. It was found that the reactive species generated through plasma application eventually damaged DNA and proteins to disrupt virus cells [102]. Yasuda et al. [103] developed a biological test that could estimate the in vivo DNA damage of bacteriophage lambda viruses exposed to air plasma. Regarding air sterilization against airborne bacteriophages, Xia et al. proposed and fabricated a packed-bed DBD plasma reactor that efficiently deactivates MS2 bacteriophages in aerosols with an air flow speed of 170 L/min using a nominal pressure drop through the reactor. This strategy is advantageous for protection against airborne viral diseases [104]. Furthermore, the inactivation of MS2 viruses in both water-
borne and airborne states largely relies on treatment time, given power, and feeding gas carrier type. This plasma-induced viral inactivation process is predominantly associated with the release of ROS, which eventually damages viral RNA and surface proteins [105]. Though these studies provide evidence that virus deactivation can be achieved by various cold plasma source applications, the primary mechanism by which inactivation occurs is not well understood. To elucidate this, Tanaka et al. [106] performed plasma virus deactivations under both wet and dry conditions, and more damage was observed on the bacteriophage ϕX174 viral coat proteins than on DNA. Overall, plasma application renders bacteriophages inactive through ROS action. However, further investigation is required to understand the plasma operating conditions that favor protein inactivation or viral DNA damage.

In addition to bacteriophages, the inactivation of human respiratory viruses by cold plasma has recently been explored [107]. For instance, nitrogen gas plasma inactivates respiratory viruses, such as influenza, by damaging proteins and RNA [108]. Oxidation may be the most prominent factor in the degradation, inactivation, and modification of influenza A and B, including hemagglutinin, nucleoprotein, and neuraminidase viruses through N₂ gas plasma [109]. In adenoviruses, plasma has a virus-type-dependent effect, and surprisingly, infectivity could be amplified for some adenovirus types.

However, the exact mechanism underlying this phenomenon remains unknown. Bunz et al. [110] suggests that plasma treatment may be an effective anti-viral therapy for certain adenoviruses. In animals, airborne disease transmission poses numerous threats to their protection, with major fatalities. The use of volumetric DBD was found to be effective in the inactivation of airborne porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome viruses in a wind tunnel within milliseconds. Importantly, virus inactivation is boosted by short-term species during in situ droplet treatment [111].

After respiratory viruses, enteric viruses have the highest rate of infectivity and transmission. The virus decontamination process using cold plasma is a potential tool for food decontamination in the food industry. A DBD plasma torch using air gas was successfully used in a recent study to inactivate feline calicivirus (FCV), which is a surrogate of foodborne human norovirus [112]. The authors of the study also showed plasma-generated ROS as the key cause of viral inactivation. Another group of researchers assessed the antiviral activity of radio-frequency atmospheric plasma jets against FCV in vitro. Interestingly, they claimed that the decrease in virus titer was enhanced by an increase in exposure time and a reduced exposure gap. Similar to previous studies, the oxidized viral proteins (capsid) through plasma-generated RONS inside the solution were believed to be responsible for the observed anti-viral effect. This study highlights the importance of plasma efficacy in combating viral contamination in food [113]. Hepatitis A virus (HAV) and murine norovirus (MNV-1) in common fresh meats were inactivated within 10–20 min of plasma jet treatment. These findings revealed that 5 min of plasma jet exposure resulted in -85–90% (1 log₁₀ PFU/mL) and -98–99% reduction (2 log₁₀ PFU/mL) in HAV and MNV-1 titers, respectively, without affecting meat quality. This strategy can be utilized in raw meat handling and delivery processes to further protect fresh meat [114]. Another possible application of cold plasma in the food industry is the decontamination of food-handling surfaces and packaging materials. Over the past few years, the use of cold plasma has been widely accepted for decontamination, particularly for heat-labile surfaces and tissues, where chemical sanitation is not suitable. Nevertheless, few have reported on the inactivation of viruses, instead focusing on fungi and bacteria. Recently, the efficiency of cold plasma in decontaminating MNV-1 and HAV viruses on stainless steel surfaces has been shown [115]. Cumulative evidence and scavenger-based studies further reinforce the significant contribution of ROS in plasma-based antiviral activities.

Although most studies have focused on evaluating the potential of cold plasma for the inactivation of human respiratory viruses, some authors have focused on its efficacy in sexually transmitted viral diseases. Volotskova et al. [116] showed that the pre-treatment of macrophages with plasma blocks HIV virus-host cell fusion and integration. Remarkably, viral particles produced by plasma-treated cells had low infectivity, suggesting that the inhibitory effects of plasma was prolonged to the next phase of viral infection [116]. Similarly, another study showed the ability of the plasma jet to increase voltage and time of exposure thereby preventing the replication of HIV virions when helium feeding gas was used [117]. These studies rationalized the use of cold plasma as an anti-human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) treatment. Further studies have revealed that one of the human hepatitis B viruses (HBV) could be transmitted by contaminated apparatuses, which is considered a primary source of nosocomial infections. As it is difficult to cultivate in the laboratory, HBV decontamination is challenging to execute; thus, Vickery et al. [118] used commercially available hydrogen peroxide gas plasma sterilizer on experimental surfaces contaminated with duck hepatitis B virus (DHBV) to mimic the likely transmission of contamination in sequential patients to inactivate DHBV. Following treatment with this plasma,
sterilization of the instruments after a water wash was more than 60%.

Plasma technique against corona viruses

Monitoring the current progress in this area of plasma-induced virus inactivation is crucial during the ongoing pandemic, which highlights the demand for alternate virus inactivation techniques or the modernization of current practices. In this section, we mainly discuss the safety and technical approaches associated with the use of cold plasma for corona virus inactivation. Notably, the possibility of infection increases with viral exposure, and the early viral load impacts the severity of the disease [119, 120]. The infectivity rate of SARS-CoV2 is high because it replicates over all throat and mouth areas [121]. As an efficient drug treatment for SARS-CoV2 infection is not available, the parochial treatment of the infected mucosa should be considered. Therefore, the use of advanced plasma technology is a promising option. Numerous reports have suggested that the use of plasma treatment in air is beneficial for pollution control, resulting in a decrease in airborne pathogens as mentioned above [122, 123, 124]. Furthermore, plasma-treated gas is effective for the decontamination of various surfaces [125, 126]. Based on these results, plasma technology has been applied to reduce or eradicate viral loads in the oral cavity of ventilated patients. The use of plasma-induced oxidation of cysteine is also recommended for the modification of SARS-CoV2 pathogenicity, and could potentially be delivered even via anesthetic masks, possibly at the time of surgery. However, mucosal tissue compatibility must be verified beforehand to prevent critical local side effects and tissue impairment.

In addition to direct plasma treatment, PAS can be used in the disinfection of surgical devices (Fig. 4). Complete inactivation efficiency of Newcastle disease virus by PAS, such as 0.9% NaCl, water, and 0.3% H2O2 after 30 min of treatment has been observed. Reactive oxygen nitrogen species were found to be the main cause of viral RNA degradation in smaller fragments. This study highlights the importance of PAS as a green disinfection invention and an alternative tool for sterilization in hospitals and public places, as well as stock farming applications where conventional chemical chlorine-based sanitizers, which are associated with risks of carcinogenic product formation with environmental pollutants, are used. These findings provide a basis for the function of PAS in addressing public health issues and eco-friendly sanitation [127]. Plasma activated solutions have also been used to understand its inactivation efficiency and mechanisms of the SARS-CoV2 virus. This study also concluded that the presence of reactive species was the main cause of viral cell death. They found that ROS of PAS damaged the RBD domain, which is positioned at the topmost margin of the spike protein and is also a very important part of the viral protein structure in SARS-CoV2 [128].

Previous studies have shown that plasma treatment of nitrogen and oxygen in the air results in the production of nitrogen oxides and O3. Both these species are needed for viral inactivation on one part; nonetheless, they are highly toxic to the lungs at high concentrations. Consequently, it could be difficult to equalize the

![Image](image-url)
concentrations of these species to achieve appropriate antiviral effectiveness by minimizing such side effects. Additionally, other topics frequently under conversation are functions of plasma during hand disinfection. It is not unexpected that this approach could be applied to minimize SARS-CoV2 infections. Similar to established skin tolerability, the cold plasma potentiality with regard to the robust requirements for skin and hand methods must be validated [130]. When operating plasmas for virus inactivation, it is essential to fix the acceptable considerations and decide the exposure intervals that permit elements to cooperate with the spoiled material or surfaces. Various plasma sources can inactivate or considerably lower the infection rates of different pathogenic viruses under diverse conditions (Fig. 5). However, virus inactivation is extremely reliant on handling characteristics, and ideal factors must be preferred on a case-by-case basis [107].

### Conclusion and future prospects

The present spread of viral disease has caused major public concern; to combat this, we must find a successful method for virus inactivation. Scientists worldwide are actively working to formulate various vaccines to immunize humans against different viruses. However, to effectively lower the death rate, we also need to consider precautionary channels that reduce viral spread. Apart from other physical techniques, plasma can be utilized as an eco-friendly treatment for the inactivation of different viruses in assorted matrices. During plasma application, RONS are responsible for viral inactivation by disrupting nucleic acids and capsid proteins (Fig. 6). Specifically, possible plasma application as an antiviral agent could significantly affect recent viral outbreaks (such as SARS-CoV-2) and could aid in alleviating the sanitization problems caused by forthcoming outbreaks.

However, more precise methods and further investigations will offer insight on which plasma elements are fundamental in every exposure and in what way they accurately disrupt viruses. We predict that plasma will be a promising candidate for virus inactivation in the near future. Eventually, the use of plasma could result in lowering human infection rates and drop-in cost-effective loads. In every circumstance, it is essential to estimate the possible unfavorable genotoxic consequences of plasma or PAS on humans. Although preliminary outcomes are favorable, the use of cold plasma...
plasma in therapies or vaccine formulations still require substantial investigation prior to implementation.

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This article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects.

**CRediT authorship contribution statement**

Neha Kaushik: Conceptualization, Software, Writing – original draft.
Sarmishta Mitra: Writing – original draft.
Eun Jung Baek: Writing – review & editing.
Pradeep Bhartiya: Writing – review & editing.
June Hyun Kim: Writing – review & editing.
Eun Ha Choi: Writing – review & editing.
Nagendra Kumar Kaushik: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft.
June Hyun Kim: Writing – review & editing.

**Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Su X, Tian Y, Zhou H, Li Y, Zhang Z, Jiang B, et al. Inactivation efficacy of plasma medicine, cancer research, Green Chemistry, and many others.

Neha Kaushik is working as Professor of Department of Biotechnology, College of Engineering at Suwon University in South Korea. She has also worked as Research Professor and was leading scientifically independent research projects at the Department of Life Science and College of Medicine, Hanyang University at Seoul, South Korea. Her work is primarily focused on biomaterials, oncogenes, nanomedicine, plasma medicine, cancer biology, immune-modulation and artificial cells. She has published more than 60 SCI/E papers, including many in top-ranked journals, such as Biomaterials, Journal of Advanced Research, Oncogene, Neuro-Oncology, Cancer Research, Green Chemistry, and many others.

Sarmistha Mitra is a Ph.D. scholar at Dongguk University at South Korea. She received her MS degree in 2020 from Kwangwoon University (Seoul). Her research interests focus on plasma or physical agents-based neuroscience and other biomedical applications.
Eun Jung Baek is a Professor of the Department of laboratory medicine, at College of Medicine, Hanyang University. Her research interests are erythropoiesis, radiation, hematopoietic stem cells, erythrocyte production.

Linh Nhat Nguyen is a PhD scholar at Kwangwoon University. He got his MS degree in 2017 from Paris Diderot University (Paris 7) and his BS degree in 2015 from the University of Science and Technology of Hanoi. His research interests focus on the synthesis of nanomaterials by cold plasma and their applications in bio-medicine.

Pradeep Bhartiya is a PhD scholar at Kwangwoon University. He got his MS degree in 2013 from The Oxford College of Science (Bangalore). His research interests focus on cold plasma and its applications in biomedicine.

June Hyun Kim is a Professor at the Department of Biotechnology and Marketing at the Suwon University. He has also worked as Senior Researcher positions at US Harvard University and Assistant Professor in Columbia University, New York in the field of pharmaceuticals and new materials. His research interests are the development of biomaterials for functional ingredients in the field of pharmaceutical cosmetics using bio quality management, biopharmaceutical engineering, bio-sensor, digital healthcare, dermatology testing.

Eun-Ha Choi is working as Director and Chairman of Applied Plasma Medicine Center, Plasma Bioscience Research Center, Electrical & Biological Physics, at Kwangwoon University in Seoul, South Korea since 1992. He has also worked as Professor and Senior Researcher at Texas Tech University (2001-2003) and Hampton University/NASA (1989-1990) and Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) at MD, USA (1987-1989) in the field of plasma physics and charged particles. He has also published more than 500 publications in SCI journals, especially in the field of nonthermal plasmas and plasma medicine.

Nagendra Kaushik is a Professor at Plasma Bioscience Research Center/ Applied Plasma Medicine Center and Department of Electrical and Biological Physics of Kwangwoon University since 2011. His research work is primarily focused on nanobiotechnology, biomaterials, plasma medicine, virus inactivation, cancer biology, immune-modulation, chemical biology. He has published more than 114 SCI papers, including many in top-ranked journals, such as Biomaterials, Journal of Advanced Research, Chemical Engineering Journal, Cancer Research, Green Chemistry, and many others. He is serving as the editor of Frontiers, Scientific Report, PloS One, Applied Sciences, Oxidative Medicine and Cellular Longevity, International Journal of Molecular Sciences and many others. He is also working as a reviewer/guest editor of more than 50 SCI journals.