

1 **Immunostimulatory effects of *Bacillus coagulans* SANK70258**

2 Running title: *B. coagulans* SANK70258 as immunostimulant

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18

19 **Abstract**

20 Specific intestinal bacteria modulate immunoresponses through various pathways, and
21 several probiotic bacteria have been identified as immunostimulants by screening. In the
22 present study, we evaluated the immunomodulating effects of *Bacillus coagulans*
23 SANK70258 (*B. coagulans* SANK70258), a spore-forming and lactic acid-producing
24 bacterium usable as food supplement for human and animals. We found that treatment
25 of mouse splenocytes with γ -ray irradiated *B. coagulans* SANK70258 induced high
26 amount of IFN- γ in comparison with 7 kinds of typical lactic acid bacteria. Further
27 analyses using splenocytes revealed that NK cell is a major source of IFN- γ , and *B.*
28 *coagulans* SANK70258-induced IFN- γ production was inhibited by neutralization of
29 IL-12 or IL-23, depletion of CD11c⁺ cells, and inhibition of NF κ B. *B. coagulans*
30 SANK70258 also induced release of IFN- γ from activated CD8⁺ T cells, and increased
31 expression of chemokine receptors in CD8⁺ T cells. *B. coagulans*
32 SANK70258-treatment induced production of cytokines from bone marrow-derived
33 dendritic cells, which is reduced by knockdown of *Tlr2* and *Nod2*. *B. coagulans*
34 SANK70258-treatment also induced IgA production from Peyer's patch cells with high
35 level among tested lactic bacteria. The oral intake of γ -ray irradiated *B. coagulans*
36 SANK70258 significantly increased intestinal IgA levels and IgA-expressing B cells in
37 the Peyer's patch of mice. Taken together, we conclude that *B. coagulans* SANK70258
38 possesses high activity as immunostimulant inducing production of IFN- γ and IgA.

39

40 **Introduction**

41 The intestinal immune homeostasis is in a balance of fight against infectious pathogens
42 and tolerance toward commensal microbiota and food ingredients. Specific intestinal
43 bacteria modulate immunoresponses through various pathways, such as activation of
44 innate immune cells by binding of bacterial cell components to receptors recognizing
45 pathogen-associated molecular patterns, and production of the secondary metabolites
46 including short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) that regulate gene expression and function of
47 immune-related cells.

48 *Bacillus coagulans* is a bacteria species, whose intake alleviates the pathology of
49 intestinal diseases, such as constipation and colitis, and has recently attracted the
50 attention with its usefulness in food processing industry due to the resistance to heat
51 temperature and acidic condition depending on the spore-forming character [1]. *Bacillus*
52 *coagulans* SANK70258 (*B. coagulans* SANK70258), also termed *Weizmannia*
53 *coagulans* SANK70258, is a lactic acid bacterium used as probiotics for livestock
54 animals and humans. Oral administration of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 effectively
55 promotes the growth of broiler chickens with conferring the protection ability against
56 *Coccidia* infection [2, 3] and modulates the composition of SCFAs in the intestine [4]. A
57 study using a model culture system of human colonic microbiota revealed that *B.*
58 *coagulans* SANK70258 increased the concentration of butyrate and number of
59 *Lachnospiraceae* bacteria in the intestine and reduced colonic *Enterobacteriaceae*
60 species [5]. Although these findings support the beneficial effects of *B. coagulans*
61 SANK70258 on the host body, the roles of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 on the host
62 immune systems are still unclear.

63 In the current study, we investigated the roles of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 as an

64 immunostimulant by using *in vitro* and *in vivo* experiments, and revealed that *B.*
65 *coagulans* SANK70258 cell components exhibit high activity in production of IFN- γ
66 and IgA from immune-related cells.
67

68 **Materials and Methods**

69 ***Mice and Cells***

70 The present study was approved by the Animal Care and Use Committees of Tokyo
71 University of Science (K22005, K21004, K20005, and K19006), and was conducted in
72 accordance with the guideline of the Institutional Review Board of Tokyo University of
73 Science. The spleen, the Peyer's patch, and the bone marrow were isolated from Balb/c
74 mice (Japan SLC, Hamamatsu, Japan) to obtain splenocytes, Peyer's patch cells, and to
75 generate BMDCs, respectively. BMDCs were developed from BM cells as previously
76 described [6]. To neutralize cytokines, anti-IL-12p40 (clone C17.8, BioLegend),
77 anti-IL-23p19 (clone MMP19B2, BioLegend), anti-IL-6 (clone MP5-20F3, BioLegend),
78 and isotype control (#RTK2071, BioLegend) Abs were used. Depletion of CD11c⁺ cells
79 from splenocytes was performed by autoMACS Pro Separator (Miltenyi Biotec) with
80 CD11c MicroBeads UltraPure mouse (Miltenyi Biotec). CD8⁺ T cells were isolated
81 from the spleen using Mojosort Magnetic Separation System CD8 Naïve T cell Isolation
82 Kit (BioLegend). Anti-CD3ε Ab (clone 145-2111C, BioLegend) and anti-CD28 Ab
83 (clone 37.51, TONBO Bioscience) were used to stimulate CD8⁺ T cells. BAY11-7082,
84 LE540 (#123-04521, Wako), Brefeldin A (#420601, BioLegend) were used as
85 inhibitors.

86

87 ***Preparation of lactic acid bacteria***

88 *B. coagulans* SANK70258 and 7 kinds of bacteria (*Lactobacillus antri* 15950, *L. sakei*
89 *subsp. sakei* 1157, *L. buchneri* 1068, *L. gasseri* 1131, *L. plantarum subsp. plantarum*
90 1149, *Leuconostoc mesenteroides subsp. cremoris* 16943, *L. mesenteroides subsp.*
91 *cremoris* 6124; all obtained from RIKEN BRC) were cultured in MRS medium for 1

92 day under a same shaking condition. After washing with saline, harvested bacteria were
93 freeze-dried and were γ -ray irradiated.

94

95 ***ELISA***

96 The concentrations of mouse IFN- γ , IL-12p40, IL-6, and IL-10, were determined by
97 ELISA using ELISA MAX Deluxe Sets (BioLegend), and IgA concentration was
98 measured by mouse IgA uncoated ELISA kit (Invitrogen) or mouse IgA ELISA
99 Quantification Set (#E90-103, Bethyl Laboratories).

100

101 ***Flow cytometry***

102 To identify CD4⁺ T cells, CD8⁺ T cells, and NK cells in whole splenocytes, cells were
103 stained with anti-mouse CD3 ϵ -PerCP (clone 145-2C11, BioLegend), anti-mouse
104 CD4-FITC (clone GK1.5, BioLegend), anti-CD8-VioGreen (clone 53-6.7, Miltenyi
105 Biotec), anti-NK1.1-PE (clone PK136, BioLegend), and anti-CD49b-APC (clone DX5,
106 BioLegend) Abs. Intracellular IFN- γ was stained with anti-mouse IFN- γ -PE/Cyanine7
107 (clone XMG1.2, BioLegend) after treatment with Fixation buffer (#420801, BioLegend)
108 and Intracellular staining perm wash buffer (#421002, BioLegend). A MACS Quant
109 analyzer (Miltenyi Biotec) and Flowjo (Tomy Digital Biology, Tokyo, Japan) were used
110 to detect fluorescence and to analyze data, respectively.

111

112 ***Small interfering RNA***

113 Electroporation was performed to introduce siRNA into BMDCs using a mouse
114 dendritic cell nucleofector kit (Lonza, Basel, Switzerland) and a Nucleofector 2b
115 (Lonza). Following siRNAs were purchased from Invitrogen (Carlsbad, CA, USA):

116 *Tlr2* (#MSS216272), *Tlr4* (#MSS211922), *Nod2* (#MSS217440), Stealth RNAi siRNA
117 Negative Control Lo GC (#12935-200) as for negative control of *Tlr4* siRNA, Stealth
118 RNAi siRNA Negative Control Hi GC (#12935-400) for *Tlr2* and *Nod2* siRNAs.

119

120 ***Quantification of mRNA***

121 Complementary DNA was synthesized from total RNA, which was isolated from
122 BMDCs using the ReliaPrep RNA Cell Miniprep System (#Z76012, Promega, Madison,
123 USA), using ReverTra Ace qPCR Master Mix (#FSQ-201, TOYOBO, Osaka, Japan).
124 Quantitative real-time PCR was performed with Thunderbird SYBR qPCR Mix
125 (#QPS-201, TOYOBO) on the StepOne Real-Time PCR System (Applied Biosystems,
126 Kanagawa, Japan). The nucleotide sequences (from 5' to 3') of the primer sets used in
127 qPCR are listed as follows.

128 *Gzmb*-F; TGCATTCCCCACCCAGACTA, *Gzmb*-R;
129 TTCAGCTTTAGCAGCATGATGTC, *Prf1*-F; GAGTGTCGCATGTACAGTTTTTCG,
130 *Prf1*-R; GCGCCTTTTTGAAGTCAAGGT, *Ccr4*-F;
131 GCAAGGCAGCTCAACTGTTCT, *Ccr4*-R; TGGCATTTCATCTTTGGAATCG,
132 *Ccr5*-F; GGCTCTTGCAGGATGGATTTT, *Ccr5*-R;
133 GGTGCTGACATAACCATAATCGATGT, *Ccr6*-F;
134 TCTGAATGAATTCCACAGAGTCCTACT, *Ccr6*-R;
135 CCATGGTCTGGAGGAATAGAATAATAC, *Ccr9*-F; GCACTTCCCCTCCTGAAGCT,
136 *Ccr9*-R; CTTGTGAGTTCGTGGGGCATCA, *Cxcr3*-F;
137 TGCCAAAGGCAGAGAAGCA, *Cxcr3*-R; CATCTAGCACTTGACGTTCACTAACC,
138 *Cxcr6*-F; GAGCACACTTCACTCTGGAACAA, *Cxcr6*-R;
139 CCATCATCCATGGCATCA, *Il1b*-F; AGTTGACGGACCCCAAAGA, *Il1b*-R;

140 GGACAGCCCAGGTCAAAGG, *Tlr2*-F; GAATTGCATCACCGGTCAGAA, *Tlr2*-R;
141 TCCTCTGAGATTTGACGCTTT, *Tlr4*-F; GCTAAGTGCCGAGTCTGAGTGTA,
142 *Tlr4*-R; TGCAGCCTTTCAGAAACACATT, *Nod2*-F; CGTGCGCCTGCTCCAT,
143 *Nod2*-R; CACCCTCAGGGACAAGAAGTTC.

144 Primers for *Il6* [7] and *Aldh1a2* mRNAs [8] were described in our previous reports.

145

146 ***Statistical analysis***

147 A two-tailed Student's t-test was used to compare two samples and a one-way ANOVA
148 followed the Tukey-Kramer multiple comparison test was employed to compare
149 multiple (more than three) samples.

150

151 **Results and Discussion**

152 ***B. coagulans SANK70258 induces IFN- γ production from NK cells***

153 To evaluate the effects of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 as immunostimulant, we incubated
154 the mouse splenocytes in the presence of SANK70258 or various lactic acid bacteria,
155 which were sterilized by γ -ray treatment. Determination of IFN- γ concentrations in the
156 culture media of splenocytes after 48 h incubation showed that the SANK70258
157 component exhibited the highest IFN- γ production ability among tested bacteria
158 components (Fig. 1A), in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 1B). Then, to identify the
159 IFN- γ -producing cells in whole splenocytes, we performed flow cytometric analysis
160 using Abs against IFN- γ and cell type markers. As shown in Fig. 1C, the
161 SANK70258-treatment markedly increased the frequency of IFN- γ -producing cells in
162 NK population, whereas none and little increase was observed in CD4⁺ T cells and
163 CD8⁺ T cells, respectively.

164 These results indicate that *B. coagulans* SANK70258 effectively induced IFN- γ release
165 from NK cells mainly.

166

167 ***Participant cells and molecules in B. coagulans SANK70258-induced IFN- γ***
168 ***production***

169 To reveal the molecular mechanisms by which *B. coagulans* SANK70258-treatment
170 induced IFN- γ production, we examined the effects of cytokine blocking, cells depletion,
171 and intracellular-signaling inhibition. As shown in Fig. 2A, addition of anti-IL-12p40
172 Ab into culture media of spleen cells completely inhibited *B. coagulans*
173 SANK70258-induced production of IFN- γ , and anti-IL-23p19 Ab also significantly
174 suppressed the IFN- γ release. Then, to confirm the involvement of

175 IL-12/IL-23-producing cells in the *B. coagulans* SANK70258-induced IFN- γ
176 production, we compared IFN- γ levels between the whole spleen cells and
177 CD11c⁺-depleted spleen cells, and found that the IFN- γ production following *B.*
178 *coagulans* SANK70258 treatment was decreased by the depletion of CD11c⁺ cells (Fig.
179 2B). To further examine whether the NF κ B-signaling activated in *B. coagulans*
180 SANK70258-treated cells participate in IFN- γ production, we stimulated whole
181 splenocyte with *B. coagulans* SANK70258 in the presence or absence of BAY11-7082,
182 an inhibitor of NF- κ B. Both production of IFN- γ and IL-12p40 from *B. coagulans*
183 SANK70258-treated splenocyte was completely inhibited by NF- κ B inhibition (Fig.
184 2C). These results demonstrated that *B. coagulans* SANK70258 induced IFN- γ
185 production from NK cells via NF- κ B-mediated stimulation of IL-12/23-producible cells
186 including DCs.

187 In a cytoplasmic-staining experiment (Fig. 1C), slight expression of IFN- γ was detected
188 in CD8⁺ T cells, which is reported to express TLRs and be able to receive the
189 stimulation by PAMPs [9, 10]. To investigate whether *B. coagulans* SANK70258
190 directly induces IFN- γ production from CD8⁺ T cells, isolated splenic CD8⁺ T cells
191 were incubated in anti-CD3 Ab- and anti-CD28 Ab-coated dishes in the presence or
192 absence of *B. coagulans* SANK70258. IFN- γ in culture supernatant was significantly
193 increased by *B. coagulans* SANK70258 treatment, and mRNA levels of *Gzmb* and *Prfl*
194 were upregulated in *B. coagulans* SANK70258-treated CD8⁺ T cells (Fig. 2D). In a
195 recent study, CCR6 expression in CD8⁺ T cells was increased by microbial
196 exopolysaccharide produced by *Lactobacillus*, which contributes the antitumor adjuvant
197 effect of the *Lactobacillus* on immune-checkpoint blockade treatment [11]. Then, we
198 quantified mRNA levels of chemokine receptors in *B. coagulans* SANK70258-treated

199 CD8⁺ T cells, and observed that mRNAs of several receptors including CCR6 tended to
200 be increased by *B. coagulans* SANK70258 treatment (Fig. 2E).

201

202 ***Roles of NOD2 and TLR2 in B. coagulans SANK70258-dependent cytokine***
203 ***production of DC***

204 Above-mentioned results using splenocytes indicated that DC is a candidate source of
205 IL-12, which produces IL-12 following *B. coagulans* SANK70258 treatment. To
206 evaluate the effects of *B. coagulans* SANK70258-treatment on DCs, we determined
207 mRNA levels of cytokines in BMDCs incubated with *B. coagulans* SANK70258.
208 Treatment with *B. coagulans* SANK70258 apparently increased mRNA levels of *Il6*,
209 *Il1b*, and *Aldh1a2* in BMDCs in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 3A), suggesting that *B.*
210 *coagulans* SANK70258 directly stimulated DCs. To evaluate the roles of PAMP
211 receptors in *B. coagulans* SANK70258-induced stimulation of DCs, we performed a
212 knockdown experiment using siRNAs for *Tlr2*, *Tlr4*, and *Nod2*, which are reported to
213 be receptors for lactic acid bacteria components [12]. Although LPS-induced release of
214 cytokines was decreased in *Tlr4* siRNA-transfected BMDCs, knockdown of TLR4 did
215 not reduce cytokine release from *B. coagulans* SANK70258-stimulated BMDCs (Fig.
216 3B). In contrast, knockdown of TLR2 and NOD2 suppressed the release of IL-6 and
217 IL-12p40 from *B. coagulans* SANK70258-treated BMDCs (Fig. 3C). *B. coagulans*
218 SANK20758 treatment also induced IL-10 release from BMDCs, which is a key
219 character of probiotic bacteria useful for prevention of inflammatory diseases and was
220 markedly reduced by NOD2 knockdown but not by knockdown of TLR2 and TLR4
221 (Fig. 3B and 3C). Based on the finding that reduced expression of PAMP receptors
222 recognizing peptidoglycan-related components suppressed the cytokine release from *B.*

223 *coagulans* SANK70258-treated BMDCs.

224

225 ***B. coagulans* SANK70258 accelerates IgA production in vitro and in vivo**

226 *B. coagulans* SANK70258 treatment increased the expression of IL-6 and RALDH2 in
227 DCs, which are known to be accelerator of IgA production [13]. To evaluate the effects
228 of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 on IgA production, we cultured whole cells prepared from
229 the Peyer's patch with *B. coagulans* SANK70258. After 3-7 days cultivation, apparent
230 amounts of IgA accompanied with the production of IL-6 and IFN- γ were detected in *B.*
231 *coagulans* SANK70258-treated Peyer's patch cells (Fig. 4A). We also confirmed that *B.*
232 *coagulans* SANK70258-induced increase of IgA was significantly suppressed in the
233 co-presence of IL-6-neutralizing Ab and an RAR inhibitor (Fig. 4B). When the amounts
234 of IgA in culture media of Peyer's patch-derived cells incubated with or without lactic
235 bacteria were compared, we found that *B. coagulans* SANK70258 exhibited the highest
236 activity of IgA production among the tested bacteria (Fig. 4C).

237 Finally, to investigate the effects of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 *in vivo*, we determined
238 the amount of IgA in feces of mice orally administered *B. coagulans* SANK70258. The
239 intake of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 for 2 weeks significantly increased IgA levels in
240 feces (Fig. 4D), and frequency of IgA-producing B cells in the Peyer's patch (Fig. 4E).

241 In the present study, we found that *B. coagulans* SANK70258 cell components induce
242 the high amount production of IFN- γ and IgA from immune cells. Although we used
243 γ -ray-treated *B. coagulans* SANK70258 focusing on the roles of cell components as an
244 immunostimulant in the present study, considering that *B. coagulans* SANK70258 can
245 reach the intestine alive by forming spore, it is expected that *B. coagulans* SANK70258
246 exhibits further beneficial effects on host body via production of the secondary

247 metabolites.

248

249 **Conflicts of Interest**

250 M.A. and R.Y. are employed by the Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation.

251

252 **References**

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305

306

307 **Legends**

308 **Figure 1. IFN- γ induction activity of lactic acid bacteria and identification of IFN- γ**
309 **producing cells in splenocytes stimulated with *B. coagulans* SANK70258**

310 **A. and B.** Concentrations of IFN- γ in culture media of splenocytes. Whole cells
311 prepared from the spleen of mouse (5×10^5 cells/500 μ L) were incubated in the
312 presence or absence of 10 μ g/mL γ -ray irradiated bacteria (**A**) or were incubated with
313 indicated amount of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 (**B**) for 48 h. IFN- γ concentrations of
314 culture media were determined by ELISA. The data represent the mean \pm SE of 3
315 independent experiments performed with triplicate samples (**A** and **B**).

316 **C.** Frequencies of IFN- γ producing cells. Whole splenocytes (5×10^5 cells/500 μ L)
317 cultured with or without 10 μ g/mL *B. coagulans* SANK70258 for 12 h were incubated
318 for additional 5 h in the presence of Monensin and Brefeldin A and were then stained
319 with Abs against IFN- γ and cell-type specific markers. The data represent the mean \pm
320 SE of 5 independent experiments. Statistical analysis was performed with two-tailed
321 Student's *t*-test. **p* < 0.05.

322

323 **Figure 2. Roles of DCs and CD8⁺ T cells involved in IFN- γ production in *B.***
324 ***coagulans* SANK70258-stimulated splenocytes**

325 **A.** Effects of neutralizing Abs on *B. coagulans* SANK70258-induced IFN- γ production.
326 Splenocytes were incubated with or without 10 μ g/mL *B. coagulans* SANK70258 in the
327 presence of 0.5 μ g/mL neutralizing Ab or its control for 48 h.

328 **B.** Effects of CD11c⁺ depletion on *B. coagulans* SANK70258-induced IFN- γ
329 production.

330 **C.** Effects of NF κ B inhibition on cytokine production in *B. coagulans*

331 SANK70258-treated splenocytes.

332 **D.** *B. coagulans* SANK70258 enhanced IFN- γ production from CD3/CD28-dependently
333 stimulated CD8⁺ T cells. Splenic CD8⁺ T cells were incubated in Ab-coated dishes in
334 the presence or absence of 10 μ g/mL *B. coagulans* SANK70258 for 48 h, and IFN- γ
335 concentrations in collected culture supernatants and *Gzmb* and *Prfl* mRNA levels in
336 harvested cells were determined.

337 **E.** Effects of *B. coagulans* treatment on transactivation of chemokine receptor genes in
338 CD8⁺ T cells. Splenic CD8⁺ T cells were cultivated with or without 10 μ g/mL *B.*
339 *coagulans* SANK70258 for 3 h, and then harvested to determine mRNA levels.

340 The data represent the mean \pm SD from three independent assays performed in triplicate.

341 *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$. Tukey-Kramer test (**A- D**) and Student's *t*-test (**E and F**) were
342 used.

343

344 **Figure 3. Effects of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 treatment on gene expression in**
345 **BMDCs**

346 **A.** mRNA levels of *Il6*, *Il1b*, and *Aldh1a2* in BMDCs.

347 **B.** Effects of *Tlr4* knockdown on *B. coagulans* SANK70258-induced expression of
348 cytokines in BMDCs.

349 **C.** Cytokine production from *Tlr2* or *Nod2* siRNA transfected BMDCs.

350 **D.** Cytokine producing activities of *B. coagulans* SANK70258-derived fractions.

351 To determine mRNA levels in cells and the amounts of cytokines in culture media, cells
352 and culture supernatants were collected 4 h and 24 h after stimulation, respectively. For
353 the stimulation, 10 μ g/mL *B. coagulans* SANK70258 or 100 ng/mL LPS was added.
354 BMDCs were cultured for 48 h after siRNA transfection (**B, C**).

355 The data represent the mean \pm SD from three independent assays performed in triplicate.

356 *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$. Tukey-Kramer test (**A-D**) were used.

357

358 **Figure 4. Induction of IgA production by *B. coagulans* treatment *in vitro* and *in***
359 ***vivo***

360 **A.** The amounts of IgA and cytokine proteins in the Peyer's patch-derived cells. Whole
361 cells (5×10^5 cells/500 μ L) isolated from the Peyer's patch were incubated with or
362 without indicated concentrations of *B. coagulans* SANK70258 for 3 or 7 days, and
363 concentrations of IgA, IL-6, and IFN- γ in culture supernatant were determined by
364 ELISA.

365 **B.** Effects of IL-6 neutralization and RAR inhibition on IgA production from *B.*
366 *coagulans* SANK70258-stimulated Peyer's patch cells. One μ g/mL anti-IL-6 Ab and/or
367 1 μ M LE540 were added to culture media of Peyer's patch-derived cells prior to
368 addition of 10 μ g/mL *B. coagulans* SANK70258, and the supernatants after 7 days
369 cultivation were collected to determine IgA concentrations.

370 **C.** IgA concentrations in the culture media of Peyer's patch cells incubated with or
371 without 10 μ g/mL lactic acid bacteria for 7 days.

372 **D.** The amount of IgA proteins in feces.

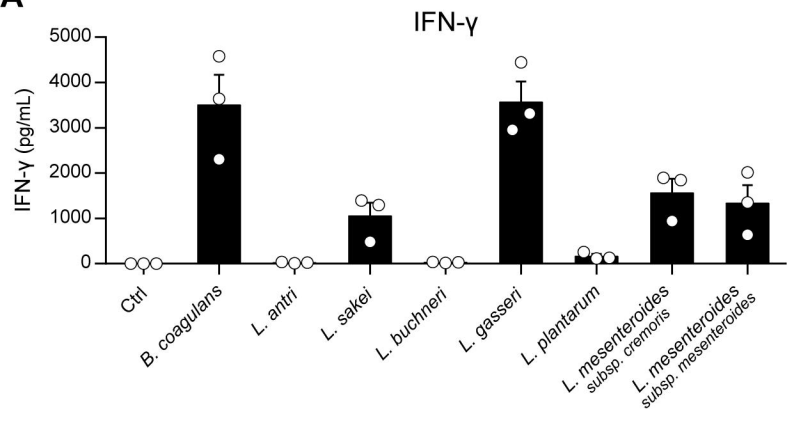
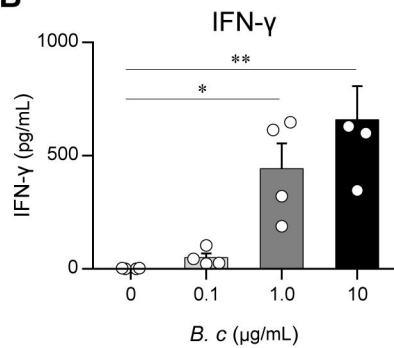
373 **E.** Frequency of IgA⁺ B cells in the Peyer's patch.

374 Balb/c mice were fed by 0.2% w/w *B. coagulans* SANK70258-containing or its control
375 diet (**D** and **E**).

376 The data represent the mean \pm SEM of individuals (**A-E**). *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$.

377 Tukey-Kramer test (**B**) and Student's *t*-test (**D** and **E**) were used.

378

A**B****C**