

## Case Report

### DOCK8 Deficiency Presenting with Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy: A Case Report

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#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 20/09/2024

Accepted: 17/02/2025

#### Keywords:

DOCK8; PML; primary immunodeficiencies; Central nervous system; hyperimmunoglobulin E syndrome

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#### ABSTRACT

**(1) Background:** Deducator of cytokinesis 8 (DOCK8) deficiency is a rare autosomal recessive form of hyperimmunoglobulin E syndrome characterized by autoimmunity, atopy, recurrent infections, and increased malignancy risk. Neurological manifestations, including central nervous system (CNS) vasculitis and stroke, have been documented, but progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML) remains a rare complication.

**(2) Case Report:** We present the case of a 27-month-old female from a consanguineous family who presented to the hospital with developmental regression and seizures, and was diagnosed with progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML). Laboratory evaluation revealed thrombocytosis, elevated inflammatory markers, and a markedly elevated serum IgE level of 1783.5 IU/ml (normal range:  $\leq 15$  IU/ml). Whole-exome sequencing identified a homozygous mutation in the DOCK8 gene, affecting the splice site in intron 15 (c.1797+1G>T). Despite extensive supportive treatments, including intravenous immunoglobulin and antimicrobial prophylaxis, the patient's condition continued to worsen. She is currently undergoing evaluation for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT).

**(3) Conclusion:** This case highlights progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML) as a rare but severe neurological complication of DOCK8 deficiency. Early recognition and treatment of DOCK8 deficiency are of paramount importance, as delays in diagnosis can result in severe complications, as demonstrated in our patient.

#### INTRODUCTION

Deducator of cytokinesis 8 (DOCK8) deficiency (OMIM#611432), a rare autosomal recessive form of hyperimmunoglobulin E (IgE), was first described in 2008 (Griggs, Ladd, Saul, DuPont, & Srivastava, 2008). It is more prevalent in populations with increased consanguinity rates, such as in regions like Saudi Arabia, where consanguineous marriages occur in 56% of cases (Khayat et al., 2024). DOCK8 deficiency results in many immune system abnormalities, including impaired cell migration, dysfunctional T-cell activity and impaired antigen-specific antibody production (Biggs, Keles, & Chatila, 2017; M. Zhang et al., 2024). These abnormalities lead to a variety of clinical features such as autoimmunity, atopy such as asthma, skin eczema, and recurrent infections as well as persistent viral and candidal infections (Biggs et al., 2017; Ganesan et al., 2024; Liquidano-Perez et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2024). Additionally, there is an increased risk of malignancy including lymphoma and squamous cell carcinoma

in patients with DOCK8 deficiency (Susanne E. Aydin et al., 2015; Kumar Jindal et al., 2024). Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation has been utilized as a treatment for DOCK8 deficiency (Freeman et al., 2025).

Although central nervous system (CNS) vasculitis and stroke are well documented in patients with DOCK8 deficiency (AlKhater, 2016; Susanne E. Aydin et al., 2015; Biggs et al., 2017; Boztug et al., 2012; Liquidano-Pérez et al., 2022), other CNS abnormalities, including neurodevelopmental disorder, moyamoya disease, encephalopathy, and viral encephalitis have been sporadically reported (Alsum et al., 2013; Susanne E. Aydin et al., 2015; K. R. Engelhardt et al., 2009; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Krgovic, Kokalj Vokac, Zagorac, & Gregoric Kumperscak, 2018). CNS involvement can significantly impair the quality of life and lead to premature mortality (Kose,

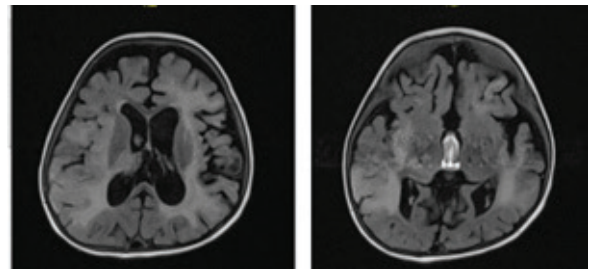
Karali, Bodur, Cekic, & Kilic, 2024; Yildirim et al., 2018). Early recognition of neurological involvement may provide a window for intervention before permanent neurological damage occurs. Herein, we re-report a case of DOCK8 deficiency in a female toddler who presented with progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy.

## 2. CASE PRESENTATION

A 27-month-old full-term girl, born to consanguineous parents, was referred to our pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) with a two-week history of fever and cough. Initially, she was diagnosed with pneumonia at a referring hospital and was treated with ceftriaxone and azithromycin. Despite antibiotic treatment, her symptoms persisted. On day five of admission her level of consciousness gradually worsened, and she experienced multiple episodes of seizures, necessitating antiepileptic treatment with levetiracetam. Subsequently, she required PICU admission due to a disturbed level of consciousness and the need for ventilatory support.

Her family reported a history of recurrent pneumonia since infancy and observed a decline in developmental skills over the past two months. Upon presentation to our PICU, she was on mechanical ventilation, with a temperature of 38.9 °C, BP 102/89 mmHg, and pulse was 100 bpm. She was sedated, nondysmorphic, and no abnormalities were noted in her nails, skin, or joints. In addition, there were no signs of organomegaly or lymphadenopathy.

A blood workup revealed leukocytosis (WBC  $18.6 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$ ) with a differential count of neutrophils  $12.4 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$ , lymphocytes  $2.88 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$ , monocytes  $2.19 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$ , and eosinophils  $1.08 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$ . Anemia (HB 9.5 g/dL) and thrombocytosis (Platelets  $705 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$ ) were also noted. The ESR was 40 mm/h, and CRP was 4.9 mg/dL. Ammonia and lactate levels were within normal limits, as were other chemistry tests. Blood and urine cultures were negative, HIV PCR was negative, and the newborn screening was normal. The CSF analysis revealed a cell count of zero, with normal CSF glucose and protein levels, and the CSF culture showed no growth. The serum IgE level was markedly elevated at 1783.5 IU/ml (normal range:  $\leq 15$  IU/ml), Chest radiography revealed pneumonic infiltrate in the right and left upper lobe. A brain MRI showed diffusion restriction in the right temporo-parietal, right insular, and left fronto-temporo-parietal regions, as well as chronic and subacute insults with atrophic changes, and bilateral asymmetric cerebral encephalopathy suggestive of progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (Figure 1). The electroencephalogram (EEG) result was normal.



**Figure 1.** Brain MRI showing possible mitochondrial encephalomyopathy. Abnormal generalized periventricular T2 hyperintensity. There is volume loss, leading to the enlargement of both the lateral and third ventricles.

Given the clinical presentation, hyperimmunoglobulin E syndrome (HIES) was suspected. Whole-exome sequences (WES) showed a novel pathogenic homozygous mutation in the DOCK8 gene, affecting the splice site in intron 15 c.1797+1G>T. The patient's 6-year-old elder sister, who presented with an -Eczema-like rash, underwent genetic testing and was found to have the same DOCK8 mutation. Both patients were initiated on intravenous immunoglobulin therapy, sulfamethoxazole and trimethoprim, and fluconazole prophylaxis by the immunologist, and referred to a transplant center for consideration of bone marrow transplant.

## 3. DISCUSSION

DOCK8 belongs to the DOCK180 superfamily which plays a crucial role in immune cell function (Ruusala & Aspenström, 2004; Q. Zhang et al., 2009). DOCK8 is involved in regulating cytoskeletal rearrangements, which are crucial for maintaining cellular structure, enabling migration, and facilitating adhesion. Furthermore, research has linked DOCK8 to various aspects of immune function, including CD4+ T-cell differentiation, immune synapse formation, and processes related to tumor immunity such as immune cell infiltration into tumors (Lambe et al., 2011; L. Zhang, Cao, Dai, & Zhang, 2022). DOCK8 defects impact the immune system, leading to combined immunodeficiency, characterized by impaired T-cell function in addition to dysfunctional B-cells and natural killer cells (Q. Zhang et al., 2009). Patients typically have low absolute counts of both CD4+ and CD8+ T cells, diminished cell proliferation, and reduced production of the antiviral cytokines IFN- $\gamma$  and TNF- $\alpha$ , which contribute to susceptibility to viral infections (Crawford et al., 2013; Engelhardt et al., 2015; Lambe et al., 2011; Q. Zhang et al., 2009; Q. Zhang, Jing, & Su, 2016). Additionally, there is a decreased presence of TH17 cells, increasing susceptibility to fungal infections, and TH2 skewing, leading to severe atopy (K. R. Engelhardt et al., 2009; Tangye et al., 2017). Lastly, there are defective antibody responses, especially to polysaccharide antigens, resulting from impaired class switching and affinity maturation,

increasing susceptibility to bacterial infections (Engelhardt et al., 2015; Randall, Lambe, Goodnow, & Cornall, 2010; Q. Zhang et al., 2016).

In addition, DOCK8 deficiency has been associated with a small number of patients presenting with severe central nervous system (CNS) lesions, manifesting as hemiplegia, seizures, ischemic infarction, subarachnoid hemorrhage, central nervous system vasculitis combined with stroke, facial paralysis, and viral encephalitis (AlKhater, 2016; Alsum et al., 2013; Susanne E. Aydin et al., 2015; Biggs et al., 2017; K. R. Engelhardt et al., 2009; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Krgovic et al., 2018; J. Yang & Y. Liu, 2021). A study involving 20 families, reported neurological symptoms in 10 patients, including meningitis, CNS vasculitis, progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), and fatal encephalitis (K. R. Engelhardt et al., 2009). In another study of 25 patients, five individuals presented with neurological symptoms such as hemiparesis and seizures. Neuroimaging revealed Moyamoya disease in one patient, middle cerebral artery syndrome in another, and brain infarctions in the remaining three patients (Alsum et al., 2013).

Progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML) is a rare, severe, and potentially fatal viral brain infection that is primarily observed in immunocompromised patients, such as those with DOCK8. (Hadjadj et al., 2019). The primary causative agent is the polyomavirus JC virus (Cortese, Reich, & Nath, 2021; Ferenczy et al., 2012) which targets oligodendrocytes, crosses the blood-brain barrier, and causes widespread demyelination in the cerebral and cerebellar hemispheres, as observed in the patient's brain MRI, which showed bilateral asymmetric cerebral encephalopathy, progressing insidiously over weeks to months (Cortese et al., 2021). Clinically, PML often manifests with focal symptoms such as hemiparesis, visual deficits, aphasia, ataxia, personality changes, cognitive decline, speech abnormalities, and new-onset seizures. Its multifocal nature affects various brain regions, predominantly the posterior regions, including the brain stem, cerebellum, and occipital lobe, which influence the clinical symptoms (Ferenczy et al., 2012).

Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) remains the most effective treatment for patients with DOCK8 deficiency (Susanne E Aydin et al., 2019; Susanne E. Aydin et al., 2015; Cuellar-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2025; Pillay et al., 2019). Without intervention, the patient is likely to experience progressive deterioration due to recurrent infections and worsening PML, ultimately leading to severe neurological decline and increased mortality. While immunoglobulin therapy and antimicrobial prophylaxis may provide temporary infection control, they do not address the underlying immunodeficiency or prevent PML progression (Hadjadj et al., 2019). In contrast, HSCT offers the potential to restore immune system

function, significantly improving prognosis and reducing the risk of opportunistic infections like PML. However, the success of HSCT depends on timely intervention to prevent irreversible neurological damage (Susanne E. Aydin et al., 2015). Our patient presented with a novel homozygous loss-of-function (LOF) mutation in the DOCK8 gene, affecting the splice site in intron 15 (c.1797+1G>T). This mutation is predicted to disrupt RNA splicing, leading to aberrant protein synthesis, and resulting in a LOF variant of the DOCK8 protein. Splice-site mutations in DOCK8, such as c.1868+2T>C and c.5962-2A>G, have previously been reported (Jing Yang & Yan Liu, 2021), and are known to impair immune cell function and contribute to significant immune dysfunction (Q. Zhang et al., 2009). However, the c.1797+1G>T mutation identified in this case has not been previously documented. Its position at a critical splice donor site likely causes exon 15 skipping or intron retention, ultimately rendering the DOCK8 protein nonfunctional (Karin R. Engelhardt et al., 2009).

The clinical manifestations in our patient, as well as her sibling, align with the disruption caused by this mutation. The younger sibling presented with progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), a rare and severe complication of DOCK8 deficiency, confirmed by brain MRI, which revealed bilateral asymmetric cerebral encephalopathy. Unfortunately, a PCR assay for JC viral DNA in the CSF was not performed due to the lack of availability of the test at our center. Despite suggestive MRI findings and clinical presentation, the absence of confirmation through the PCR assay presents a significant limitation in this case report. Meanwhile, the elder sibling exhibited milder symptoms, such as eczema and recurrent infections, highlighting potential phenotypic variability influenced by environmental factors, additional genetic variations, or differences in the timing of clinical evaluation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This case report highlights progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML) as a rare and severe presentation of DOCK8 deficiency. It emphasizes the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach to the diagnosis and management of DOCK8 deficiency. Early recognition and treatment of DOCK8 deficiency are of paramount importance, as delays in diagnosis can result in severe complications, as demonstrated in our patient.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

DOCK 8: Deducator of cytokinesis 8, IgE: Immuno-globulin E, CNS: Central nervous system, PICU: pediatric intensive care unit, WBC: White blood cell, Hb: Hemoglobin, ESR: Erythrocyte sedimentation rate, CRP: C-reactive protein, HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus, PCR: Polymerase chain reaction, CSF: cerebro-spinal fluid MRI: Magnetic Resonance Imaging, EEG: Electroencephalogram, HIES: Hyperimmu-

noglobulin E syndrome, WES: Whole Exome Sequencing, PML: Pro-gressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy, JC: John Cunningham virus, HSCT: Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

#### ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Informed consent was taken from the parents. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Biomedical Research Ethics Committee of Umm AL-Qura University (HAPO-02-K-012-2024-10-2288).

#### SOURCE OF FUNDING

This research received no external funding

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None

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