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Institute of Particle Physics and
Accelerator Technologies



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“Does radiochemistry play a role in FLASH effect?”

Investigation of hydrogen peroxide production under ultra-high dose rate (UHDR) X-ray irradiation in presence of solvated electron scavengers

In the framework of PhD thesis

“Optimization of ion beam parameters for very high dose rate (FLASH) radiotherapy”

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- ≡ Introduction to *FLASH* effect and the potential it holds for radiotherapy
- ≡ Mechanism of *FLASH* effect: past and present biophysical theories
- ≡ Role of hydrogen peroxide production in water radiolysis chain
- ≡ Aims of the study
- ≡ Methods used
 - ≡ Sample preparation
 - ≡ Irradiation and dosimetry
 - ≡ Hydrogen peroxide concentration measurement, G-value calculation and statistical analysis
- ≡ Uncertainty source analysis
- ≡ Results
- ≡ Conclusions. Future outlooks

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Introduction

***FLASH* effect: potential and possible mechanisms**





Historically . . .

- ≡ First observed radiosensitivity changes in biological systems: **1959 for *Serratia marcescens* bacteria** [1]
- ≡ *FLASH* effect in terminology **from 2014: the differential effect** in mice model lung tumors [2]

The *FLASH* effect

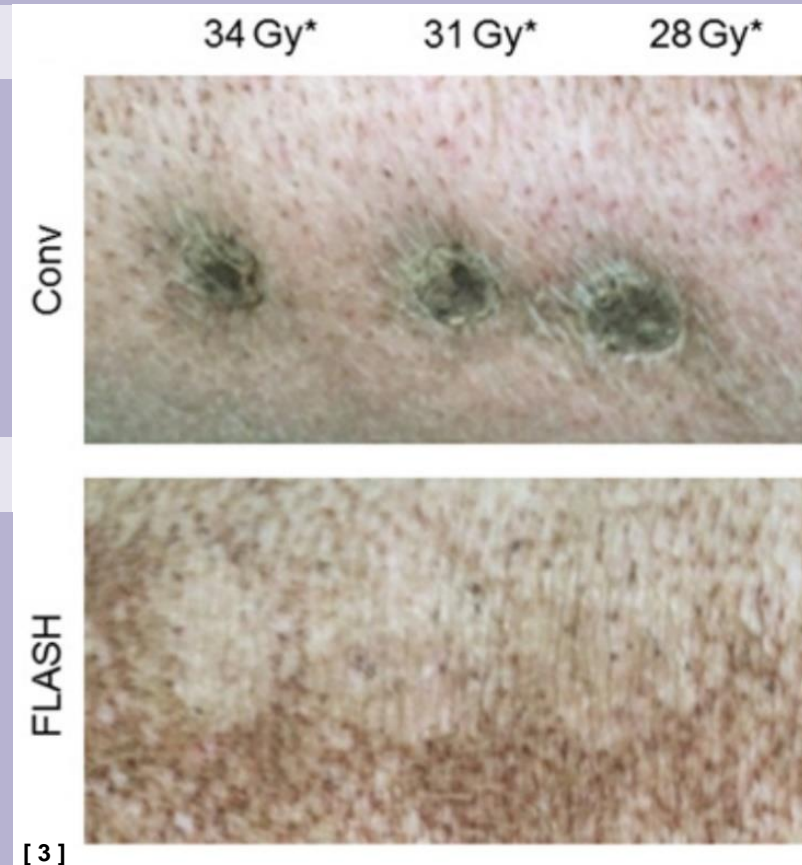
Biologically observed **differential effect** – when irradiation with ionizing radiation is performed at ultra-high dose rates (*delivery timescale of milliseconds*) **adverse effects in healthy tissue are greatly reduced while DNA damage in cancerous tissue remains the same**

To achieve dosimetrically . . .

In order to achieve *FLASH* effect:

- ≡ **High dose rate of more than 40 Gy/s**
- ≡ **High delivered dose above 8 – 10 Gy**

(*hypofractionation*)

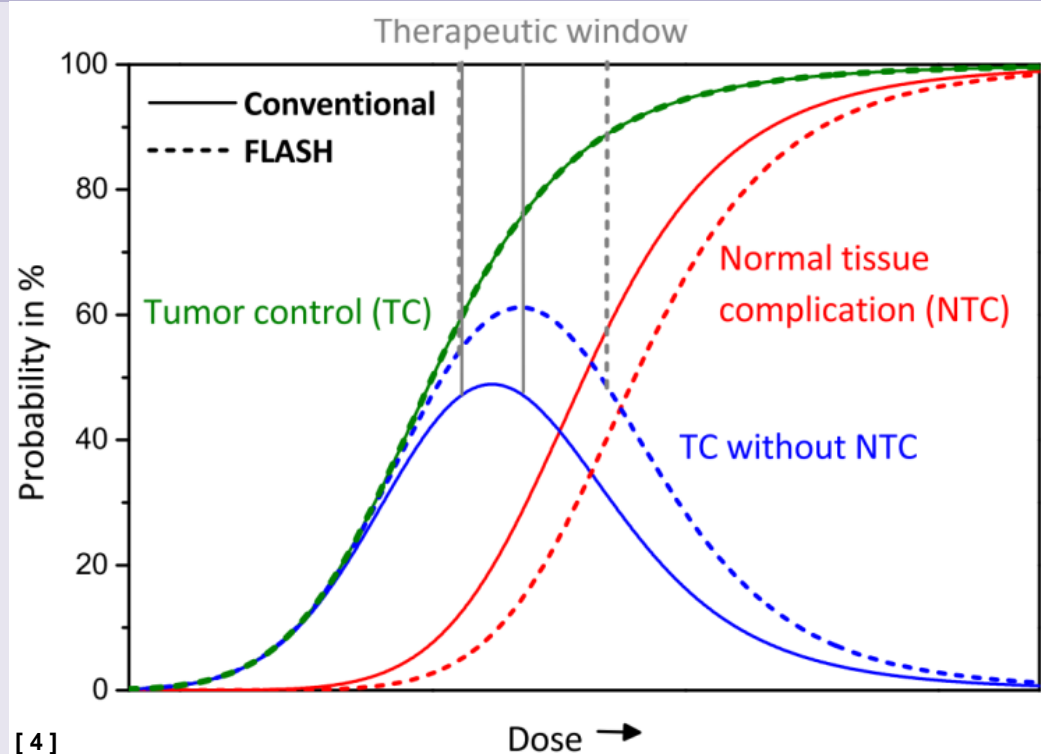


[1] DEWEY DL, BOAG JW. *Modification of the Oxygen Effect when Bacteria are given Large Pulses of Radiation*. Nature 1959
 [2] Favaudon V, Caplier L, Monceau V, et al. *Ultrahigh dose-rate FLASH irradiation increases the differential response between normal and tumor tissue in mice*. Sci. Transl. Med. 2014
 [3] Vozenin M-C, De Fornel P, Petersson K, et al. *The Advantage of FLASH Radiotherapy Confirmed in Mini-pig and Cat-cancer Patients*. Clinical Cancer Research 2019



PRIMARILY

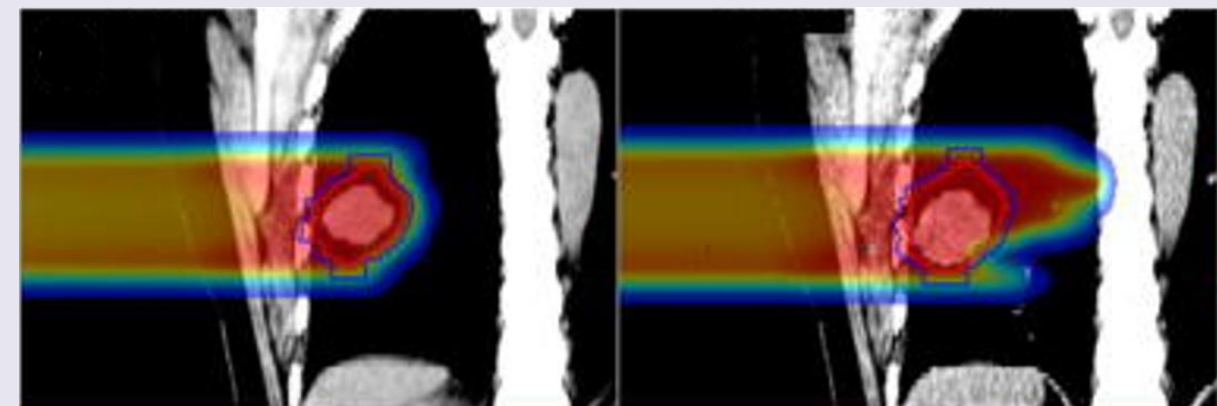
Tumor control probability is sustained, while decreasing normal tissue complication probability – **it is possible to reduce adverse effects of therapy or increase delivered dose due to increased therapeutic window**



[4]

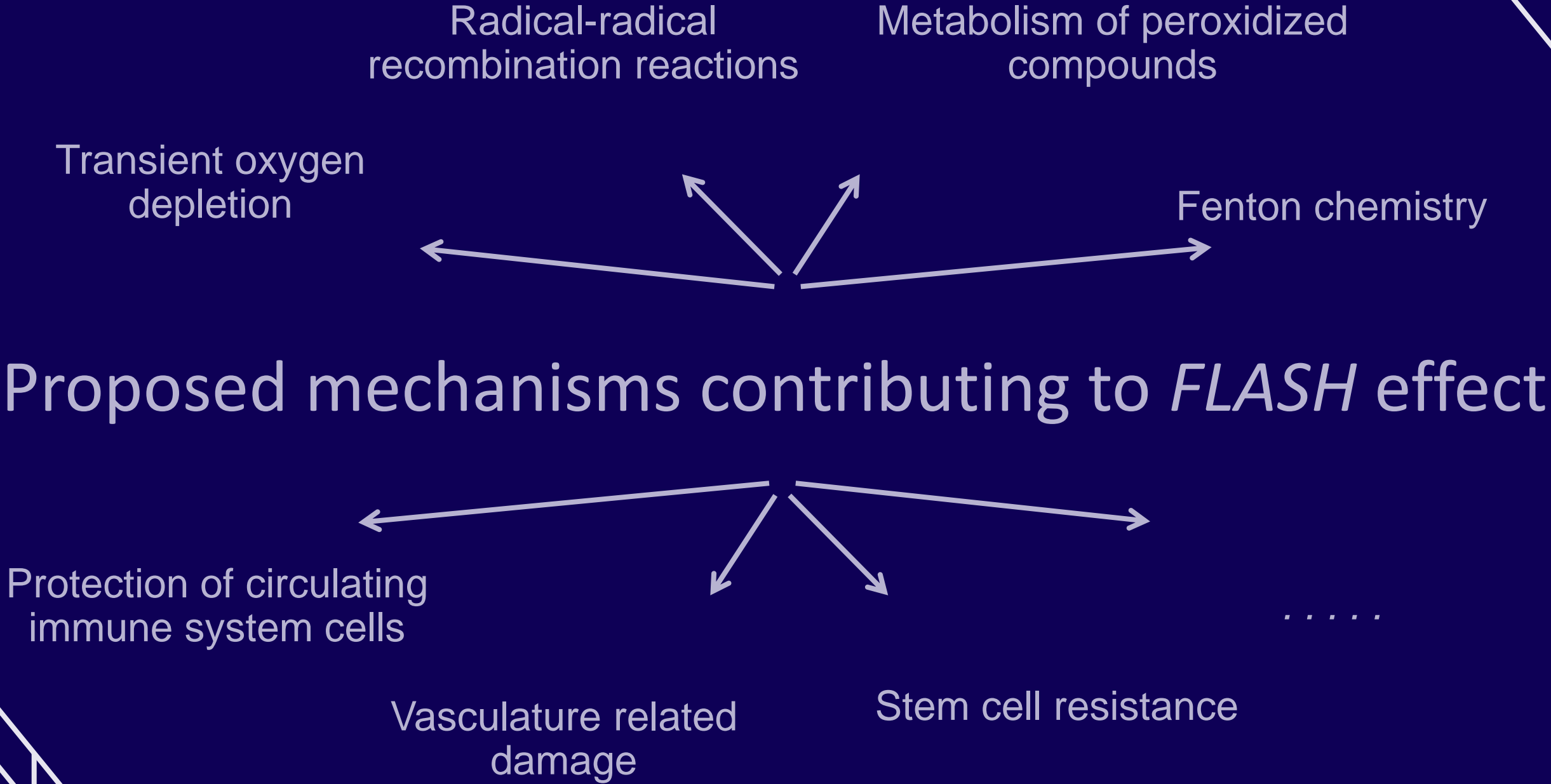
Secondarily . . .

- ≡ Possibly **reduced treatment course**, as *FLASH* effect has been found for **hypofractionation** (1-5 fractions)
- ≡ **Impact of physiological motions** (*breathing, heartbeat, peristalsis etc.*) is **reduced** due to shorted beam delivery time



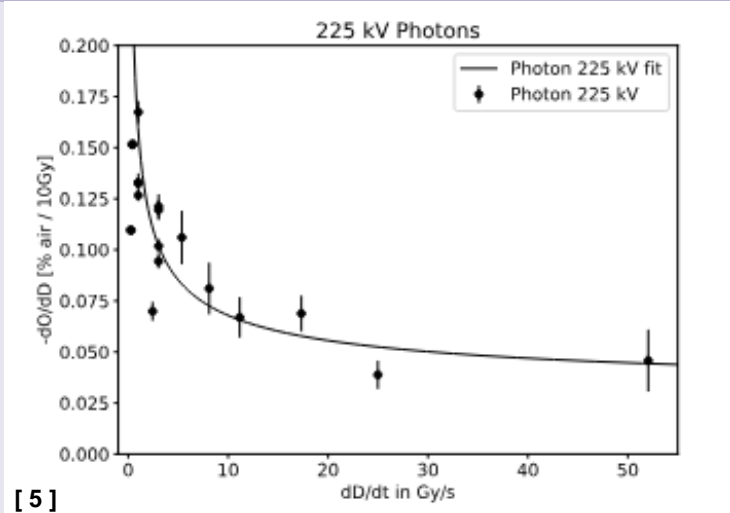
[4] Schüller A, Heinrich S, Foullade C, et al. *The European Joint Research Project UHDpulse – Metrology for advanced radiotherapy using particle beams with ultra-high pulse dose rates*. Physica Medica 2020

Proposed mechanisms contributing to *FLASH* effect



Transient oxygen depletion

- ≡ One of the early theories of *FLASH* effect
- ≡ High dose rate in healthy tissue consumes more oxygen than regenerated through diffusion – **transient hypoxic conditions are induced while irradiating**
- ≡ Theory “debunked” [5], [6] – could contribute, but not sole cause:
 - ≡ doses in range of 100s of Gy are necessary for depletion – in contrast to experimental studies
 - ≡ oxygen depletion rate is reduced for UHDR



[5]

[5] Jansen J, Knoll J, Beyreuther E, et al. Does FLASH deplete oxygen? Experimental validation for photons, protons, and carbon ions. Medical Physics 2021

[6] Jansen J, Beyreuther E, García-Calderón D, et al. Changes in Radical Levels as a Cause for the FLASH effect: Impact of beam structure parameters at ultra-high dose rates on oxygen depletion in water. Radiotherapy and Oncology 2022

Radical-radical recombination

- ≡ At UHDR, instantaneous radical concentrations are higher, possibly *skewing* the balance of chemical interactions
- ≡ Higher probability of self-annihilation reactions - **reducing stable concentration post-irradiation** – reduced DNA damage
- ≡ Modelling studies have shown that peroxy radicals could be the main contributor to *FLASH* effect, though experimental validation impossible due to short lifetime of these radicals

Could there be an alternative radical or chemical species for assessment?



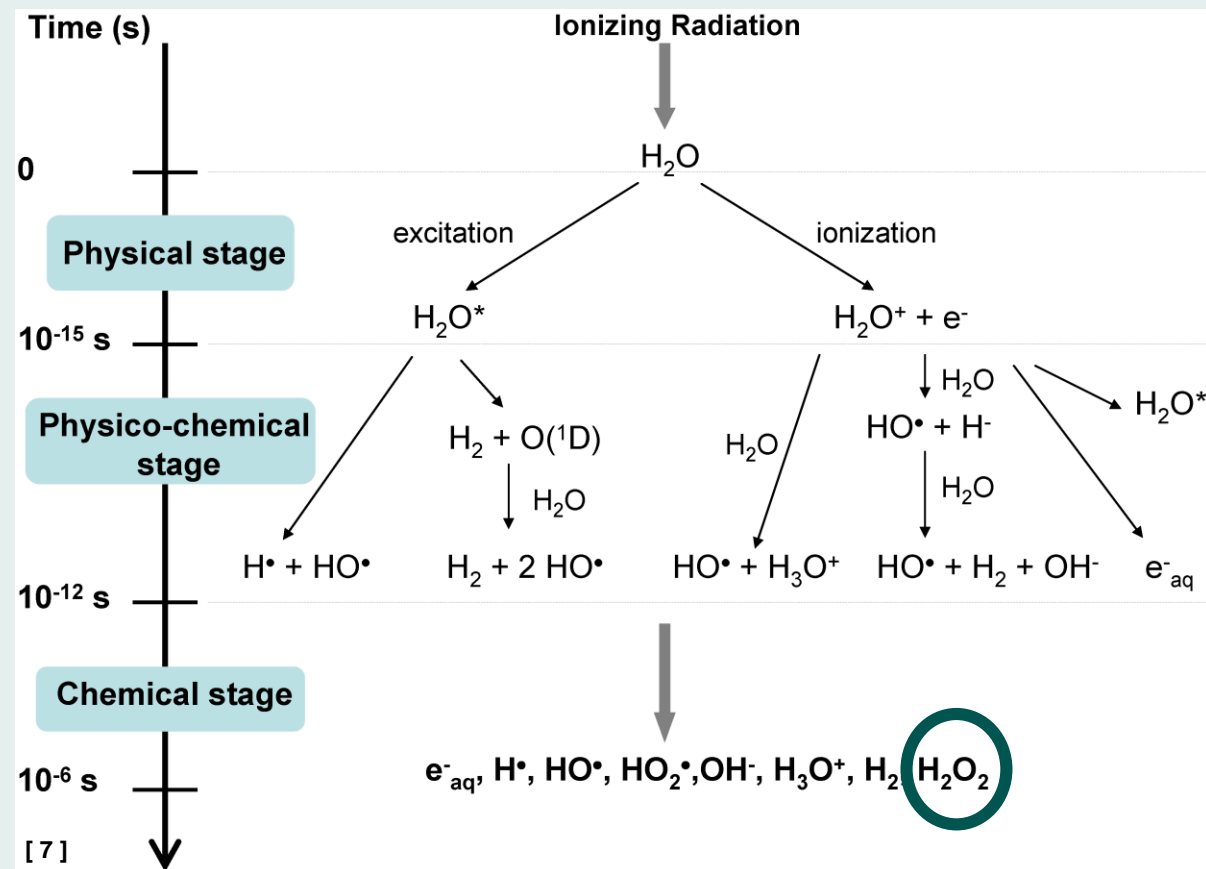
Motivation for the study

**Methods. Results.
Conclusions**





Water radiolysis



≡ Describes how ionizing radiation excites and ionizes molecules of water, which in turn undergo chemical and physical interactions **creating reactive species at the end of chemical stage - indirect interactions with cellular DNA**

≡ Under UHDR – higher concentrations of chemical species are induced (**closer both in temporal and spatial domains**) – the balance of chemical interactions can be shifted

Hydrogen peroxide

≡ Most of water radiolysis products are highly chemically reactive and short lived – almost impossible to measure

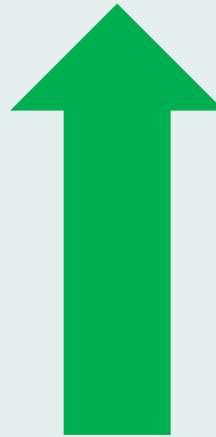
≡ **Hydrogen peroxide is stable enough to perform measurements after irradiation – could be used as an indicator for radiochemical changes under UHDR irradiation**

Main question:

Could UHDR induced radiochemical changes be correlated with biologically relevant changes of *FLASH* effect?

Furthermore . . .

MC simulations predict **INCREASED** hydrogen peroxide production under UHDR



Experimental measurements ^{[8]-[12]} have shown **DECREASED** hydrogen peroxide production under UHDR

Research gap:

It is necessary to investigate mechanistically hydrogen peroxide production changes under UHDR to understand mechanisms causing the discrepancies for simple systems, before exploring biologically complex media

[8] Sunnerberg JP, Zhang R, Gladstone DJ, Swartz HM, Gui J, Pogue BW. *Mean dose rate in ultra-high dose rate electron irradiation is a significant predictor for O₂ consumption and H₂O₂ yield.* Phys. Med. Biol. 2023

[9] Blain G, Vandenborre J, Villoing D, et al. *Proton Irradiations at Ultra-High Dose Rate vs. Conventional Dose Rate: Strong Impact on Hydrogen Peroxide Yield.* Radiation Research 2022

[10] Montay-Gruel P, Acharya MM, Petersson K, et al. *Long-term neurocognitive benefits of FLASH radiotherapy driven by reduced reactive oxygen species.* Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 2019

[11] Thomas W, Sunnerberg J, Reed M, et al. *Proton and Electron Ultrahigh-Dose-Rate Isodose Irradiations Produce Differences in Reactive Oxygen Species Yields.* International Journal of Radiation Oncology*Biophysics*Physics 2024

[12] Kacem H, Psoroulas S, Boivin G, et al. *Comparing radiolytic production of H₂O₂ and development of Zebrafish embryos after ultra high dose rate exposure with electron and transmission proton beams.* Radiotherapy and Oncology 2022;

AIMS OF THE STUDY

- To study H_2O_2 production changes with X-ray irradiation at UHDR and conventional dose rates in water medium
- To assess the impact of self-annihilation (*radical-radical*) interactions, study the medium with added solvated electron (e_{aq}^-) scavengers

Starting point

- ≡ Previous measurement work by DKFZ E041 team, specifically **Tengda Zhang**, with electron and carbon ion beams ^[13]
- ≡ **Measurement approach adapted and further expanded**

[13] Zhang T, Stengl C, Derksen L, et al. *Analysis of hydrogen peroxide production in pure water: Ultrahigh versus conventional dose-rate irradiation and mechanistic insights*. Medical Physics 2024

Preparation of samples

- Liquid samples are prepared in **200 μ L PCR eppendorf tubes**
- Filled fully to **avoid any dose distribution perturbations due to air gaps**
- Afterwards, inspected for air bubbles and new sample is prepared

Solutions studied

- Reference: **pure MilliQ water** prepared by *TKA GenPure* system
- To assess impact of solvated electron scavengers (*more in next slide*):
 - **nitrous oxide (N_2O) saturated solutions**
 - N_2O gas by *Guttmann, Germany*
 - solutions were bubbled with gas for 1 hour
 - **sodium nitrate ($NaNO_3$) water solutions**
 - ACS reagent grade $NaNO_3$ (*Sigma-Aldrich, Germany*) was used
 - dissolved, vortexed and serial dilution for different concentrations

Oxygen levels studied

- *Most of the study*: **aerated samples** ($p_{O_2} = 21\%$), leaving water for ~ 1 hour
- **Physoxic samples** ($p_{O_2} = 4\%$, $p_{CO_2} = 0.1\%$) were also studied:
 - conditioning samples for 24 hours in hypoxia chamber *SciTive (Baker)*
 - flushing by nitrogen gas



Role of scavengers

- Compounds reacting with certain water radiolysis species – **disrupts the radiolysis chain**
- By introducing e_{aq}^- scavenger – multiple pathways changed, changing end products. Impact of certain species can be assessed

Nitrous oxide

- Method as studied previously by DKFZ E041 Group ^[13]
- **Method has multiple drawbacks:**
 - no direct concentration measurement possible – no scavenging capacity
 - “concentration” not reproducible day-to-day – room temperature, gas flow etc.
 - time consuming process of bubbling

$N_2O + e_{aq}^- \rightarrow {}^*N_2O^-$	$9.1 \times 10^9 M^{-1}s^{-1}$
$N_2O + e_{pre}^- \rightarrow {}^*N_2O^-$	$< 10^{12} M^{-1}s^{-1}$

Alternatives

Acrylamide

Bromine ion

Nitrate ion

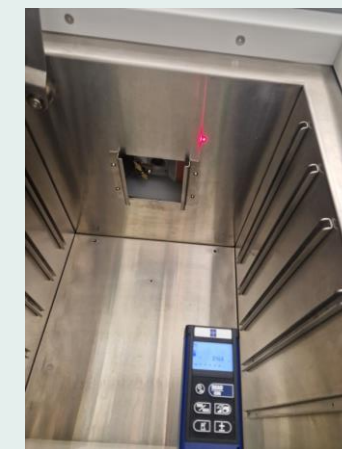
Sodium nitrate

- Nitrate ion effective scavenger of solvated electron, as well as precursor of solvated electron and molecular cation of water
- Sodium nitrate (NaNO₃) extensively studied in water radiolysis process
- Solid and dissolvable – **possibility to accurately control the concentration**
- **Additional measurements taken to characterize the approach:**
 - pH of the solution
 - hydrogen peroxide measurement assay independence
 - impact of the sodium nitrate concentration

$NO_3^- + e_{aq}^- \rightarrow {}^*NO_3^{2-}$	$9.7 \times 10^9 M^{-1}s^{-1}$
$NO_3^- + H_2O^+ \rightarrow {}^*NO_3 + H_2O$	$\sim 1 \times 10^{12} M^{-1}s^{-1}$
$NO_3^- + e_{pre}^- \rightarrow {}^*NO_3^{2-}$	$1 \times 10^{13} M^{-1}s^{-1}$

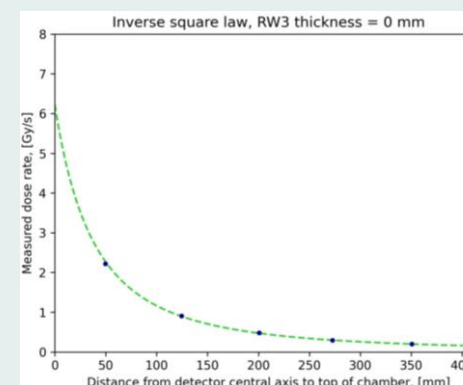
X-ray system used

- **MultiRad225 X-ray irradiation system** was used
- Operated at nominal **voltage of 200 kV** and **beam current of 17.8 mA**
- *Explored: 118 kV and 30 mA, but surface dose rate increase diminished with PDD*
- Provides continuous beam, with irradiation time resolution of 1 s



Dose rate characterization

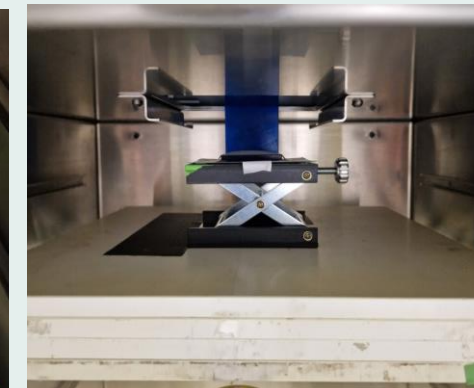
- **Dose rate (DR) variation achieved by changing SDD**
- Using the phantom setup, dose rate was measured at the “pre-set” SDDs
- By ISL, SDD values for higher DR calculated and validated with measurements



SDD	Dose Rate
498 mm	0.1 Gy/s
123 mm	2 Gy/s
79 mm	5 Gy/s
59 mm	10 Gy/s

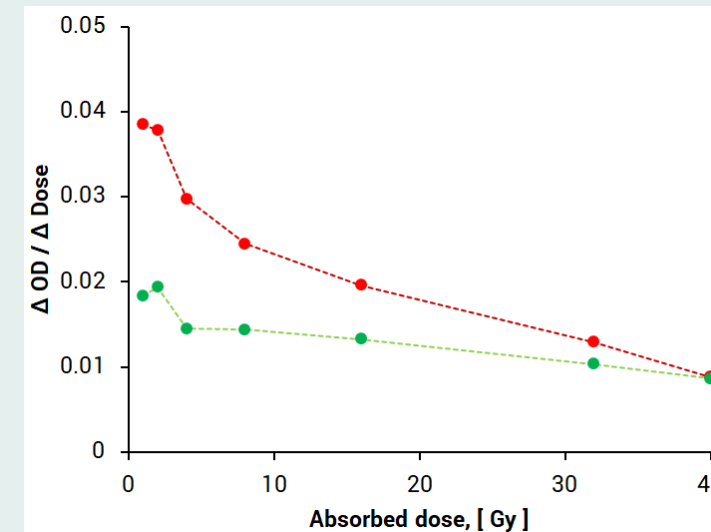
Phantom setup

- *Phantom developed for previous studies used*
- **Material:** 3D printed with water equivalent plastic (*VeroClear*)
- **In beam direction:** 20 mm, 2 mm in front of sample (*limits dose gradient*)
- **Transversal to beam:** 50 x 50 mm, ensuring lateral scattering equilibrium
- **For back-scatter:** phantom placed on 20 mm of RW3 plates (*large SDD*)
- **Position:** center of the beam, small SDDs with lab jack (*Elpida Theodoridou*)



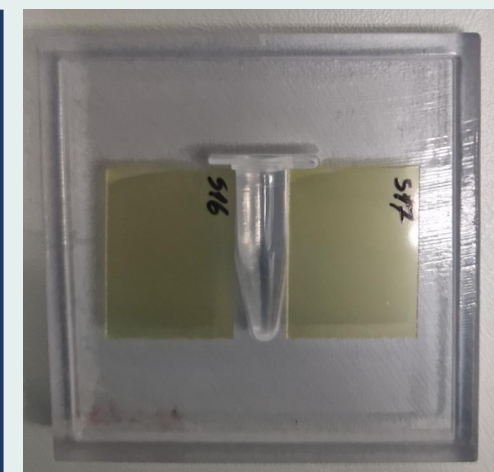
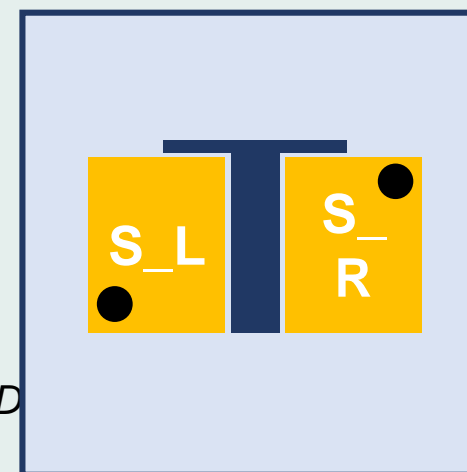
Radiochromic film dosimetry

- **Radiochromic films dosimetry chosen:** phantom setup + spatial information
- **Gafchromic EBT-XD films were used**
- Protocol for use:
 - cut 24 hours before irradiation (*mechanical stress*)
 - pre-scanning before irradiation
 - post-scanning 24 hours after irradiation (*OD growth stabilization*)
- Optical density (OD) readout with **flatbed scanner Epson 10000XL**
 - scan settings: transmission mode, 150 dpi, no corrections, 3-channel TIFF
 - sensitivity measurements performed – **red color channel used for analysis**
 - **ImageJ macro created: 2D OD transformation into dose map**



Dosimetry setup

- **Dosimetry performed for each sample:** positioning setup and output variations
- *Initially: additional measurements of dose distribution (PDD and transversal profiles)*
- **Film size used:** 10 x 20 mm
- **Region of interest (ROI) for analysis:** ~ 2 x 15 mm near sample
- Mean and standard deviation extracted
- **Films on both sides of the sample to account for “heel-effect”** (*especially low SD*)



Concentration measurement

Note: hydrogen peroxide light-sensitive, samples kept in dark after irradiation

Amplex UltraRed assay used:

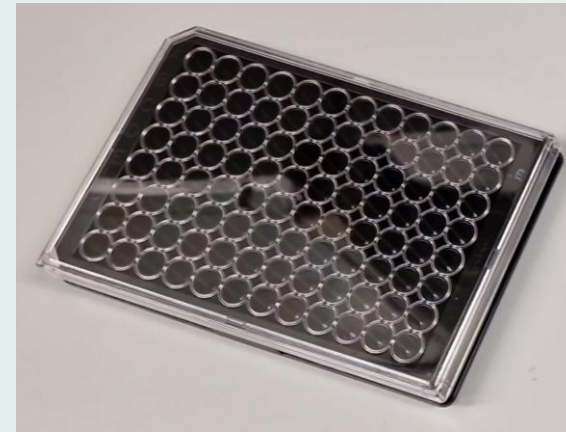
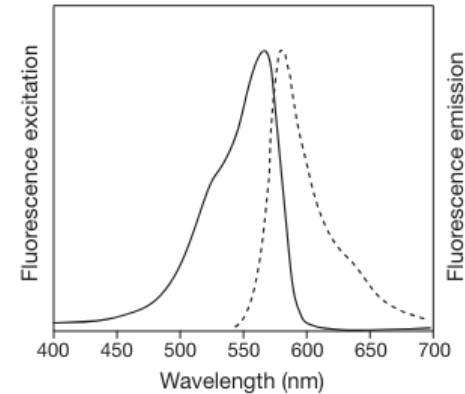
- reagent is mixed with enzyme – horseradish peroxidase (HPR)
- under exposure of hydrogen peroxide – fluorescent compound formed

After irradiation, 50 μL of sample mixed with 50 μL of assay in 96-well plate

After incubation period of 30 minutes, fluorescence readings are done

Calibration curve is established:

- re-done for every session
- hydrogen peroxide water solutions of 0, 1, 3, 5 and 7 μM mixed with assay



Fluorescence readings

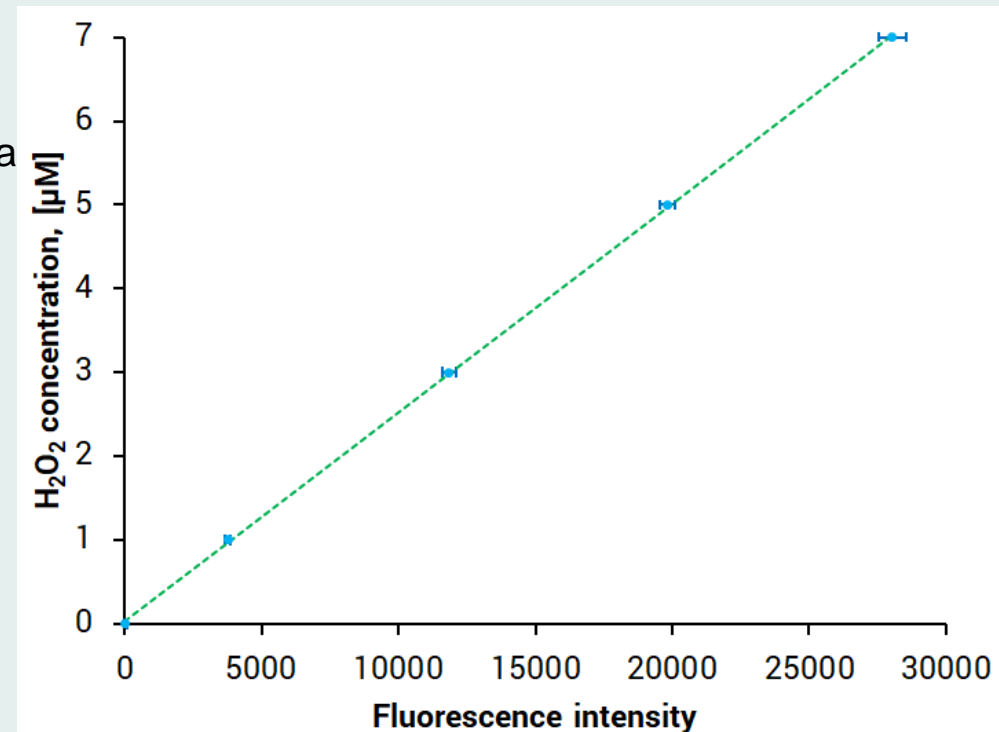
BMG Labtech Clariostar well plate reader used

Readout settings:

- top-read measurement mode
- flashes per well: 4
- excitation wavelength (filter): $530 \pm 15 \text{ nm}$
- emission wavelength (filter): $590 \pm 20 \text{ nm}$

Readings corrected by background measurement

For calibration: linear fit, extracting also fit error



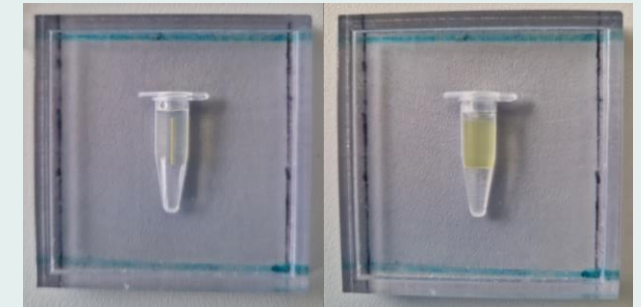
Sources of uncertainty

Radiochromic film calibration function

- uncertainty of radiochromic film measurement arises also from choice of calibration function
- **3 different calibration functions were assessed** (*full error propagation and fitting errors*)

Dose distribution within the sample

- although samples are irradiated radially, there is still a significant dose gradient due to nature of X-rays
 - **miniature radiochromic films were prepared and placed within eppendorf tubes** – axially and transversally
 - **average dose calculated, compared with sample dose measurements**



Finite rise-time of X-ray tube

- X-ray tubes have finite rise time for stable output, important for dose rate at short irradiation times
- **output temporal distribution measured with microDiamond detector and PTW UNIDOS electrometer in «Current» mode (500 ms resolution)**
 - **dose-averaged dose rate calculated**

Measurement statistics

- **3 samples for each condition** (*solution + dose rate*)
- **3 H₂O₂ concentration measurements for each sample**

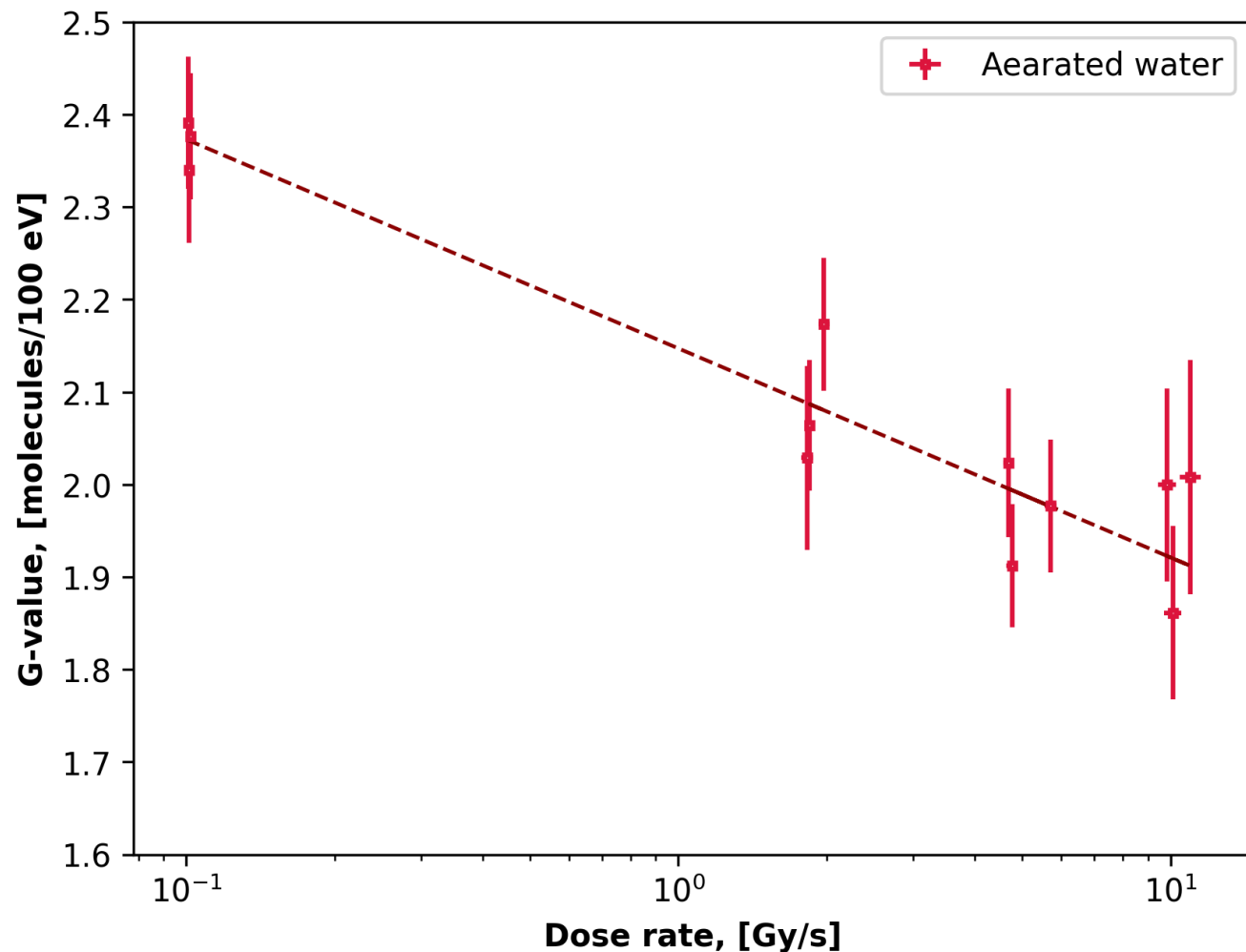
G-value. Error propagation

- Of interest – **H₂O₂ production yield (G-value)**
- Produced concentration / Absorbed dose
- Error propagation based on dose, concentration errors and variability of measurements

Statistical analysis

- Based on approach outlined by Sunnerberg et al. [8]
 - **linear regression between logarithm of dose rate and G-value**
 - To assess the statistical significance of the findings, **t-test for linear regression was performed, with confidence of 95 %**

[8] Sunnerberg JP, Zhang R, Gladstone DJ, Swartz HM, Gui J, Pogue BW. Mean dose rate in ultra-high dose rate electron irradiation is a significant predictor for O₂ consumption and H₂O₂ yield. Phys. Med.



In agreement with previous experiments, **decreased hydrogen peroxide production yield is observed at higher dose rates**, even for the relatively low range studied (0.1 – 10 Gy/s)

Statistical analysis

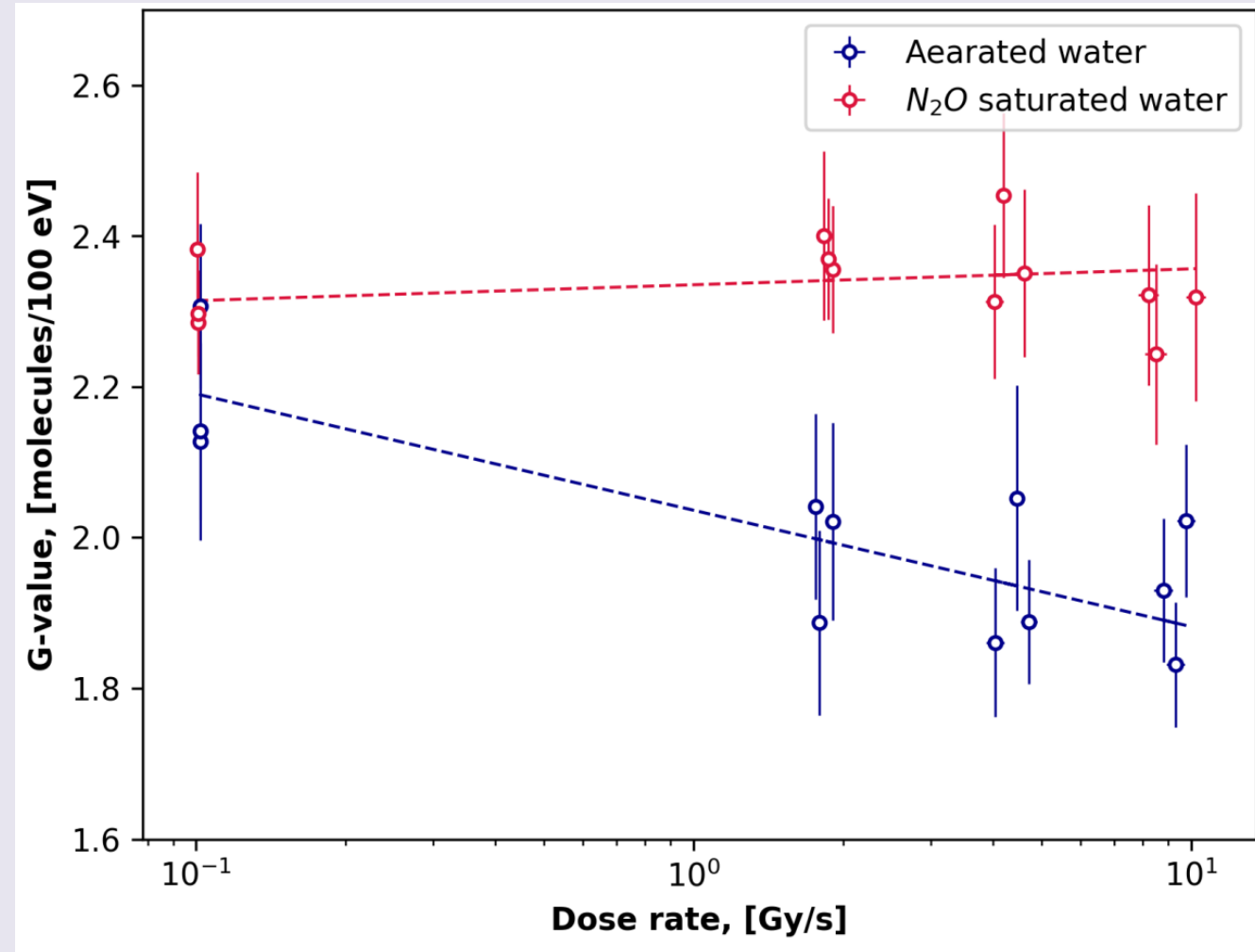
Slope for linear regression of G-value with respect to logarithm of dose rate

$$-0.2260 \pm 0.0297$$

p-value for t-test of linear regression – 0.00002

Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

Results: Nitrous oxide as e_{aq}^- scavenger



Addition of nitrous oxide – a solvated electron scavenger – diminishes the dose rate dependence of hydrogen peroxide production

Statistical analysis

Slope for linear regression of G-value with respect to logarithm of dose rate
 0.0211 ± 0.0334

p-value for t-test of linear regression – 0.5422
Statistically insignificant ($p > 0.05$)

**Addition of solvated electron scavenger – nitrous oxide – has a statistically significant impact on dose rate dependence
DIMINISHING IT**

pH of the solution

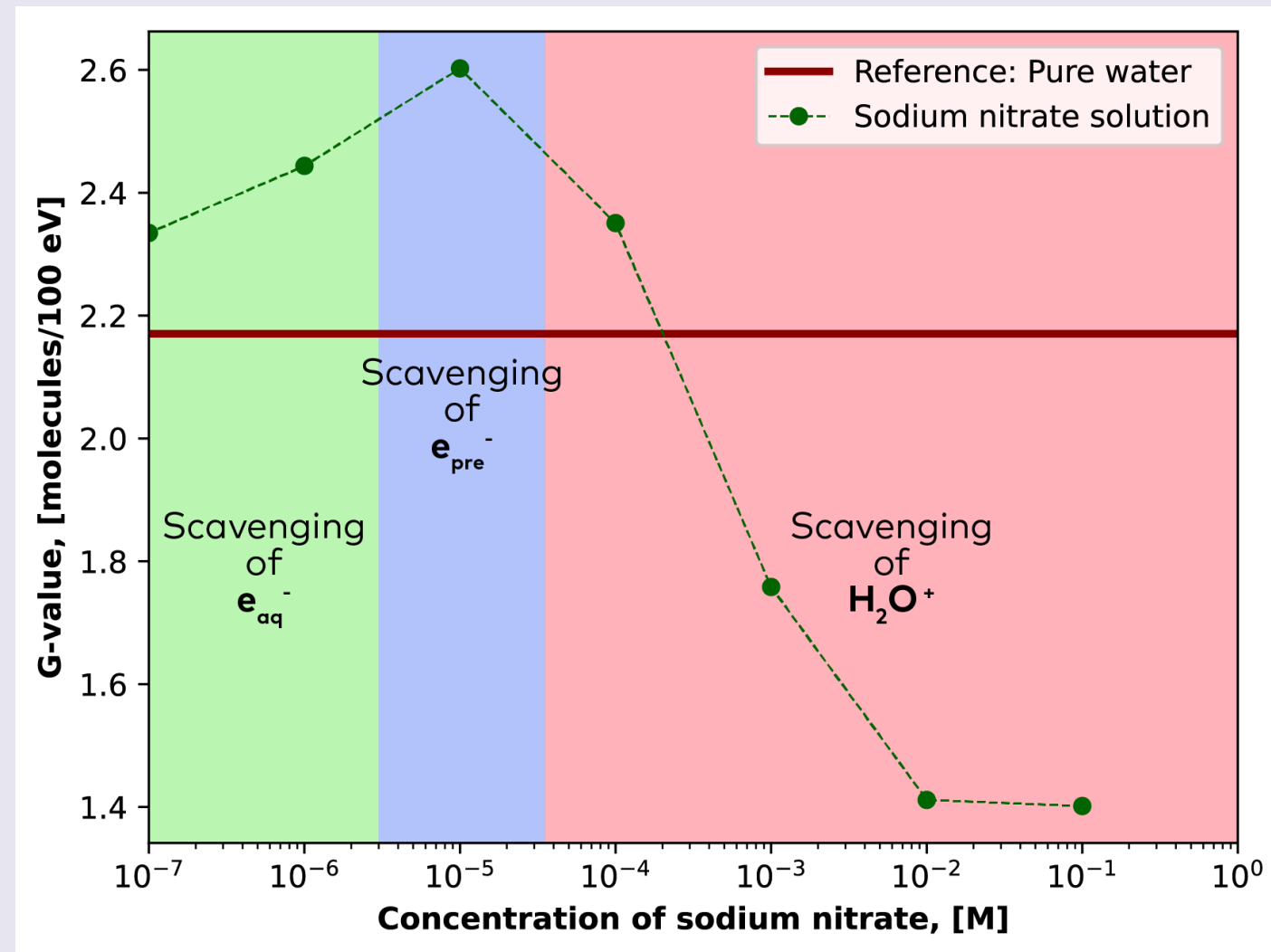
- Sodium nitrate: **neutral salt** (strong base: sodium hydroxide, strong acid: nitric acid)
- Measurements with *Mettler Toledo pH Probe*: **6.5 to 7**

Interaction with assay

- 0, 1 and 3 μM of hydrogen peroxide mixed with 1 M, 100 mM, 10 mM, 1 mM, 100 μM and 10 μM sodium nitrate
- **Solutions were not irradiated, fluorescence measured**
- **No significant differences observed in fluorescence readings: assay is not interacting with sodium nitrate**

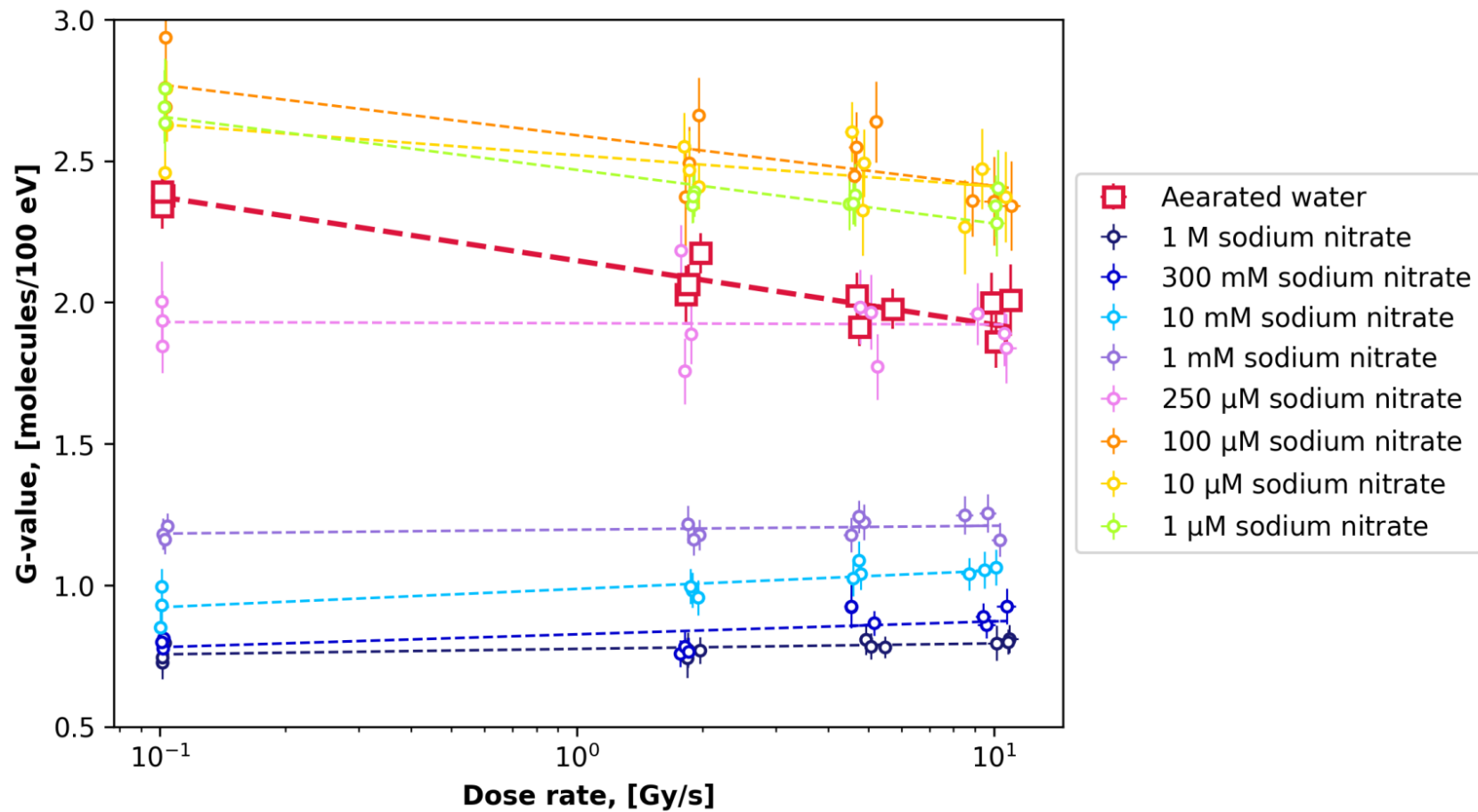
Impact of concentration

- Samples with sodium nitrate concentration from 0.1 μM to 1 M (*steps in magnitude*) irradiated at 2 Gy/s for dose of 11 Gy
- **Low concentrations of sodium nitrate INCREASE production of H_2O_2 relative to water**
- **Concentrations above 100 μM – DECREASE it**
- **By changing the concentration of sodium nitrate, the main scavenged chemical product is changed** [14]



[14] Hiroki A, Pimblott SM, LaVerne JA. Hydrogen Peroxide Production in the Radiolysis of Water with High Radical Scavenger Concentrations. J. Phys. Chem. A 2002; 106(40): 9352–9358.

Results: Sodium nitrate as e_{aq}^- scavenger



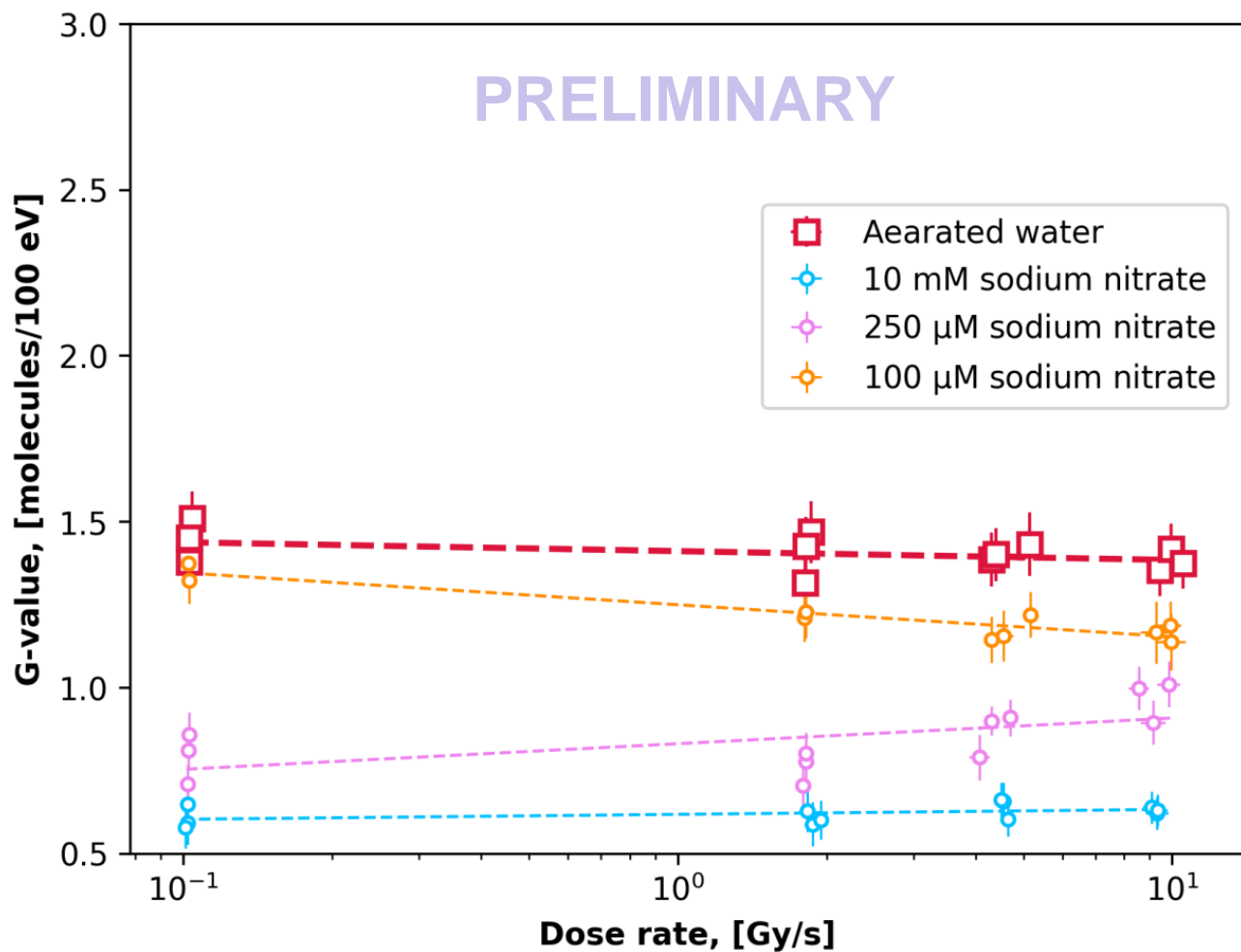
Dose rate dependency of hydrogen peroxide was still observed at low concentration of sodium nitrate (*reduced impact*), while completely diminished at sodium nitrate concentration above 250 μM

Statistical analysis

1 M	0.0194 ± 0.0193	$p = 0.3395$
300 mM	0.0457 ± 0.0182	$p = 0.0313$
10 mM	0.0694 ± 0.0193	$p = 0.0245$
1 mM	0.0139 ± 0.0210	$p = 0.5241$
250 μM	-0.0042 ± 0.0427	$p = 0.9243$
100 μM	-0.1793 ± 0.0403	$p = 0.0012$
10 μM	-0.1099 ± 0.0391	$p = 0.0186$
1 μM	-0.1889 ± 0.0419	$p = 0.0011$

Sodium nitrate concentrations above 250 μM have statistically significant impact, diminishing DR dependency

(increasing production at 10 and 300 mM – not further investigated)



Preliminary: lower oxygen concentration of 4%, no DR dependency was observed both for pure water and sodium nitrated solutions

Statistical analysis

Pure water	-0.0268 ± 0.0298	$p = 0.3903$
Sodium nitrate: 10 mM	0.0149 ± 0.0226	$p = 0.5232$
Sodium nitrate: 250 μM	0.0772 ± 0.0245	$p = 0.0103$
Sodium nitrate: 10 μM	-0.0965 ± 0.0313	$p = 0.0150$

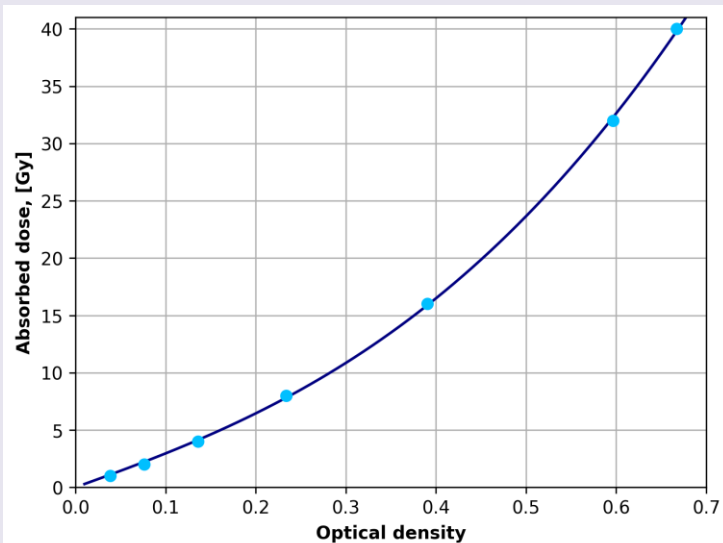
Additional measurements necessary to investigate the impact of oxygen concentration further

Overall measurement errors

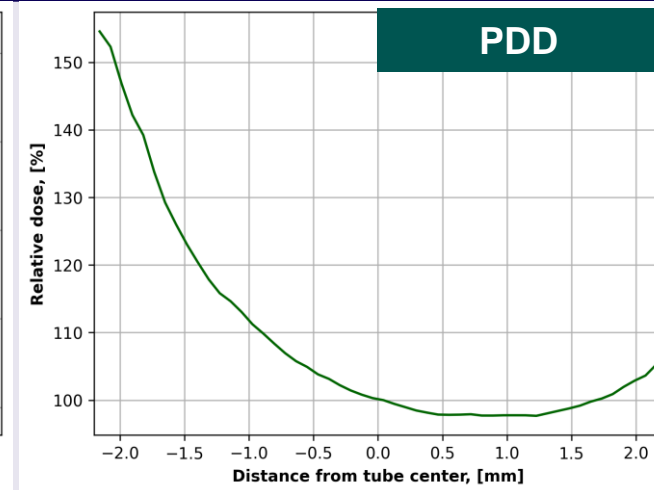
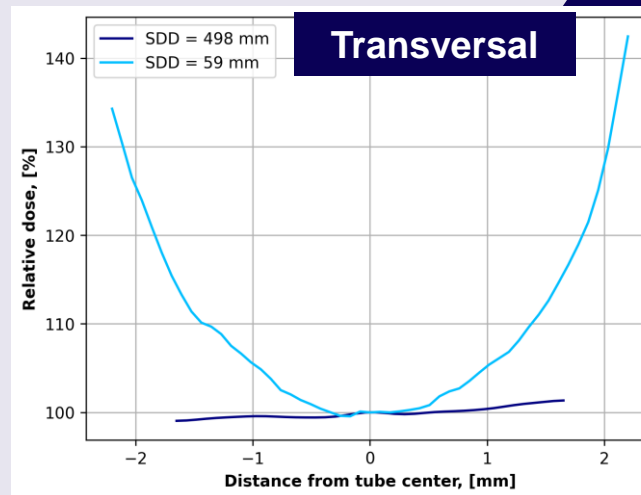
- Dose and dose rate relative error: 1.5 – 2 %
- H₂O₂ concentration relative error: 3 – 6 % (*meas. variability*)
- **Total G-value relative error: 5 – 10 %**

RCF calibration function

- 3 different radiochromic film calibration functions
- **assessed** $Dose = \frac{b}{OD-a} + c$: uncertainty of 8 – 40 % (*manufacturer recommended*)
- $Dose = a * OD + b * OD^n$: uncertainty below 5 %
- $Dose = c * \left(\frac{a-d}{OD-d} - 1\right)^{\frac{1}{b}}$: uncertainty of ~ 15 %
- Chosen based on lowest uncertainty and high accuracy

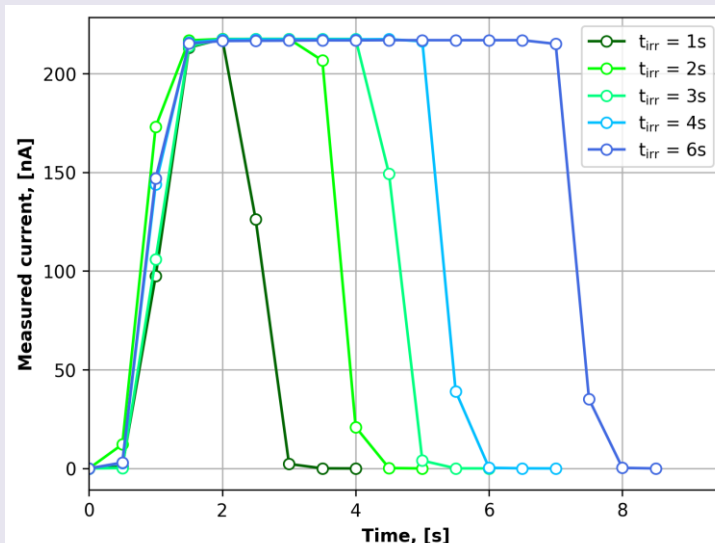


Dose distribution in sample



Transversally: “heel-effect” for small SDD, PDD: exponential depth dose, both: air gaps

By volumetric averaging calculation : delivered dose in PCR is about 6 % higher



Temporal variability of DR

- System indicated time – stable DR
- Finite rise time ~ 1 s
- Finite “fall-off” time ~ 1s

**Effect low for irradiation time > 6 s:
DADR 2% lower than average**

**For 3 s irr. (5 Gy/s): DADR 14% lower
For 2 s irr. (10 Gy/s): DADR 22% lower**

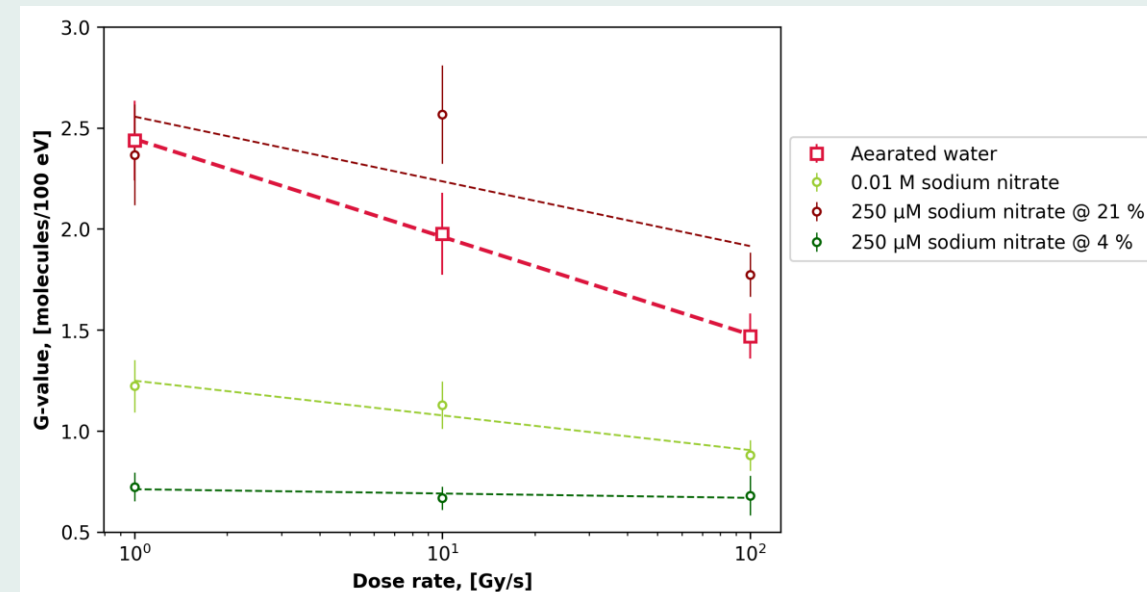
- Study explored hydrogen peroxide production under UHDR with low energy X-ray beam, compared to most studies performed with electron or proton beams.
- In the dose rate range investigated (0.1 – 10 Gy/s), **statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) decrease of hydrogen peroxide in aerated samples was observed at higher dose rates.** This finding is in agreement with previously reported experiments.
- Disrupting water radiolysis chain, **addition of solvated electron scavengers diminishes the dose rate dependency of aerated samples ($p > 0.05$).** Phenomenon was observed with two different systems: **nitrous oxide and sufficiently high concentrations of sodium nitrate.**
- Further investigations are necessary, though initial measurements show no dose rate dependency at 4% oxygen concentration in the 0.1 - 10 Gy/s range studied.
- Radiochemical measurements with X-rays pose a significant challenge due to dose distribution inhomogeneity, thus G-value errors of 5-10 % were observed. Additional systematic errors need to be taken into account due to dose distribution and dose-rate “ramp-up” time.
- **Study clearly indicates the role of solvated electrons (*and/or other products*) in radiochemical changes under UHDR irradiation of *FLASH* therapy. These results justify usage of solvated electrons as possible surrogate parameter in studying various UHDR effects.**

Modelling studies

- Continuation of previous modelling studies regarding scaling of dose threshold aspect of *FLASH* effect for heavy ions
- Experimental measurements with X-rays need to be related to modelling results with heavy ions. **On-going radiochemical interaction simulations under UHDR irradiation, to be expanded towards LET dependency**
- In context of PhD project – usage of radiochemical findings for technological delivery of UHDR beams*

Additional experiments

- Following the developed methodology, additional experiments were performed at **DESY PITZ FlashLab with electrons**
- 18 MeV beam with 10x10 FWHM beam – **challenging and inhomogeneous distribution**
- Average dose rates of 1, 10 and 100 Gy/s studied
- Average dose rate of 100 Gy/s studied with two different pulse dose rates
- Measurement analysis undergoing, **though initial findings suggest same phenomena as observed**





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Thank you for your attention!