Multicenter and international study of MIC/MEC distributions for definition of

- ² epidemiological cutoff values (ECVs) for species of *Sporothrix* identified by molecular
- 3 methods

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Abstract 41

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Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) conditions for testing the 43 susceptibilities of pathogenic Sporothrix species to antifungal agents are based on a 44 collaborative study that evaluated five clinically relevant isolates of Sporothrix schenckii sensu 45 lato and some antifungal agents. With the advent of molecular identification, there are two basic 46 needs: to confirm the suitability of these testing conditions for all agents and Sporothrix species 47 and to establish species-specific epidemiologic cutoff values (ECVs) or breakpoints (BPs) for 48 these species. We collected available CLSI MICs/MECs of amphotericin B, five triazoles, 49 terbinafine, flucytosine and caspofungin for 301 Sporothrix schenckii sensu stricto, 486 S. 50 brasiliensis, 75 S. globosa and 13 S. mexicana molecularly identified isolates. Data were 51 obtained in 17 independent laboratories (Australia, Europe, India, South Africa, South and North 52 America) using conidial inoculum suspensions and 48-72 h of incubation at 35°C. Sufficient and 53 suitable data (modal MICs within 2-fold concentrations) allowed the proposal of the following 54 ECVs for S. schenckii and S. brasiliensis, respectively: amphotericin B 4 and 4 µg/ml, 55 itraconazole 2 and 2 µg/ml; posaconazole 2 and 2 µg/ml; and voriconazole 64 and 32 µg/ml; 56 ketoconazole and terbinafine ECVs for S. brasiliensis were 2 and 0.12 µg/ml, respectively. 57 Insufficient or unsuitable data precluded the calculation of ketoconazole and terbinafine ECVs 58 for S. schenckii as well as ECVs for S. globosa and S. mexicana or any other antifungal agent. 59 These ECVs could aid the clinician in identifying potentially resistant isolates (non-wild type) 60 less likely to respond to therapy. 61

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Introduction 63

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Sporotrichosis is considered a relatively uncommon granulomatous infection of the 65 cutaneous and subcutaneous tissue, although dissemination to other deep-seated organs has 66 been reported (1.2). The first case of sporotrichosis was documented in the United States in the 67

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late 1800s by Benjamin Schenck (3,4). This case was followed by worldwide reports as well as 68 numerous outbreaks (e.g., in the South African mines in the 1920s and 1930s, among children 69 in relatively remote areas of Peru, the Brazilian case clusters, and in the USA (5-8). In addition, 70 several feline outbreaks caused by Sporothrix brasiliensis with transmissions from cat to human 71 to cat have been reported in Brazil (7,8). Most other outbreaks or infections have been 72 associated with traumatic inoculation of vegetative materials and/or soil. Until recently, all cases 73 were attributed to S. schenckii, according to phenotypic identification (macro and microscopic 74 studies, carbohydrate assimilations, and conversion to the yeast phase). The advent of 75 molecular methodologies and the use of internal transcribed spacer (ITS), region sequence 76 analysis of chitin-synthase, ß-tubulin and calmodulin (CAL) genes indicated that there were 77 various cryptic species nested in the medically relevant clade. The taxon was considered as the 78 Sporothrix schenckii species complex (8-12). Therefore, sporotrichosis is caused by different 79 pathogenic species, including the three clinically relevant species evaluated in the present 80 study: S. schenckii sensu stricto (referred from now only as S. schenckii), S. brasiliensis, and S. 81

globosa. We also evaluated one rare species in the environmental clade, *S. mexicana* (10,11).

The recommended therapeutic agents for the treatment of human sporotrichosis are itraconazole, amphotericin B and its lipid formulations (invasive/disseminated disease), terbinafine, and fluconazole; the saturated solution of potassium iodide has been an alternative choice for lymphocutaneous/cutaneous infections (2,13-18). Ketoconazole is not used as much given its low efficacy and potentially severe side effects (13,16). Among the newer triazoles, *in vivo* and *in vitro* activity has been reported with posaconazole in combination with amphotericin

B, while voriconazole has not been considered a therapeutic choice for these infections due to
its high MICs (19,20).

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The Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) has described testing conditions 93 for the "filamentous phase of the S. schenckii species complex", because the initial CLSI 94 collaborative evaluation predated molecular studies, which only included five isolates that were 95 documented as "S. schenckii" (21,22). Therefore, the species of Sporothrix are not mentioned in 96 the CLSI M38-A2 document (21). In addition, interpretive MIC/MEC categories, either formal 97 breakpoints (BPs) or epidemiological cutoff values (ECVs), have not been established for any of 98 Sporothrix species. Method-dependent and species-specific ECVs should identify the non-wild 99 type (non-WT) isolates with reduced susceptibility to the agent being evaluated due to acquired 100 mutational or other resistance mechanisms (23,24). Whilst ECVs would not predict the clinical 101

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success to therapy, these endpoints could identify those isolates less likely to respond to the 102 specific agents. We have collected available MICs/MECs of nine antifungal agents from 17 103 laboratories for molecularly identified isolates of four Sporothrix species. These MIC/MEC 104 values represent the antifungal susceptibility of the two more prevalent species (S. schenckii 105 and S. brasiliensis) as well of those of S. globosa and S. mexicana to the different agents as 106 determined by the CLSI M38-A2 method (21). Although the in vitro data were obtained in 17 107 laboratories, the isolates originated from different geographical areas (Australia, Europe, India, 108 South Africa, and both South and North American countries). 109

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The purpose of the present study was (i) to pool available MIC/MEC data determined by 111 the broth microdilution M38-A2 method originating from 17 independent laboratories for S. 112 schenckii, S. brasiliensis, S. globosa and S. mexicana; (ii) to define the WT susceptibility 113 MIC/MEC distributions of amphotericin B, five triazoles, terbinafine, flucytosine, and 114 caspofungin; (iii) to assess the suitability of these distributions for ECV calculation (including 115 interlaboratory modal agreement); and (iv) to propose CLSI ECVs for two of those species (S. 116 schenckii and S. brasiliensis) when the agent/species combination comprised >100 MICs that 117 originated in 3 to 9 laboratories. MICs of S. globosa and S. mexicana that originated in 3 to 4 118 laboratories were also listed when the distribution comprised at least 10 isolates from >3 119 centers; caspofungin, flucytosine and fluconazole data were summarized in the text. 120

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Results and Discussion

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CLSI BPs, which reliably predict clinical response to therapy, are not available for any 124 filamentous (mould) species including the Sporothrix species. While the establishment of BPs 125 requires, in addition to other parameters, the clinical correlation of both high and low in vitro 126 results with in vivo data, ECVs are based solely on in vitro data obtained in multiple laboratories 127 (24,25). ECVs or BPs are needed in order to identify the potential in vitro resistance to the agent 128 under evaluation. Although the scarcity of clinical data has precluded the establishment of CLSI 129 BPs for mould testing, several ECVs (e.g., for certain species of Aspergillus, Fusarium and the 130 Mucorales) are available (23,24,26,27). ECVs should distinguish the two populations (WT and 131 non-WT) that are present in the MIC/MEC distribution of a species and agent combination. 132 ECVs for S. brasiliensis and some agents were recently reported using data from a single 133

- laboratory (28). However, the definition of ECVs using data from multiple laboratories allows the
- evaluation of modal (more frequent value in each MIC/MEC distribution) compatibility among the

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individual distributions included in the pool (a CLSI requirement) (24). To our knowledge, ECVs 136 have not been defined for any other Sporothrix species; therefore, we collected available MIC/ 137 MEC data for S. schenckii, S. brasiliensis, S. globosa and S. mexicana from 17 laboratories 138 worldwide in order to propose ECVs for several antifungal agents. 139

Another requirement for the definition of ECVs is that the MIC/MEC data must be 141 accompanied by results for at least one of the quality control (QC) or reference strains (23,24). 142 Examination of the results for QC or reference isolates in our study demonstrated that 143 discrepant MICs for the QC and reference strains (21), although uncommon, were obtained in 144 some laboratories as follows: (i) lower amphotericin B, itraconazole and posaconazole MICs 145 than the expected limits for the QC Candida krusei ATCC 6258 strain from one laboratory; (ii) 146 lower amphotericin B and posaconazole MICs for the QC isolate Paecilomyces variotii ATCC 147 MYA-3630 and the reference Aspergillus flavus ATCC 204304 strains, respectively, from 148 another laboratory. As far as we know, MIC limits have not been established for terbinafine and 149 any fungal strain. However, the laboratories that provided terbinafine MICs used as their internal 150 controls some of the QC or reference isolates. Terbinafine MICs ranged from 0.25 to 1 µg/ml 151 and 0.25 to 0.5 µg/ml for both A. fumigatus ATCC MYA-3626 and A. flavus ATCC 204304, 152 respectively. Nevertheless, the MIC ranges for the C. krusei ATCC 6258 (2 to 64 µg/ml) and to 153 certain extent for C. parapsilosis ATCC 22019 (0.01 to 0.5 µg/ml) were wider than the approved 154 ranges for QC or reference isolates (21). These results indicated that both Candida QC strains 155 could be unsuitable as either QC or reference isolates for terbinafine, but future collaborative 156 studies should establish control guidelines for this agent. 157

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Although we received MIC/MEC data from 17 laboratories for the four Sporothrix species 159 evaluated in the present study, distributions for each species/agent combination were not 160 collected from each center. In addition, the following unsuitable distributions were excluded: (i) 161 aberrant (mode at the lowest or highest concentration tested) or distributions where the mode is 162 not obvious (e.g., distributions having two or more modes), (ii) when MICs for the QC isolate(s) 163 were outside the recommended limits, or (iii) the mode of a particular distribution was more than 164 one concentration/dilution than the global mode (23,24). In addition, we only incorporated data 165 obtained by the same and unmodified M38-A2 testing parameters as per responses to the 166 survey sent to each laboratory (described below) as follows: (i) MIC distributions that were 167 obtained using conidial suspensions as the inoculum; (ii) MICs obtained after 48 to 72 h of 168

incubation at 35°C; and (iii) by the standard growth inhibition criteria for each agent. Those are 169

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essentially the M38- A2 testing guidelines for obtaining in vitro data for a variety of non-170 dermatophyte mould species and agents; the exception is terbinafine (only evaluated in 171 multicenter studies for dermatophytes by the CLSI reference method) (21). However, regarding 172 the Sporothrix species, the testing guidelines were based on the multicenter evaluation that 173 included five isolates of S. schenckii sensu lato and four (amphotericin B, fluconazole, 174 itraconazole and ketoconazole) of the nine agents evaluated in the present study (21,22). Since 175 collaborative studies have not been conducted with molecularly identified isolates and QC data 176 are not available for terbinafine, the present collaborative study provides important corroboration 177 about the testing conditions that could yield the most comparable values for six of the nine 178 agents (best interlaboratory modal agreement). These parameters could serve as the basis for 179 further and related studies for evaluating other agents and species, e.g., S. globosa and S. 180 mexicana. 181

The MIC distributions of the four Sporothrix species and six of the nine agents evaluated 183 are depicted in Table 1. The modal MICs ranged between 0.5 and 2 µg/ml for most of the 184 species and agent combinations; the exceptions were the higher voriconazole (8 to 16 µg/ml) 185 and the lower terbinafine modes for S. brasiliensis and S. globosa (0.06 µg/ml). Flucytosine, 186 fluconazole and caspofungin data were also collected for S. schenckii, S. brasiliensis and S. 187 globosa from two to five laboratories. Although most of those distributions were either abnormal 188 or unsuitable for ECV definition, both fluconazole and flucytosine modes were consistently at 189 the upper end of the distribution (>32 µg/ml) for S. brasiliensis and S. schenckii, while 190 caspofungin modes were ~1 µg/ml (data not listed in Table 1). While abundant in vitro data are 191 found in the literature in addition to those summarized in Table 1, these studies (i) predated the 192 advent of molecular identification, (ii) reported MIC/MEC data mostly for S. schenckii and S. 193 brasiliensis, and (iii) MICs were obtained for either the yeast or filamentous phase or by 194 modified versions of the CLSI reference method (e.g., supplemented RPMI broth [2%], 30°C 195 incubation, longer incubation times) (29-32). Although some MIC ranges in Table 1 were wider 196 than those in prior studies, owing perhaps to the larger number of isolates (e.g., \geq 200 versus < 197 100) and different testing conditions, the antifungal susceptibility trend of those species to the 198 various agents is similar. When MICs that were obtained using both the yeast and conidial 199 phases of S. schenckii were compared, the yeast phase yielded lower amphotericin B and 200 itraconazole MICs, while terbinafine MICs were similar or the same (30). There was a need to 201 ascertain which testing conditions yield the most reproducible results. Our collaborative study 202

- provides such corroboration at least for the two more prevalent species and clinically relevant

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<u>Antimicrobial Agents and</u> nemotherapy therapeutic agents. In addition, our results suggest that the incubation time for S. globosa needs to be longer and that further evaluation is needed for S. mexicana, among other species.

Table 2 summarizes MIC ranges, modes and more importantly our proposed ECVs for 207 the species and agents with sufficient data to fulfill the current criteria (> 100 MICs of each 208 agent and species obtained in \geq 3 independent laboratories) for establishing method-and 209 species-dependent ECVs by the iterative statistical method (23,24). The CLSI has selected the 210 97.5% over the 95% ECVs, both values were calculated and documented. As expected, the 211 highest ECVs were for voriconazole versus S. schenckii and S. brasiliensis (64 and 32 µg/ml, 212 respectively) and the lowest value for terbinafine and S. brasiliensis (0.12 µg/ml). Sufficient and 213 suitable terbinafine MIC data were not available to calculate the terbinafine ECV for S. schenckii 214 according to the current criteria; this species/agent combination needs to be further evaluated. 215 We are also proposing ECVs of 4 µg/ml for amphotericin B and ECVs of 2 µg/ml for three 216 triazoles and both S. schenckii and S. brasiliensis. The high ECVs for these two species (e.g., 217 amphotericin B and voriconazole ECVs above expected and achievable serum levels) indicate 218 their resistant nature, as was the case for certain species among the Mucorales and Fusarium 219 spp. (26,27). Although the ECV is not a predictor of clinical response to therapy, the high values 220 suggest that isolates of these species could be unresponsive to therapy with these agents. On 221 the other hand, categorization of an isolate as WT does not necessarily signify that it is 222 susceptible to or treatable by the agent under evaluation. 223

Unfortunately, among the moulds, genetic information concerning the mechanisms of 225 resistance is mostly available for A. fumigatus and the triazoles. To our knowledge that is not 226 the case for the clinically relevant Sporothrix species. In addition, limited data have been 227 documented regarding the possible correlation between MICs for the Sporothrix infective isolate 228 and the outcome of therapy with the specific agent, including amphotericin B, itraconazole or 229 terbinafine (17,33). In one of those two studies, five patients who responded to oral itraconazole 230 (pulse, 400 mg/day one week with a three week break) for lymphangitic and fixed cutaneous 231 sporotrichosis, the itraconazole MICs for 4 of the 5 infecting S. schenckii isolates were either 232 0.25 or 0.5 µg/ml (17). Those itraconazole MICs were below our proposed ECV of 2 µg/ml for 233 this species and those strains could be considered WT strains (Table 2). In the other report, 234 seven patients with various and persistent S. brasiliensis infections (including disseminated 235 disease) were treated for \geq 13 weeks as follows: itraconazole 100 mg (3 patients), terbinafine 236 200 mg (3 patients) and amphotericin B, followed by 800 mg of posaconazole (1 HIV-infected 237

patient) (33). MICs for the serial infective isolates and the clinical response to therapy were as 238 follows: itraconazole 1 or 2 µg/ml (patients cured/infection free); terbinafine between 0.03 and 239 0.12 µg/ml (1 of 3 patients cured); posaconazole 1 µg/ml and amphotericin B between 2 and 4 240 µg/ml (patient died). Our proposed ECVs for S. brasiliensis and those four agents were: 2, 0.12, 241 2 and 4 µg/ml, respectively, and thus, those infecting isolates also could be considered WT 242 (Table 2). However, other factors related to the patient immune response or the use of adjuvant 243 treatments (cryosurgery/curettage) could interfere with meaningful in vitro versus in vivo 244 correlations. On the other hand, the combination of posaconazole and amphotericin B was 245 effective in murine models of disseminated disease caused by S. schenckii or S. brasiliensis 246 (34). The infective isolates for the murine model were WT according to our proposed ECVs. 247 Furthermore, the role of the ECV is not to predict therapeutic outcome, but to identify the non-248 WT strains that could be less likely to respond to therapy. 249

In conclusion, the main role of the ECV is to distinguish between WT and non-WT 251 isolates and aid the clinician in identifying the non-WT isolates that are potentially refractory to 252 therapy with the agent evaluated. This is important when BPs are not available for the 253 species/agent being evaluated, which is the case for the Sporothrix species. Based on CLSI 254 MICs from multiple laboratories, we are proposing the following species-specific CLSI ECVs for 255 S. schenckii and S. brasiliensis, respectively: amphotericin B, 4 and 4 µg/ml; itraconazole, 2 and 256 2 µg/ml; posaconazole, 2 and 2 µg/ml; and voriconazole, 64 and 32 µg/ml. Our proposed 257 ketoconazole and terbinafine ECVs for S. brasiliensis are 2 and 0.12 µg/ml, respectively. 258 Insufficient data precluded the calculation of ketoconazole and terbinafine ECVs for S. 259 schenckii, as well as ECVs for S. globosa and S. mexicana versus any antifungal agent. More 260 importantly, we have corroborated that the susceptibility testing conditions described in the CLSI 261 M38-A2 document could yield the most reliable or reproducible results for the two most 262 prevalent species, which were based on our examination of modes from multiple laboratories. 263

265 Materials and methods

Isolates. The isolates evaluated were recovered from clinical specimens (mostly
lymphocutaneous, cutaneous [including disseminated disease] or subcutaneous lesions [>90%])
and to a lesser extent pulmonary lesions or other disseminated infections. In addition, we
received *S. brasiliensis* isolates (cutaneous lesions) of feline origin from 4 of the 17 laboratories.
MIC/MEC data for each agent were determined in each of the following centers: VCU Medical

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Although data were received from 17 independent laboratories (coded 1 to 17), some 289 MIC distributions were excluded from the study for previously discussed reasons. The isolates 290 were identified using phenotypic and genetic approaches (e.g., temperature and nutritional 291 tests, yeast conversion, species specific PCR and PCR-RFLP calmodulin and ß-tubulin 292 sequencing) (10-12,35). The MIC data used for ECV definition were as follows: 301 S. schenckii 293 and 486 S. brasiliensis isolates. Among the 486 isolates of S. brasiliensis, 261 were isolated 294 from cats. In addition, MIC/MEC data were collected for 75 S. globosa and 13 S. mexicana, 295 respectively. At least one of the QC isolates (C. parapsilosis ATCC 22019, C. krusei ATCC 296 6258, or P. variotii ATCC MYA-3630) was evaluated by the participant laboratories during 297 testing; some laboratories also evaluated the reference isolates A. flavus ATCC 204304 or A. 298 fumigatus ATCC MYA-3626. MICs were only pooled or used for the calculation of ECVs when 299 MICs for the QC or reference isolates were consistently within the established MIC limits as 300 approved by the CLSI (21). 301

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In vitro susceptibility testing. MIC data for each isolate in the set that was included for
analysis or depicted in Tables 1 and 2 were obtained at each center according to the CLSI M38 A2 broth microdilution method (21) (standard RPMI 1640 broth [0.2% dextrose], final conidial

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suspensions that ranged from 0.4x10⁴ to 5x10⁴ CFU/mI and an incubation at 35°C between 48 306 to 72 h (S. schenckii, S. brasiliensis, and S. mexicana) or >72 h for S. globosa. MICs were the 307 lowest drug concentrations that produced either complete growth inhibition (100%: amphotericin 308 B, itraconazole, posaconazole and voriconazole) or partial growth inhibition as follows: 309 (terbinafine [80%], fluconazole, ketoconazole and flucytosine [50%]), or morphological changes 310 (caspofungin MECs). 311 312

Data analysis. Data were analyzed by the iterative statistical analysis as previously 313 described in various ECV reports (24-27). MIC/MEC distributions of each species received from 314 each center were listed in electronic spreadsheets. Individual distributions were not included in 315 the final analysis when (i) the distribution had a modal MIC at the lowest or highest 316 concentration tested or were bimodal or when (ii) unusual modal variation (modes that were 317 more than one dilution/concentration from the global mode) (24). Data for each species and 318 agent were only included for the final calculation of ECVs when the total pooled distribution had 319 >100 isolates and originated from at least three laboratories (Tables 1 and 2). 320

321

Surveys. To ascertain that the collected in vitro susceptibility data in our study were 322 developed following the same testing conditions as described in the CLSI M38-A2 document 323 (21), a survey was sent to the 17 participant laboratories requesting the following information: (i) 324 the source of the agents used; (ii) the formulation of the RPMI medium as described in the CLSI 325 document; (iii) the cells (conidia versus yeasts) and count used to prepare the inoculum 326 suspensions; and (iv) the growth inhibition criteria to determine MICs/MECs for each agent 327 (including incubation temperature and length, and percentage of growth inhibition). The 328 laboratories were also requested to provide MIC/MEC data for at least one of the QC or 329 reference isolates (21). 330

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Acknowledgments

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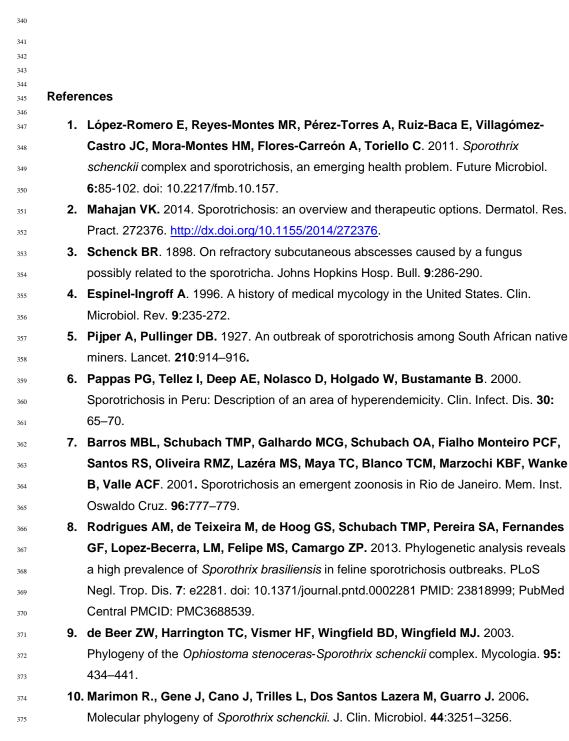
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8	Table 1. Pooled MIC distributions of four Sporothrix species from between 2 and 9 laboratories determined by CLSI M38-A2 broth microdilution method

Agent	Species*	No. labs	No. isolates				No.	of isolate	es with MI	ЛIС (µg/ml) of ^a				
				<u><</u> 0.03	0.06	0.12	0.25	0.5	1	2	4	8	16	<u>></u> 32
Amphotericin	S. schenckii*	9	263	2		5	9	29	100	78	33	3	1	3
В	S. brasiliensis	9	486	6		10	64	112	175	100	15	4		
	S. globosa	4	75			3	5	8	19	29	6	3		2
	S. mexicana	ID												
Itraconazole	S. schenckii*	8	194		4	5	22	71	56	17	9	3	2	5
	S. brasiliensis	8	306	2	2	12	19	60	146	38	6		5	16
	S. globosa	4	53			5	10	17	10	9	1		1	
	S. mexicana	3	13				3	4	2	1				3
Ketoconazole	S. schenckii*	2	92		1	11	12	32	17	16	3			
	S. brasiliensis	5	338	6	13	45	64	126	71	13				
	S. globosa	ID												
	S. mexicana	ID												
Posaconazole	S. schenckii*	8	301		1	10	15	67	114	55	13	14	8	4
	S. brasiliensis	5	200	2	1	6	13	32	128	14	1			3
	S. globosa	3	59				12	25	12	5	1		2	3 2
	S. mexicana	ID												
Voriconazole	S. schenckii*	6	252					3	1	6	17	42	108	75
	S. brasiliensis	7	200					1	9	17	32	79	56	6
	S. globosa	3	41						2	5	10	14	9	1
	S. mexicana	3	11						2	1	2	4	2	
Terbinafine	S. schenckii*	2	118	2	18	23	26	43	6					
	S. brasiliensis	3	368	131	151	75	7	2	2					
	S. globosa	3	35	5	16	6	3	4	1					
	S. mexicana	ID												

^aThe highest number in each row (showing the most frequently obtained MIC or the mode) is indicated in boldface. *It refers to *Sporothrix schenckii sensu stricto*. ID: insufficient data with comparable mod

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Table 2. CLSI-ECVs for S. schenckii sensu stricto and S. brasiliensis based on MICs from between 3 and 9 laboratories by the CLSI broth 486

microdilution method 487

			MIC (µg/ml) ^a		ECV⁵	
Species	Antifungal agent	No. of isolates tested	Range	Mode	≥ 95 %	≥97.5 %
S. schenckii	Amphotericin B	263	0.03-32	1	4	4
	Itraconazole	194	0.06- <u>></u> 32	0.5	2	2
	Ketoconazole	ND°				
	Posaconazole	301	0.06-16	1	2	4
	Voriconazole	252	0.5->32	16	64	64
	Terbinafine	ND °				
S. brasiliensis	Amphotericin B	486	0.03-8	1	4	4
	Itraconazole	306	0.01-32	1	2	2
	Ketoconazole	338	0.01-2	0.5	2	2
	Posaconazole	200	0.01-4	1	2	2
	Voriconazole	200	0.5-32	8	32	32
	Terbinafine	368	<0.01-1	0.06	0.12	0.25

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^a Mode, most frequent MIC. ^bCalculated CLSI ECVs comprising ≥95 % and ≥ 97.5 % of the statistically modeled population; values based on MICs determined by the

489 490 CLSI M38-A2 broth dilution method (21).

491 ^cND, Not determined, due to insufficient number of isolates or laboratories for ECV calculation. 492