

Gene variation common in South Asians found to double risk of dying from COVID

Scientists identified a specific gene that doubles the risk of respiratory failure from Covid-19 and may go some way to explaining why some ethnic groups are more susceptible to severe disease than others.

Researchers from the [University of Oxford](#) found that a higher-risk version of the gene most likely prevents the cells lining airways and the lungs from responding to the virus properly. About 60% of people with South Asian ancestry carry this version of the gene, compared with 15% of people with European heritage, according to the [study](#) published [November 4].

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The findings help explain why higher rates of hospitalization and death may have been seen in certain communities and on the Indian subcontinent. The authors cautioned that the gene cannot be used as a sole explanation as many other factors, such as socioeconomic conditions, play a role. Despite a significant impact from the virus to people with Afro-Caribbean ancestry, only 2% carry the higher-risk genotype.

People with the gene, known as LZTFL1, would particularly benefit from vaccination, which remains the best method of protection, the authors said. The findings raise the possibility of research into treatments specific to patients with this gene, though no tailored drugs are currently available.

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