

NEWS

# Autism comorbidities reflect racial, ethnic disparities

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19 JANUARY 2022

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Black, Hispanic/Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander autistic people in the United States have **higher odds of having co-occurring health conditions**, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease or hypertension, compared with white autistic people, according to a new study.

The same disparities exist in the general population and are likely linked to multiple factors, including a lack of access to healthcare, exposure to poorer air quality and systemic discrimination toward these racial and ethnic groups, says lead investigator **Whitney Schott**, research scientist at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Genetic differences may also play a role, the study notes.

Schott and her colleagues analyzed the prevalence of health conditions listed in insurance claims data for more than 155,000 autistic and 466,000 non-autistic adults in the U.S. who were covered by Medicaid — a government-funded healthcare program — between 2008 and 2012. They matched the autistic and non-autistic participants for age, sex, race and ethnicity, and controlled for differences in intellectual ability.

The prevalence of infections, cardiovascular disease and cancer was similar between autistic and non-autistic people overall, the researchers found. But people with autism had higher odds of having several different kinds of psychiatric conditions, including obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and anxiety.

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