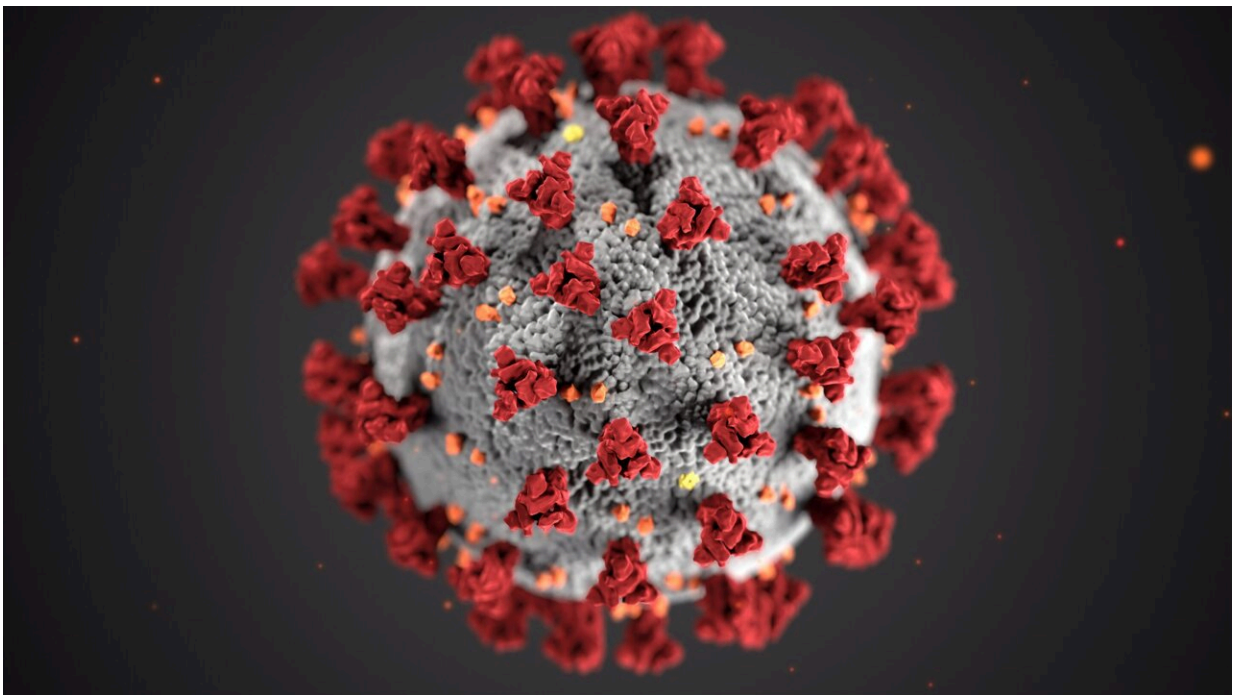


Can a drug used to treat liver disease help prevent SARS-CoV-2 infections and lessen COVID-19 severity?

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SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, attaches to a cellular receptor called angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2), and activation of the farnesoid X receptor increases ACE2 expression. New research published in the *Journal of Internal Medicine* suggests that a drug that

inhibits the farnesoid X receptor and is used to treat liver disease may decrease SARS-CoV-2 infections and reduce the severity of COVID-19.

The study ran from March 2020 to February 2022 and included 3,214 patients with [liver disease](#), half of whom were taking the drug, called ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA). Patients taking UDCA had 46% lower odds of being infected with SARS-CoV-2. Among patients who developed COVID-19, UDCA use was associated with 46% reduced odds of having symptomatic COVID-19, 49% lower odds of having moderate COVID-19, and 52% lower odds of having severe or critical COVID-19.

"Although our findings are hypothesis generating and supplement data in experimental animal and human models, no recommendations on UDCA use in either the prevention or treatment of COVID-19 can be made in the absence of prospective randomized controlled trials," the authors wrote.

More information: Ursodeoxycholic acid is associated with a reduction in SARS-CoV-2 infection and reduced severity of COVID-19 in patients with cirrhosis, *Journal of Internal Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/joim.13630](https://doi.org/10.1111/joim.13630)

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