

Exploring the reasons behind Kenya's low COVID-19 infection and death rates

13 November 2020, by Bob Yirka



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A team of researchers from institutions in the U.K. and Kenya has been conducting research to explain Kenya's comparatively low COVID-19 infection and death rates. In their paper published in the journal *Science*, the group describes analyzing blood from donors in Kenya for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies as a means to estimate infection rates in that country.

As the world continues to grapple with the global pandemic, Africa has begun to stand out from other regions. Infection rates and deaths from COVID-19 have remained much lower across the continent (except South Africa) than in most of the rest of the world. Thus far, little work has addressed why African [infection rates](#) have been lower, but some experts in the field suggest it is

likely due to demographics—the average age of people across Africa is much lower than in other parts of the world. Others suggest it might simply be a matter of less accurate reporting of infections and deaths. In this new effort, the researchers sought to discover which explanation is more likely. To that end, they conducted a study of donated blood in Kenya—a country in Africa that, like the rest of the continent, has not seen the sky-high [infection](#) and deaths rates found in other parts of the world.

The work involved analyzing [blood samples](#) collected from donors across the country over the months April to June. Each sample was tested for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies—a sign that the person who had donated the blood had experienced a COVID-19 infection.

The researchers found that approximately 4.3 percent of the donor samples had SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, which, the researchers suggest, indicates that approximately the same percent of the population had been infected—a very high number compared to the number of deaths reported for the same period: roughly 341. They note that during the same [time period](#), Spain had roughly the same percentage of infections but experienced 28,000 deaths.

The researchers were not able to explain why [death rates](#) from COVID-19 infections appeared to be lower in Kenya than in other parts of the world, but suggest it might be due to the low average age of people living there. However, they also acknowledge that they might have seen higher-than-average infection rates in their study because people in Kenya who are willing to donate blood might also be more likely to have been infected. They also suggest the possibility that people in Kenya might simply have more natural resistance to such infections.

More information: Sophie Uyoga et al. Seroprevalence of anti-SARS-CoV-2 IgG

antibodies in Kenyan blood donors, *Science* (2020).

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