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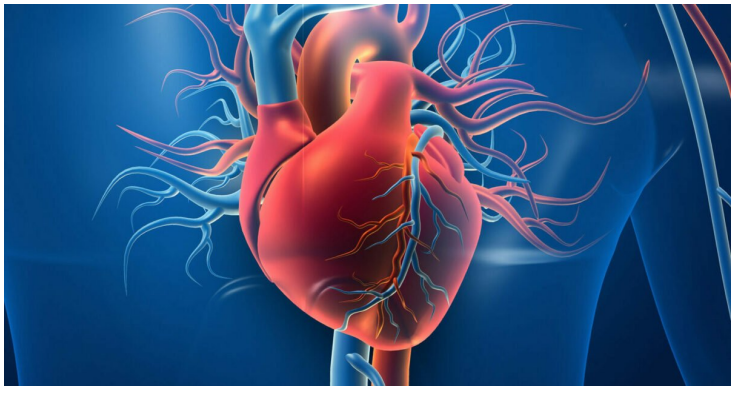
Hidden genetic threat putting 1 in 4 at cardiovascular disease risk in India: Novartis study

24 September 2025 | News

Elevated lipoprotein(a) or Lp(a), an inherited condition that raises CVD risk, affects 1 in 4 people in India but is rarely tested



Cardiovascular disease (CVD) claims nearly 18 million lives worldwide each year, with India accounting for roughly one-fifth of these deaths— more than all cancers combined — yet one of its critical genetic risk factors remains largely invisible. It is estimated that approximately 25% of the Indian population has elevated lipoprotein(a), or Lp(a), but is rarely tested and often overlooked in heart health strategies.

Ahead of World Heart Day (29 September), Global Heart Hub and Novartis convened international healthcare experts for the educational media webinar "*Introducing the Little (a) with Big Consequences,*" to spotlight elevated Lp(a) as a critical, underrecognized inherited condition that independently increases risk of cardiovascular disease such as heart attack or stroke.

In the Asia Pacific and Middle East region, two in three individuals (66%) skip routine heart tests, while nearly half (45%) do not recognize genetics as a risk factor of heart disease, according to the results of a recent survey commissioned by Novartis. Awareness of Lp(a) is even lower, with just 22% of respondents reporting they had heard of a test for the biomarker, while only 7% had taken it.

"Cardiovascular disease remains one of the leading causes of death in India, and awareness of risk factors such as elevated Lp(a) is critical," said Dr A. Sreenivas Kumar, Director, Cardiology, Apollo Hospitals, India. "South Asians are particularly vulnerable — in fact, 34% of Indian acute coronary syndrome patients have high Lp(a). When combined with common risk factors such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension, the likelihood of heart attack or stroke increases dramatically. Lp(a) testing is essential to identify high-risk individuals early and help prevent avoidable cardiac events."

The webinar concluded with a unified call to action to expand Lp(a) testing across the Asia Pacific and Middle East region, embed diagnosis and management of elevated Lp(a) into health systems with supportive policies.