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4 Title

5 Genetic associations and architecture of asthma-chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
6 overlap

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8 Genome-wide association study of asthma-COPD overlap

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122

123 Abstract

124 **Background** Some individuals have characteristics of both asthma and chronic obstructive
125 pulmonary disease (asthma-COPD overlap), and evidence suggests they experience worse
126 outcomes than those with either condition alone.

127 **Research Question** What is the genetic architecture of asthma-COPD overlap, and do the
128 determinants of risk for asthma-COPD overlap differ from those for COPD or asthma?

129 **Study Design and Methods** We conducted a genome-wide association study in 8,068
130 asthma-COPD overlap cases and 40,360 controls without asthma or COPD of European
131 ancestry in UK Biobank (Stage 1). We followed up promising signals which had $p < 5 \times 10^{-6}$, and
132 that remained associated in analyses comparing: i) asthma-COPD overlap vs asthma-only
133 controls, and ii) asthma-COPD overlap versus COPD-only controls). These variants were
134 analysed in 12 independent cohorts (Stage 2).

135 **Results** We selected 31 independent variants for further investigation in stage 2, and
136 discovered eight novel signals ($P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) for asthma-COPD overlap (meta-analysis of Stage 1
137 and 2 studies). These signals suggest a spectrum of shared genetic influences, some
138 predominantly influencing asthma (*FAM105A*, *GLB1*, *PHB*, *TSLP*), others predominantly
139 influencing fixed airflow obstruction (*IL17RD*, *C5orf56*, *HLA-DQB1*). One intergenic signal on
140 chromosome 5 had not been previously associated with asthma, COPD or lung function.
141 Subgroup analyses suggested that associations at these eight signals were not driven by
142 smoking or age at asthma diagnosis, and in phenome-wide scans, eosinophil counts, atopy
143 and asthma traits were prominent.

144 **Interpretation** We identified eight signals for asthma-COPD overlap, which may represent
145 loci that predispose to type 2 inflammation, and serious long-term consequences of asthma.

146 Key words

147 epidemiology; genome-wide association study; asthma; chronic obstructive pulmonary
148 disease; spirometry

149 Abbreviations

150 95% CI 95% confidence interval; ACO asthma-COPD overlap; COPD chronic obstructive
151 pulmonary disease; eQTL expression quantitative trait locus; FEV₁ forced expiratory volume

152 in 1 second; FVC forced vital capacity; FDR false discovery rate; GWAS genome-wide
153 association study; HLA Human leukocyte antigen; LDSC Linkage disequilibrium score
154 regression; MHC Major histocompatibility complex; MAF Minor allele frequency; OR odds
155 ratio; SNP single-nucleotide polymorphism

156 Asthma and COPD have substantial global impacts.¹ They are heterogeneous conditions²⁻⁴
157 that share some common features, including airflow obstruction with differing degrees of
158 reversibility. Inflammatory processes are important in both conditions, and cytokine profiles
159 identify both distinct and overlapping groups of patients.⁵ Individuals with characteristics of
160 both conditions have until recently been referred to as having “asthma-COPD overlap”
161 (ACO),⁴ and a number of studies have suggested that such patients have significantly worse
162 outcomes than those with either condition alone.⁶⁻¹³ Recent guidelines emphasize that
163 asthma and COPD are different conditions, but may coexist in the same patient.¹⁴
164 Individuals with features of both diseases risk being excluded from research that might
165 provide evidence about the most effective treatment strategies.³

166 Environmental risk factors – notably smoking in COPD – are central, but genetics also plays
167 an important role in both asthma and COPD,¹⁵⁻¹⁷ and it has long been hypothesized that
168 there may be a shared, underlying genetic predisposition to both diseases.^{2,18} Genome-wide
169 association studies (GWAS) examine variants across the genome in an unbiased manner, to
170 identify variant-trait associations that inform understanding of disease biology and potential
171 treatment strategies. GWAS have identified many loci associated with asthma or COPD in
172 European populations (**e-Appendix**). The genetic correlation (r_g) between asthma and COPD
173 is 0.38 ($p=6.2 \times 10^{-5}$), suggesting shared genetic aetiology.¹⁹ A GWAS of ACO compared to
174 COPD alone ($n=3570$) did not identify any variants associated at the conventional
175 threshold,⁸ and a meta-analysis of an asthma and COPD GWAS found one association,
176 driven by COPD.²⁰ Eighteen loci outside the HLA (human leucocyte antigen) region have
177 been identified as associated with both asthma and lung function/COPD at $p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$, but
178 have not been specifically described as ACO loci.

179 Notwithstanding the controversies of changing terminology for individuals with both asthma
180 and COPD, we refer to this case status as “ACO”. Improved knowledge of genetic variants
181 associated with co-existing asthma and COPD would contribute to understanding of
182 underlying molecular pathways, and potentially inform diagnostic terminology and specific
183 management strategies for those with co-existing asthma and COPD.

184 Accordingly, using spirometry, self-report and electronic healthcare record (EHR) data to
185 define cases with both asthma and COPD (ACO) and suitable controls, we undertook the

186 largest GWAS of coexisting asthma and COPD to date, including up to 12,369 cases and
187 88,969 controls, in a two-stage design incorporating 13 studies.

188 Study Design and Methods

189 Stage 1

190 The data source for this study was UK Biobank (<http://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk>).²¹ Eligibility
191 criteria, genotyping and quality control are described in the e-Appendix. 321,057 individuals
192 and 37 million single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) were included.

193 We defined cases of ACO if they had self-reported asthma (see **e-Appendix**) AND FEV_1/FVC
194 <0.7 with GOLD 2+ airflow limitation ($FEV_1 <80\%$ predicted). Cases who reported alpha-1-
195 antitrypsin deficiency were excluded. Controls reported no asthma or COPD (**e-Appendix**),
196 and had $FEV_1 \geq 80\%$ predicted and $FEV_1/FVC >0.7$. Five controls were randomly selected for
197 each case. Cases and controls were unrelated (second degree or closer). Two additional
198 control sets were defined for signal prioritisation: individuals with asthma but without
199 COPD, and individuals with COPD but without asthma. Asthma and COPD were defined as
200 above.

201 Association testing was undertaken in SNPTEST ('score' option)
202 (https://mathgen.stats.ox.ac.uk/genetics_software/snptest/snptest.html, version 2.5.2),
203 under an additive model. Age, sex, smoking status (ever/never), genotyping array and 10
204 principal components were included as covariates. Variants were filtered based on minor
205 allele frequency (MAF) >0.01 and imputation quality (INFO) >0.5 . P-values and standard
206 errors were adjusted for the LD score regression intercept (LDSC,
207 <https://github.com/bulik/ldsc>) (**e-Figure 1**).

208 In stage 1, we defined distinct signals passing a P-value threshold of $P < 5 \times 10^{-6}$. We defined
209 regions of association around the most strongly associated variant (sentinel variant) ± 1 Mb.
210 To identify distinct signals, and additional signals within the regions described above,
211 conditional analyses were undertaken using GCTA-COJO
212 (<http://cns.genomics.com/software/gcta/#COJO>) (**e-Appendix, e-Figure 2**).

213 Two further "signal prioritisation" analyses were undertaken to ascertain the extent to
214 which signals were driven by association with COPD and/or asthma alone. These included
215 the same cases as the primary analysis, plus the two additional control sets described
216 above. Variants were selected for follow-up in Stage 2 if they were associated at $P < 5 \times 10^{-6}$ in
217 the main Stage 1 analysis and at $P < 0.01$ in both signal prioritisation analyses.

218 Stage 2 and joint analysis
219 SNPs identified in Stage 1 signal prioritisation analyses were tested for association in twelve
220 independent studies of European ancestry (up to 4,301 cases and 48,609 controls, in CHS,
221 COPDGene, deCODE, ECLIPSE, EPIC-Norfolk, FHS, Generation Scotland, GenKOLS, the
222 Trondelag Health Study [HUNT], LOVELACE, Rotterdam Study, SPIROMICS) and one African-
223 American ancestry cohort (COPDGene; 297 cases, 1335 controls) (**e-Appendix, e-Table 1, e-**
224 **Table 2**).

225 Cases had both asthma and COPD. Asthma was defined as any lifetime self-report of
226 asthma, or asthma diagnosis in the healthcare record, including billing codes (**e-Appendix**
227 for further details and validation).²² All cases had spirometry indicating $FEV_1/FVC < 0.7$, and
228 $FEV_1 < 80\%$ predicted. All controls had $FEV_1/FVC > 0.7$, $FEV_1 \geq 80\%$ predicted and no asthma
229 diagnosis. Where possible, studies excluded individuals with alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency.

230 Details of statistical analysis in Stage 2 studies are in the **e-Appendix** (and **e-Table 3**). Results
231 were combined across Stage 2 studies using fixed-effect meta-analysis. Heterogeneity was
232 assessed using the I^2 statistic. We combined these results with those from UK Biobank
233 (Stage 1).

234 We performed a sensitivity analysis to assess whether the way COPD was defined changed
235 our Stage 2 results (**e-Appendix**).

236 To assess whether associations with our Stage 1 signals changed according to age of asthma
237 diagnosis, we divided cases into those who self-reported their age at asthma diagnosis as
238 < 12 years, and > 25 years.²³ We then repeated the association tests in UK Biobank. In
239 addition, we repeated association testing after stratifying our sample into ever-/never-
240 smokers.

241 Definition of top signals for bioinformatic analyses
242 We undertook bioinformatic analyses on ACO signals reaching $p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$ in the joint analysis
243 of Stages 1 and 2, and which also had a lower p-value in the joint analysis than in UK
244 Biobank (Stage 1) alone or had $p < 0.05$ in Stage 2. For each of these, we identified the set of
245 SNPs that was 99% likely to contain the causal variant ('99% credible set'), assuming that the
246 causal variant was included in the dataset (**e-Appendix**).²⁴ For bioinformatic analysis
247 methods, see **e-Appendix**.

248 Using LD score regression,²⁵ we computed genetic correlations between ACO (Stage 1
249 results), asthma,²⁶ moderate-severe asthma,²⁷ COPD,²⁸ eosinophil counts,²⁹ and FEV₁/FVC.³⁰
250 We also computed genetic correlations between ACO and atopic, auto-immune, and
251 smoking behaviour traits (<http://ldsc.broadinstitute.org/>).³¹

252 Approvals

253 The research was conducted using UK Biobank (<http://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk>), under
254 application 648. UK Biobank has ethical approval from the UK National Health Service (NHS)
255 National Research Ethics Service (11/NW/0382). All included studies were approved by the
256 appropriate research ethics committee or institutional review board (**e-Appendix**). All
257 participants gave informed consent.

258 Results

259 In Stage 1, 8,068 ACO cases were selected from UK Biobank, and 40,360 as healthy controls
260 free of asthma and COPD. For signal prioritisation analyses, another 16,762 individuals were
261 selected as controls with COPD alone (without asthma), and 26,815 as controls with asthma
262 alone (without COPD). Descriptive statistics for cases and controls are in **Table 1**. ACO cases
263 were slightly older than healthy controls, and included more males and ever-smokers.

264

265 After filtering on MAF and INFO, 7,693,381 variants were analysed. The LDSC regression
266 intercept was 1.018, suggesting that results were not strongly inflated due to population
267 structure (**e-Figure 1**).²⁵

268 ACO association signals

269 In stage 1, there were 83 distinct signals at $P < 5 \times 10^{-6}$ (**Figure 1**,²⁹ **e-Appendix** and **e-Figure 2**
270 for the signal selection, **e-Table 4** for results). Of these, 31 retained significance ($P < 0.01$) in
271 signal prioritisation analyses comparing ACO cases separately with either COPD cases or
272 asthma cases, to determine whether signals were driven by asthma or COPD alone (**e-Table**
273 **4**). In Stage 2, comprising 12 independent cohorts (4301 cases, 48609 controls) (**e-Table 1**
274 and **e-Table 2**), 26/31 signals had a direction of effect concordant with Stage 1 (**e-Table 5**),
275 and the median value for heterogeneity (I^2) across these signals was 15%. Whilst the sample
276 size of individuals of African-American ancestry was small (297 cases, 1335 controls) and
277 confidence intervals were broad, 22/31 signals had a direction of effect consistent with the
278 European ancestry studies (**e-Table 5**).

279 Results for the Stage 2 sensitivity analysis (9,638 cases and 128,273 controls from 15
280 studies), where COPD was defined either by available spirometry or, alternatively, by EHR
281 diagnoses (**e-Appendix**), are in **e-Table 6**.

282 Subgroup analyses

283 Effect sizes for the 31 signals amongst cases with childhood-onset asthma were highly
284 correlated with those amongst individuals with adult onset ($R = 0.883$) (**e-Table 7**, **e-Figure 3**).
285 Effect sizes in ever- and never-smokers were also closely correlated ($R = 0.911$) (**e-Table 7**
286 and **e-Figure 4**).

287 Eight top signals for ACO defined from joint analysis
288 After meta-analysis combining Stage 1 and Stage 2, 13 signals were genome-wide significant
289 ($p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) (**e-Table 4; e-Figure 2** for flow diagram). Of these, eight either had a lower p-
290 value in the joint analysis than in Stage 1 alone, or $p < 0.05$ in Stage 2 studies alone (**Table 2,**
291 **e-Figure 5, e-Figure 6**). None of these eight signals are previously reported as associated
292 specifically with ACO.⁸

293 For the novel intergenic ACO signal on chromosome 5 (rs80101740, effect allele frequency
294 (EAF)=0.015, OR=1.42, $P=3.72 \times 10^{-8}$, **e-Table 5**), which has not been previously associated
295 with asthma, lung function or COPD, the sentinel SNP had the largest posterior probability
296 (0.77) of being the true causal variant, assuming the causal variant was genotyped/imputed
297 (**e-Table 8**). There was no evidence of colocalisation with eQTL signals at this locus (**e-Tables**
298 **9 and 10**), and no chromatin interactions were identified.

299 Four of our novel signals for ACO were previously reported for asthma but not COPD/lung
300 function.³²⁻³⁴ For rs35570272 in *GLB1* (OR=1.10, EAF 0.398, $P=2.44 \times 10^{-9}$), there were 11 SNPs
301 in the credible set, and the intronic sentinel SNP had the highest posterior probability
302 (0.655). There were significant chromatin interactions nearby in *GLB1* in fetal lung
303 fibroblasts. *GLB1* encodes the beta-galactosidase enzyme involved in lysosomal function,
304 and an elastin-binding protein involved in extracellular elastic fibre formation. Two SNPs
305 (both with a posterior probability ~ 0.13) in the 99% credible set, rs7646283 and rs34064757,
306 were eQTLs for cartilage-associated protein (*CRTAP*) in lung (**e-Table 9**), implicated in bone
307 development and osteogenesis imperfecta.

308 Another signal (previously reported for asthma) was rs16903574 (EAF=0.077, OR=1.20,
309 $P=3.8 \times 10^{-10}$), a missense variant in *FAM105A*, deleterious according to its CADD score
310 (22.6).³⁵ *FAM105A* encodes a pseudoenzyme, possibly involved in protein-protein
311 interactions.³⁶ This sentinel had a posterior probability of 0.99. A previous study in asthma
312 predicted *FAM105A* as the target based on chromatin interactions and correlation between
313 enhancer epigenetic marks and gene expression, although we did not identify any eQTL
314 evidence in lung or whole blood.³² We also identified a highly significant chromatin
315 interaction in fetal lung fibroblasts overlapping *FAM105A* and another nearby gene (*TRIO*),
316 but not in adult lung.

317 An intergenic signal between *PHB* and *ZNF652* (rs2584662; EAF=0.42, OR=0.92, P=2.21x10⁻⁸)
318 was previously associated with asthma and reported as a blood eQTL for *GNGT2* (implicated
319 in NF-κB activation),^{26,32} although we did not identify this in our eQTL analysis. In our
320 analysis, eight SNPs were in the credible set (posterior probabilities all ≤0.2). Hi-C data
321 suggested a significant chromatin interaction in *ZNF652*, with another less significant peak
322 close to *GNGT2*. Nearby loci in *ZNF652* have previously been associated with
323 asthma/allergic disease and moderate-to-severe asthma.³²

324 We also identified rs1837253, an intergenic signal near *TSLP* (EAF 0.739, OR=1.16,
325 P=1.53x10⁻¹⁸), with a posterior probability of 1, i.e. the only variant in the credible set. No
326 eQTL evidence was identified. There were highly significant chromatin interactions with
327 *SLC25A46* in fetal lung fibroblasts and in adult lung tissue, and with a region between *TSLP*
328 and *SLC25A46* in fetal lung fibroblasts only. The cytokine TSLP was implicated in asthma and
329 allergic disease prior to the GWAS era,³⁷ and an anti-TSLP antibody has been trialed in
330 allergic asthma.³⁸

331 Another signal, rs6787279 in *IL17RD* (EAF=0.169, OR=0.89, P=7.87x10⁻⁹), has been previously
332 reported for lung function and COPD.^{28,39} There were 55 variants in the credible set, all with
333 posterior probability ≤0.12, meaning it is not yet possible to fine-map this signal confidently.
334 One SNP in the credible set was exonic and possibly damaging (rs17057718), but the
335 posterior probability was only 0.012. Multiple SNPs at this locus were eQTLs for *IL17RD* in
336 lung, with the ACO risk allele corresponding to decreased *IL17RD* expression. *IL17RD* is in
337 the IL17 signalling pathway, which is implicated in asthma,⁴⁰ and in COPD pathogenesis,^{41,42}
338 potentially by mediating effects of cigarette smoke.

339 Two ACO signals have previously been reported separately for both asthma and lung
340 function or COPD: rs9273410 in *HLA-DQB1* (EAF=0.445, OR=1.20, P=9.19x10⁻²⁸) and
341 rs3749833 in *C5orf56* (EAF=0.263, OR=1.12, P=9.37x10⁻¹²). *HLA-DQB1* encodes a major
342 histocompatibility complex (MHC) type II molecule involved in antigen presentation. *HLA-*
343 *DQB1* alleles are associated with numerous inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. In our
344 analysis, the sentinel was the only SNP in the credible set. For lung function, an amino acid
345 change in the gene product HLA-DQβ1 has been identified as the main driver of signals in
346 the MHC region.³⁰ Analyses in asthma have identified *HLA-DQA1* as the likely driver gene.³²

347 *C5orf56* is located on a cytokine gene cluster on chromosome 5, including *IL3*, *IL4* and *IL5*.
348 Several interleukins in this region have been considered as therapeutic targets in asthma. In
349 severe eosinophilic asthma, the anti-IL5 monoclonal antibodies mepolizumab and
350 reslizumab reduce exacerbations and improve quality of life.⁴³⁻⁴⁵ SNPs in the credible set
351 were eQTLs in lung and/or blood for *SLC22A5*, *AC116366.6*, *RAD50* and a non-coding Y RNA.
352 *SLC22A4* has been identified as the most likely candidate gene for the lung function
353 association.³⁰ The gene products of *SLC22A4* and *SLC22A5* are involved in bronchial uptake
354 of bronchodilators and anti-cholinergic drugs.⁴⁶ An analysis in asthma predicted *C5orf56*
355 (which encodes the interferon regulatory factor 1 antisense RNA, *IRF1-AS1*) as the causal
356 gene.³²

357 In our phenome-wide scan, all ACO loci previously associated with asthma showed
358 association with blood cell counts, particularly eosinophils and neutrophils, and atopic traits
359 (**e-Table 11**). The HLA locus was associated with a wide range of autoimmune/inflammatory
360 traits. Another locus (rs2584662, near *PHB* and *ZNF652*), was associated with
361 anthropometric traits, cardiovascular phenotypes and chronic diseases/multimorbidity,
362 whilst rs3749833 (near *C5orf56*), was associated with anthropometric traits and
363 inflammatory bowel disease. SNPs in the credible set for the intergenic chromosome 5
364 signal (rs80101740) were associated with cardiovascular and a range of other traits.

365 ACO shares genetic architecture with other traits
366 We observed genetic correlations (r_g) of broadly similar magnitude between ACO and COPD
367 ($r_g=0.828$, $p=3.19\times 10^{-299}$), ACO and asthma ($r_g=0.743$, $p=6.18\times 10^{-44}$), and ACO and FEV₁/FVC
368 ($r_g=-0.692$, $p=7.48\times 10^{-33}$) (**Figure 2, e-Table 12**). The genetic correlation (r_g) between asthma
369 and FEV₁/FVC was -0.333 ($p=8.71\times 10^{-7}$), (i.e. increased asthma risk was correlated with
370 lower FEV₁/FVC). Blood eosinophil counts were moderately correlated with ACO ($r_g=0.292$,
371 $p=4.87\times 10^{-11}$), similar in magnitude to the correlation of eosinophils with asthma ($r_g=0.371$,
372 $p=3.15\times 10^{-7}$), whereas the correlation of eosinophils with FEV₁/FVC ($r_g=-0.070$, $p=0.002$)
373 and COPD ($r_g=0.130$, $p=4.83\times 10^{-6}$) were smaller. We additionally computed genetic
374 correlations between ACO and 16 autoimmune traits, and ACO and smoking behaviour
375 ($r_g=0.046$, $p=0.417$) (**e-Table 12**). After asthma, the next strongest correlation was with
376 eczema ($r_g=0.255$, $p=0.004$), then multiple sclerosis ($r_g=0.323$, $p=0.011$).

377 Discussion

378 We conducted the largest GWAS of ACO to date, and identified 83 independent signals
379 associated at $P < 5 \times 10^{-6}$ in Stage 1. After excluding variants associated with asthma only or
380 COPD only, we studied 31 variants in stage 2, with eight distinct signals for ACO showing
381 genome-wide significance ($P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$) in a Stage 1 and Stage 2 meta-analysis.

382 Our study contributes to understanding of the genetic architecture of ACO. We showed
383 strong genetic correlation between ACO and COPD/lung function, and ACO and asthma,
384 especially moderate-severe asthma. Furthermore, we showed that the genetic correlation
385 of blood eosinophil counts with ACO was more similar in magnitude to the genetic
386 correlation of eosinophils with asthma than of eosinophils with FEV₁/FVC and COPD.
387 Increased eosinophils are associated with asthma and COPD exacerbations,⁴⁷⁻⁴⁹ and with
388 lung function decline in subjects with and without asthma.⁵⁰ Eosinophil counts, atopy and
389 asthma traits were prominent in phenome-wide scans of our top eight signals, consistent
390 with an important role for type 2 inflammation in ACO.^{51,52}

391 One intergenic signal on chromosome 5 (rs80101740) is not reported as associated with
392 asthma, COPD or lung function. Whilst near to a putative signal for lung function without
393 replication support (rs377731, $r^2 = 0.02$ with rs80101740),³⁰ the ACO sentinel was
394 independent of this lung function signal in conditional analyses. Evidence from eQTL studies
395 suggests that the nearby lung function signal is associated with *RGMB* and *LINC02062*
396 expression.

397 Four of the eight signals identified as novel (*GLB1*, *FAM105A*, *PHB*, *TSLP*) are known signals
398 for asthma or allergic disease, but not COPD. Our results suggest that these loci also have a
399 role in COPD. All four have been associated with child- and adult-onset asthma, and could
400 represent an opportunity to intervene in early life to prevent serious long-term sequelae.²³

401 One ACO signal (*IL17RD*) is a known lung function and COPD locus; our findings demonstrate
402 its relevance in reversible airflow obstruction. Together, these loci could represent targets
403 for intervention, potentially to prevent development of fixed airflow obstruction.

404 Two signals are known to be associated with asthma and COPD/lung function, including the
405 *HLA-DQB1* locus (the first signal identified as associated with both asthma and COPD), and a
406 signal at *C5orf56*, encoding *IRF1-AS1*, on chromosome 5, near a cytokine gene cluster.

407 In subgroup analyses, there was a strong positive correlation between Stage 1 effect sizes
408 for ACO in ever- and never-smokers, suggesting that ACO is not due solely to smoking in
409 people with asthma, although childhood asthma in smokers increases COPD risk compared
410 with non-asthmatics, possibly via early lung development.⁵³ Similarly, when stratifying by
411 child- versus adult-onset asthma, there was a strong correlation between effect sizes in both
412 groups. Nevertheless, for some of the eight top signals, we found evidence of chromatin
413 interactions in fetal but not adult lung. Although this may implicate developmental
414 processes in ACO, inference is difficult, due to differences in experimental conditions,
415 sample sizes and reporting practices. Clearer conclusions may become possible as functional
416 genomic assays advance.

417 Our study has some potential limitations. The stage 2 sample size (4,301 cases) was
418 substantial, although relatively underpowered compared to stage 1 (8,068 cases). All signals
419 reported met commonly-adopted criteria for genome-wide significance, but stricter criteria
420 are starting to be used for genome sequencing studies;⁵⁴ future work using sequence data
421 would provide an opportunity to re-evaluate the genomic regions we highlight.

422 Misclassification of asthma and COPD diagnoses is possible: asthma in older patients may
423 mimic COPD, and clinicians may be less likely to suspect COPD in non-smokers. To mitigate
424 this, we utilised GOLD 2+ spirometric criteria to define COPD wherever possible, and note
425 that self-reported asthma has been shown to accurately identify subjects with clinical and
426 genetic characteristics of asthma.⁵³ We hypothesise that any remaining misclassification
427 would attenuate effect estimates towards the null, i.e. reduce power to detect true genetic
428 associations with ACO. Our main analysis was undertaken in European ancestry populations
429 only; although for many loci there was good concordance in a small sample of African-
430 American ancestry, it is essential to study this trait further in diverse populations.

431 Interpretation

432 In the largest genome-wide association study to date, we identified eight signals associated
433 with ACO. Our findings suggest a spectrum of shared genetic influences, from variants
434 predominantly influencing asthma, to those predominantly influencing fixed airflow
435 obstruction. We focus on variants that tend towards an intermediate phenotype with
436 features of both asthma and fixed airflow obstruction, with pathways implicating innate and
437 adaptive immunity and potentially bone development, and signals for which the biology

438 remains unclear. Further biological understanding is likely to be important for therapeutics
439 to prevent the development of fixed airflow obstruction among people with asthma.

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575 Take-Home Points

576 Study question

577 What are the genetic determinants of risk for asthma-COPD overlap, and how do these
578 differ from those for COPD or asthma?

579 Results

580 We discovered eight novel signals for asthma-COPD overlap in a meta-analysis of 12,369
581 cases and 88,969 controls; most signals suggested a spectrum of shared genetic influences
582 on asthma, COPD or lung function, and in phenome-wide scans of these signals, eosinophil
583 counts, atopy and asthma traits were prominent.

584 Interpretation

585 We identified eight signals for asthma-COPD overlap, not driven by smoking or age at
586 asthma diagnosis, which may represent loci that predispose to type 2 inflammation, and
587 serious long-term consequences of asthma.

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590 C.J., A.L.G. and M.D.T. will act as guarantors for the content of the manuscript.

591 Author Contributions

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640 Individual-level participant data are from UK Biobank

641 (<https://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk/enable-your-research/apply-for-access>). Summary-level

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643 on publication (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk/gwas/>).