

GSSCC - - DNA Special Interest Group
Ethnicity Estimate Updates at Ancestry, MyHeritage and 23andMe
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There's been a lot going on in the DNA world recently. One major event comes by way of AncestryDNA, which released its latest and "biggest yet" ethnicity update in late 2025. Ancestry significantly increased the number of specific regions in its reference panel, and added "macro regions" for clarity. There are 68 new or updated regions, which results in more finely-detailed ethnicity breakdowns. The macro regions function like file folders, grouping specific ethnic groups such as Scotland and Ireland under Celtic and Gaelic, or Swedish and Danish under Nordic, so that individual ethnic groups are clustered under the appropriate respective heading. The number of reference populations increased from 107 to 148, resulting in more numerous specific ethnicities within larger macro regions; that is, broader geographical groups now contain more specific sub-regions.

The updated reference panel has many thousands more DNA samples from many more parts of the world, yielding more granular ethnicity results for most AncestryDNA testers. Because this latest update is more precise over all, most AncestryDNA testers will see shifts in their ethnicity percentages, and will likely see new DNA reference regions. For example, in my own ethnicity estimate, my previous 19% Scottish ethnicity is now broken down into Central Scotland and Northern Ireland, together with Northern Wales and Northwest England. My previous 5% Irish ethnicity is now shown as Munster, Ireland. These regions are all grouped together under the macro region of Celtic and Gaelic.

Ancestry provides interesting information about how groups are named. They incorporate maps to show where a particular ethnic group is native to a specific region, and then they work with a diverse group of outside scholars to review how regions are named. By working with both local residents and scholarly experts, Ancestry applies names to regions that reflect both accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Ancestry states that, "representing the people of the world fairly is our priority." Of course, accurate naming is important so that DNA test takers can understand where their DNA is found.

Everyone who has tested at AncestryDNA will have their DNA results re-analyzed with the new science and their ethnicity estimate will be updated. The breakdown showing which parent provided DNA in specific ethnicity groups will also be updated to reflect the new ethnicity categories.

Meanwhile, over at MyHeritage, ethnicity estimates were also updated in 2025 to version v2.5. The number of ethnic categories has doubled, from 42 to 79. Broad categories such as “European” have been broken down into French, German and Dutch; “Scandinavian” has been broken down into Swedish, Norwegian, Danish etc. There are now 15 different Jewish categories at MyHeritage. At MyHeritage, my own ethnicity estimate has evolved from showing only vague blobs of English and Scandinavian DNA (in spite of having a French Canadian great-grandmother and a German great-grandmother) to now indicating German, Dutch, French and Breton ethnicities.

The genetic groups themselves remain unchanged with this update; however, the genetic groups you belong to may now be nested under a different ethnicity than before. For example, with the new update, the Genetic Group of Malta might be nested under Maltese, South Italian, Spanish, Catalan and Basque, or French - - depending on the percentages of these ethnicities in your DNA results. Some may wonder why some ethnic categories are very specific, while others are still rather general. That’s because certain populations are so genetically similar that it is very difficult to tell them apart. Another is that the accuracy and detail of ethnicity estimates are limited by the quality and quantity of the reference populations used to identify the genetic groups.

New testers will immediately show ethnicity results in version v2.5. Existing DNA testers will need to opt in to version v2.5. It takes about a day for the updated results to be calculated. Test takers who prefer to continue with the previous version, v0.95, have the option to keep or switch back to the earlier estimate.

Beginning in 2026, new DNA tests using the new v2.5 chip will include whole genome sequencing. Old tests using the older chip will not be resequenced, but testers using the previous chip can request the v2.5 version update to ethnicity estimates.

In November, 2025, MyHeritage also updated everyone’s Theories of Family Relativity, adding millions of new theories. Their Theory of Family Relativity™ functions like ThruLines® at Ancestry; showing how you and your DNA matches at MyHeritage are potentially related. This tool utilizes shared DNA, documents and family trees at MyHeritage in piecing together the theories. I used to have 32 Theories of Family Relativity; now I have 40. Of course, I need to vet each one to determine if it pans out. Occasionally, I reject a theory when it seems totally bogus.

23andMe also rolled out its ancestry composition update in late 2025. The new version added 33 new European and 6 new American populations to its reference database. The 6 new American populations all relate to indigenous groups. The Indigenous American category is broken into these new ancestry populations: Arctic North American, Central Andean & Amazonian, North American, Northern Andean, Southern Mesoamerican, and Western North American. These changes result in better ethnic specificity and a reduction in its previous more vague categories such as “broadly Northwestern European” or “broadly Indigenous American.” This update incorporates advanced phasing and more specific reference data to provide a more tailored result to testers. A new “Version History” section lets you compare your new results to your previous result.

23andMe states that the new update should provide better distant relative predictions. Customer results are now computed with HybridIBD, and provide better results for test takers with South Asian, West Asian, and North African ancestry. Customers with Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry will see particularly noticeable improvements in their distant relative predictions because 23andMe’s new relationship estimator better accounts for pedigree collapse, which was particularly strong in the historical Ashkenazi population. The new algorithm also better captures the true range of likely relationships.

Sources Ancestry.com - - Ethnicity Update

<https://www.ancestry.com/c/dna/ancestry-dna-ethnicity-estimate-update>

MyHeritage - - Your Questions Answered

<https://education.myheritage.com/article/myheritages-ethnicity-estimate-v2-5-your-questions-answered/#:~:text=Daniella%20Levy,other%20tests%2C%20such%20as%20Armenian.>

23andMe - - blog posts

<https://blog.23andme.com/articles/ancestry-composition-version-7-is-here>

<https://blog.23andme.com/articles/update-to-dna-relatives>

<https://blog.23andme.com/articles/a-major-update-to-ancestry-composition-is-coming-soon>