

# NEARLY HALF OF US ADULTS INFECTED WITH GENITAL HPV

## US LETS 23ANDME MARKET GENETIC HEALTH RISK REPORTS

**NEW YORK:** Health officials say nearly half of US adults have caught HPV, a sexually-transmitted bug that can cause cervical cancer and genital warts. About 45 percent of Americans ages 18 to 59 had some form of genital human papillomavirus, according to a report released Thursday that's the most complete look at how common HPV is among adults.

More concerning, about 25 percent of men and 20 percent of women had certain strains that carry a higher risk of

cancer. There are more than 150 HPV viruses. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said most sexually active people will get HPV.

Vaccinations against HPV first became available in 2006, aimed at protecting kids before they become sexually active.

Meanwhile, US regulators on Thursday granted Silicon Valley biotech firm 23andMe permission to become the first company to market reports

showing customers' health risks based on their genetics.

The first reports will be made available this month in the United States, indicating genetic propensities for conditions such as Parkinson's disease and late-onset Alzheimer's disease, according to the Food and Drug Administration. "Consumers can now have direct access to certain genetic risk information," said Jeffrey Shuren, director of the FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health.

"But it is important that people understand that genetic risk is just one piece of the bigger puzzle, it does not mean they will or won't ultimately develop a disease."

23andMe extracts genetic data from saliva samples sent in by customers. The private company had been focusing on providing ancestry information after the FDA reined in efforts to offer genetics-based health information about four years ago. "I am proud to say we are the first and only company to receive FDA authorization to market genetic health risk reports without a prescription," said 23andMe co-founder and chief Anne Wojcicki, the ex-wife of Google co-founder Sergey Brin.

"It's a defining moment-giving individuals direct access to more information about how their DNA could impact their health." The FDA said it granted permission for 23andMe to market "personal genome service genetic health risk" tests for ten diseases or conditions in a first-of-its-kind service direct to consumers.

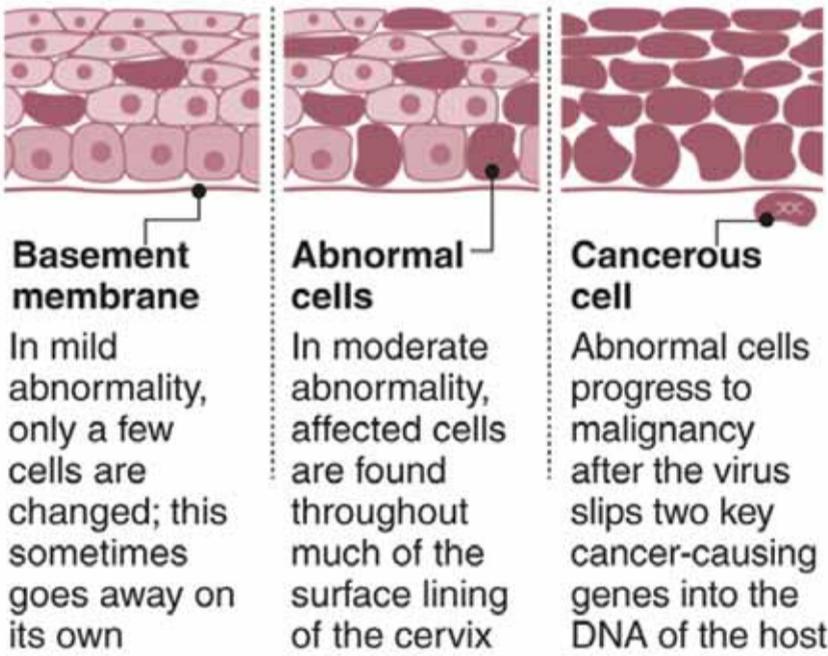
Test results could help people make more informed decisions when it comes to lifestyle or spur more insightful discussions with health care providers, according to the FDA.

The agency stressed that factors other than genetics, such as lifestyle and pollution, play roles when it comes to health. The 23andMe tests were specifically barred from serving as the sole basis for major medical treatment decisions, the FDA said. 23andMe was founded in 2006 and is based in Mountain View, California, where Google also has its headquarters. The 23andMe "Health + Ancestry" report costs \$199. A genetic test focused on ancestry alone is \$99. — Agencies

## HPV From Infection to Cancer

*"High-risk" human papillomavirus (HPV) types have the potential to lead to cancer over a decade or longer. When the virus infects cells, it gradually causes increasingly severe damage.*

### Squamous cells



MCT Source: Dr. Richard M. Haupt, Merck & Co.



**KIEV:** Acting Health Minister of Ukraine Juliana Suprun (center), along with others participates in an outdoor sport exercise to mark World Health Day in Kiev yesterday.—AP

## URUGUAY TO START SELLING MARIJUANA IN PHARMACIES

**MONTEVIDEO:** Uruguay will become the world's first country to allow recreational marijuana to be sold in pharmacies starting in July, the president's office said Thursday.

The move is the last step in implementing a revolutionary law that the South American country adopted in 2013 that fully legalized the production, sale and consumption of marijuana. The most innovative-and controversial-aspect of the law, pharmacy sales, had been on hold, with no clear timeline for when it would begin. But President Tabare Vazquez's administration put an end to the uncertainty at a news conference.

"Cannabis will be dispensed in pharmacies starting in the month of July," said presidential aide Juan Andres Roballo, the head of the National Drugs Council. "Sometime in the first two weeks of July," he added when asked by reporters. Under the law, buyers must sign up for a national registry of marijuana users to ensure they have fulfilled licensing procedures and do not exceed the monthly maximum purchase of 40 grams (1.4 ounces).

The registry-which is open only to Uruguayan citizens and permanent residents-will be up and running on May 2, Roballo said. A gram of pot will cost \$1.30, said the secretary general of the National Drugs Council, Diego Olivera.

The drug will be sold in packets of five or 10 grams, with only the smaller size available initially, he said. Part of the proceeds will fund government drug-use prevention programs.

Far from covering demand The marijuana sold in pharmacies is being grown by private companies in state-supervised fields. The country has so far stockpiled 400 kilograms (880 pounds), produced by two different firms.

"We're far from covering the real demand," said Roballo. But starting sales will enable the companies to ramp up production, he said. Under the law, users also have the option to grow their own pot at home, or join cannabis clubs that grow it in cooperatives.

Only 16 pharmacies have signed agreements with the government to supply marijuana so far. The government is hoping to reach at least 30 by the time sales begin. Uruguay, a country of 3.4 million people, has an estimated 150,000 regular marijuana users. Advocates of the law say it will funnel money away from drug traffickers, toward legal businesses and the state. Roballo said the government's marijuana would be "every bit" as potent as that sold by dealers.

"Buyers will have complete certainty about the quality of the product they are consuming, and so the risks will diminish considerably," he said. The marijuana law was passed under former president Jose Mujica (2010-2015), a colorful ex-guerrilla fighter known for living in a run-down farmhouse, driving a beat-up Volkswagen Beetle and giving most of his salary to charity.

It made an uncomfortable inheritance for his ally and successor, Vazquez-a cancer doctor who passed strict anti-smoking legislation when he served a first presidential term from 2005 to 2010.

Vazquez's government said in 2015 that it was in "no hurry" to implement the law. But it reluctantly agreed to follow through in the end. — AFP

## DOCTORS MUST CHECK WEATHER FORECASTS TO STOP EPIDEMICS

**LONDON:** Health agencies in Africa need to start consulting seasonal weather forecasts to help prepare for malaria epidemics and ensure outbreaks are spotted early and curbed before they become severe, a malaria expert said. Rising temperatures, floods and droughts can cause major epidemics in areas not usually affected by malaria, particularly as people may lack immunity to the disease and are therefore more likely to fall ill or even die, said Tarekegn Abeku, senior technical specialist at international non-profit Malaria Consortium.

Weather forecasts are vital to help health agencies know where to increase vigilance "so that if there is an outbreak you can take action immediately", he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from his London office. Forecasters are getting better at predicting these threatening weather pat-

terns - sometimes months in advance - as they become more frequent and more severe in many countries as the climate changes. But currently most health agencies in Africa have "no organised way of looking at information related to climate change", said Abeku.

### El nino and malaria

"Most malaria epidemics follow abnormal weather conditions, often in combination with other causes, including increased resistance of the parasite to antimalarial drugs," he said. In the last 60 years in Ethiopia, for example, most outbreaks have been associated with El Nino or La Nina weather patterns, which can bring higher temperatures, more rainfall or drought, Abeku said. —Reuters

## MAKE CLIMATE CHANGE AN ECONOMIC ISSUE: EX-MALDIVES PRESIDENT

**OXFORD, England:** Winning effective action on climate change will require treating the problem less as an environmental or human rights crisis and more as a sensible economic shift, the former Maldives president said Thursday.

"While it remains an ethical or human rights issue, it's not so easy to have it in your political manifesto," Mohamed Nasheed said, pointing to climate change's political divisiveness in the United States. But any politician, he said, can win votes by promising more jobs and a stronger economy - something eminently achievable if the world transitions to cleaner and more sustainable energy, a move that also would bring environmental and social benefits.

The world needs to package the benefits of a low-carbon transition in way "that political parties can embrace", said Nasheed, speaking at the Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship in Oxford. Some populist politicians are already persuaded on the economic benefits of stepping up climate action, said Samir Saran, vice president of the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation, which works on policy responses to problems facing India.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for instance, aims to put in place 175 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2022 - approaching the entire electrical generating capacity of Germany today, Saran said. The aim is not primarily to fight climate change, but to develop the country - and cut poverty - in the quickest, most effective and most sustainable way, he said.

India, by developing without large amounts of fossil fuels, "will be the first country in the world to create a new model of growth that will be exportable to the whole world", Saran predicted - a point of national pride and a potential route to economic success. Nasheed, who was ousted from the Maldives presidency in a 2012 coup, said he didn't believe that the election of US President Donald Trump, whose administration is trying to reverse action on climate change and promote dirty fuels such as coal, would have any significant impact on countries like China and India as they push ahead on clean energy. —Reuters

## GIRL, 9, SUES INDIA GOVT OVER INACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

PETITION UNDERLINES GROWING CONCERN OVER POLLUTION

**MUMBAI:** A nine-year-old girl has filed a legal case against the Indian government for failing to take action on climate change, highlighting the growing concern over pollution and environmental degradation in the country. In the petition filed with the National Green Tribunal (NGT), a special court for environment-related cases, Ridhima Pandey said the government has failed to implement its environment laws.

"As a young person (Ridhima) is part of a class that amongst all Indians is most vulnerable to changes in climate, yet are not part of the decision making process," the 52-page petition said.

The petition called on the tribunal to direct the government "to take effective, science-based action to reduce and minimize the adverse impacts of climate change".

The tribunal has asked the Ministry of Environment and the Central Pollution Control Board to respond within two weeks. A spokesman from the Ministry of Environment told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that they would respond as directed by the tribunal. India is home to four of the 10 worst ranked cities in the world for air pollution. Along with China, India accounted for more than half the total number of global deaths attributable to air pollution in 2015, according to a recent study. Despite several laws to protect India's forests, clean up its rivers and improve air quality, critics are concerned that implementation is poor, and economic growth often takes precedence over the environment.

Flash floods and landslides in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, where Ridhima lives, killed hundreds of people and left tens of thousands homeless in 2013.

The devastation affected Ridhima, the daughter of an environmental activist, said Rahul Choudhary, a lawyer representing her. "For someone so young, she is very aware of the issue of climate change, and she is very concerned about how it will impact her in

future," he said. "She wanted to do something that can have a meaningful effect, and we suggested she could file a petition against the government," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Ridhima is not the first child in India to take the government to task over inaction to protect the environment. Last year, six teenagers filed a petition with the NGT over air pollution in New Delhi which has the worst air quality in the country. —Reuters



**HYDERBAD:** An India nurse checks the blood pressure of a woman at the Government Maternity Hospital in Hyderabad yesterday on World Health Day. World Health Day yesterday marks the anniversary of the World Health Organization being founded in 1948. —AFP

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THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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