

LIFESTYLE

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT 23ANDME'S BREACH— AND OTHER DNA TEST KITS TO TRY

Plus, how to better safeguard your sensitive data.



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Updated December 16, 2023

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Ancestry and genetics company 23andMe **revealed** earlier this month that 14,000 accounts had been breached by hackers, resulting in 6.9 million people having their ancestry information accessed. The breach impacted 0.1% of the site's user base and was conducted by using stolen usernames and passwords from other websites that matched information on 23andMe. While the company disclosed the breach in October, it wasn't until last week that the scope of the data obtained was made public.

Given that it's the holiday season, you're probably wondering if it's safe to give or receive DNA testing kits as a gift. Here's everything we know about the breach, alternative **DNA testing kits** to try that we've tested and love, and advice on how to protect your data so that you can feel confident while on the hunt for **the perfect gift**.

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What information was stolen in the 23andMe data breach?

- Display names of account holders and members of family trees
- Self-reported location of account holders, including city and ZIP code
- Relationship labels
- How recently account holders logged onto the site

- Ancestry and DNA reports
- Ancestor birth locations and family names
- Profile picture
- Birth year

What is 23andMe doing about the data breach?

According to **23andMe's blog post**, the company is now requiring new and existing customers to login using two-step verification. Since the incident in question, customers were all notified of the breach and the potential impact of it. Additionally, customers were required to reset their passwords. See **23andMe's privacy statement** in full to find out how you can remove or better protect the data you have stored with 23andMe.

How secure is my data using a DNA testing kit?

We spoke with Anahi Santiago, the Chief Information Security Officer at ChristianaCare, a Delaware-based health system, to find out more about the risks of giving sensitive data to a company and how consumers can better protect their data.

"It can happen at any company," says Santiago. "Every company needs to achieve one hundred percent protection one hundred percent of the time, while [hackers] only need to be successful once." She continues, "It isn't a matter of if, but *when*."

No matter what brand, DNA testing websites are particularly desirable targets for cybercriminals due to the wealth of information they store—before 23andMe, **Veritas Genetics was hacked in 2019**.

Fortunately, there are precautions that both consumers and companies can take to protect sensitive information. "Review terms of service and privacy [policy]. Feel comfortable that the company has provided you with enough information to feel safeguarded."

In particular, she urges prospective DNA kit users to do some research to determine whether data will just be used to discover heritage or if it will be sold and shared with third parties. It should be noted that DNA testing kits can have similar levels of privacy. 23andMe, Ancestry, and other genetics companies have privacy policies that outline how the site in question uses and stores your data.

DNA testing sites, under certain conditions such as subpoenas, can turn your or your family's data over to law enforcement agencies. Additionally, a company can be bought, acquired, or merged with another company that will potentially gain access to your data in a legal transfer of assets.

How was 23andMe hacked?

The breach on 23andMe was carried out using an attack method called credential stuffing. In such an attack, hackers use an automated process to get into accounts using stolen usernames and passwords with the assumption that people use the same credentials over multiple websites.

How can I better protect my data?

One way to protect and avert this kind of attack is by using multi-factor authentication in which users must prove their identity using multiple methods required by a company beyond just using a password. Additionally, users should be in the habit of using different passwords for every account they have. To make remembering multiple passwords easier, users can sign up for **password vaulting technologies**.

Santiago's number one piece of advice is to set up alerts with all three credit bureaus. "It's the biggest and most impactful thing people can do to protect their data." If a user is impacted by a breach or some other cyberattack, it's ultimately the best way to protect your identity, she explains. "You'll be notified if anyone tries to open a bank account, a mortgage in your name, tries to buy a car...anything with your stolen information."

Lastly, when you're through with your testing experience, consider whether or not you want the company to hold onto your sample or data. Most genetic testing websites allow you to delete your personal information or get rid of your sample at any time.



Bitwarden

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Other DNA testing kits to try

Users should keep in mind that there are inherent risks associated with providing sensitive DNA information to any DNA testing website. As credential breaches are all too common, users should exercise caution with any DNA testing kit that they buy or receive. That said, when Reviewed **tested 23andMe**, our editors enjoyed it and recommended it because of the overall positive experience. However, if you're wary of purchasing a 23andMe kit, there are other kits that we recommend as well. If you're interested in getting your hands on one, here are some alternatives to try.



AncestryDNA

AncestryDNA is our favorite DNA testing kit.

BUY NOW
at Ancestry

AncestryDNA is your best bet when it comes to an alternate DNA kit to try, as it's the premiere genetics kit. We not only named it as offering **the best overall DNA testing kit**, but also identified it as being better than **23andMe**. It boasts the largest database for finding matches among ancestry kits, you can use it to research and build your family tree, and it has the greatest detail of DNA to help you interpret your results which include genetic traits that can influence appearance, fitness, and nutrition.

Read the full privacy statement at Ancestry.com



Family Ancestry

As the name implies, Family Tree DNA has a great family tree maker.

BUY NOW
at Family Tree DNA

Family Tree DNA was another one of our favorite DNA testing services. It features a robust family tree maker, it allows you to upload DNA data from other websites, and it offers additional DNA tests like maternal and paternal tests for those with XY chromosomes, which give even more results.

Read the full privacy statement at FamilyTreeDNA.com

MyHeritage DNA kit



MyHeritage offers one of the least expensive DNA testing kits out there.

BUY NOW
at MyHeritage

For a slightly larger DNA database, as well as a less expensive testing kit than Family Tree DNA, we recommend trying out MyHeritage. Like Family Tree DNA, you can also upload your DNA data from other websites to MyHeritage. The basic DNA test allows you to explore your family history and origins, as well as find new relatives.

Read the full privacy statement at MyHeritage.com

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