

Start genetic literacy young: Take your family to “Unlocking Life’s Code” touring exhibit

“Genome: Unlocking Life’s Code” is an initiative of the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI). Together, they have created a dynamic and high-tech exhibit delving into exploring the workings of genes, and how genomics permeates the world around us.

The exhibition is a 4,400 square foot immersion experience at the National Mall. It focuses on a few areas of genomic science in a fascinating and engrossing manner designed for a lay audience and children. Here are some of the most exciting features in each area:

Visitors to “The Genome Within Us” will encounter the 3-D printed Genome Ball display. When we think human chromosomes, most of us picture a neat karyotyped arrangement of x-shaped chromosomes. Yet as scientists have learned, chromosomes are anything but neatly arranged in cell nuclei. The Genome Ball sculpture shows visitors how a genome really looks.

Those wandering into “Genome Zone” will find themselves in an interactive educational space. Here, of many alluring activities, visitors can determine their alleles for predominantly Mendelian inherited traits like attached-earlobes, tongue rolling. Then enjoy comparing information with those sharing a unique combination of these traits. At the Smithsonian exhibit, mingle one-on-one with real live visiting experts at “The Genome Scientist Is In” programs.

The “Genomic Medicine” online exhibit features the awesome science behind how genomics will inevitably transform the way clinicians treat their patients. Here, learn about how one’s genetic makeup influences whether or not s/he responds to a drug at all, will experience harmful side effects, or may require an altered dose. Discover the intricacies of cancer genomics, and how comparing the genetic information from tumor tissue as compared to healthy tissue provides powerful insight leading to cancer treatment and prevention.

[Mutations driving cancer growth](#) Mutations driving cancer growth

There are more areas of genomics to explore including “The Natural World,” “Our Genomic Journey,” and “Genomics and Society.” Excellent news—the “Unlocking Life’s Code” Exhibit will begin a nationwide tour starting this month. I encourage everyone to [visit the website](#) and see if the exhibit is coming to a city near you. If attending in person isn’t feasible, the site also features a fantastic virtual tour, informative videos, and interactive multimedia for adults, children, teachers, and students.

Is it just me, or is anyone else looking forward to checking it out in person?

Kavin Senapathy is a contributor at Genetic Literacy Project and other sites. She works for a genomics/bioinformatics R&D in Madison, WI. She is not a scientist, but loves all things genetics, genomics, and bioinformatics. Her interests span the human and agricultural realms. Opinions expressed are her own and do not reflect her employer. Follow Kavin on twitter [@ksenapathy](#) and [Google +](#)