

How old is that child? ‘Epigenetic clocks’ could help fight child labor, trafficking and improve age records on immigrant children

Epigenetic clocks are a new type of biological test currently capturing the attention of the scientific community, private companies and governmental agencies because of their potential to [reveal an individual's “true” age](#).

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Recently, the [Kobor Lab](#) developed the first [pediatric epigenetic clock](#) designed specifically for testing the age of young people, with an eye towards its applications in research and medical settings. This test uses a small sample of cells collected cheaply and easily from a cheek swab, and can predict a child's age with a degree of precision within approximately four months.

But pediatric [epigenetic clocks](#) are likely to have non-medical applications as well. They could soon be used in immigration cases to prove the age of undocumented [migrants seeking asylum as minors](#). Other future uses can be imagined, such as for child labor and trafficking surveillance, or even for the identification of child combatants in armed conflicts.

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In an era of rising [xenophobic and protectionist immigration policies](#) across the globe, the benefits of gaining biological data should be critically considered against the risks to basic human rights inherent in the process of collecting another layer of information from a vulnerable population.

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