

Henrietta Lacks's Family Settles Lawsuit With Company That Used Cells Without Consent

Thermo Fisher Scientific was sued for knowingly profiting from Henrietta Lacks's extraordinary tissue sample and cell line.

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The family of Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman whose cells have been used to advance scientific research for decades, and the biotech company Thermo Fisher Scientific have reached a settlement, according to the family's attorneys.

In 2021, the Lacks family filed a federal lawsuit against Thermo Fisher Scientific for knowingly profiting from Lacks's tissue sample and cell line, [according to CNN](#).

In 1951, Lacks, a young mother of five, was admitted to Johns Hopkins Hospital after experiencing vaginal bleeding. She soon began radium treatment for [cervical cancer](#), and a sample of her cancer cells was sent to a tissue laboratory without her consent. While other cancer cell samples quickly died in the lab up until that point, Lacks's did something extraordinary: Her cells doubled every 20 to 24 hours, according to [Johns Hopkins](#).

Lacks died of cervical cancer in 1951. Yet the unique cells taken from Lacks, nicknamed HeLa cells, facilitated major scientific breakthroughs in the ensuing decades, including the polio vaccine, the COVID-19 vaccine, in vitro fertilization, advancements in cancer treatment, AIDS research, stem cell studies and more, [according to CNN](#).

The Lackses' attorneys told CNN that the family and the company reached a confidential out-of-court settlement. "On her 103rd birthday, we got justice," Lacks's grandson, Alfred Lacks-Carter Jr., said.

Thermo Fisher Scientific said in a statement to CNN that it was "pleased" with the settlement.

Ben Crump, an attorney for the Lackses, told CNN that he hopes the settlement will spread awareness about Lacks's legacy. "This Black woman gave so much to the world—it's good to give her a present back on her birthday," he told CNN.

To learn more about the life and legacy of Henrietta Lacks, read “[Henrietta Lacks’s Family Joins the WHO Effort to End Cervical Cancer](#),” “[Law to Honor Henrietta Lacks Would Encourage Diversity in Cancer Research](#)” or “[If You Think You Own the Rights to Your Cells, Think Again](#).”

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