

For immediate release

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Commissioner reminds BC 23andMe users of their personal information rights in light of bankruptcy filing

VICTORIA – BC Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael Harvey is reminding people in British Columbia that they have certain rights under the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA) to manage how an organization may use their personal information. The reminder follows the bankruptcy filing of 23andMe, a genetic services company, in the United States on March 23.

The company holds the personal information of an estimated 15 million people worldwide including many people in British Columbia.

23andMe has issued a statement on its bankruptcy filing, which includes claims about how customer data may be treated both while still in the custody of the company and if sold as part of bankruptcy proceedings.

However, if 23andMe users in British Columbia have concerns about what will happen to their samples and data, there are a number of options for how users can manage consent for their information. For example, users can adjust their settings to choose whether or not they wish to participate in research and share their data, or participate in biobanking. There is also the option to delete account and genetic data on the 23andMe platform. This option is in the account settings under “23andMe” Data, “Permanently Delete Data.” Users can select options to delete both their account and their genetic data.

“Genetic information is some of the most sensitive personal information we can share,” said Commissioner Harvey. “In many ways, it is the very biological essence of who we are. When we talk about protecting it, it’s not only our own privacy that is at stake, but also those of our biological relatives with whom we share our genetic makeup. That means that we need to take extra caution when determining how this personal information is collected, used, disclosed and stored. If people are concerned about their data, one first step that people can take is to explore their rights to manage it.”

Requests to destroy physical DNA samples and additional queries can be sent through the 23andMe customer service portal: <https://customercare.23andme.com/hc/en-us/requests/new>

23andMe news release on bankruptcy filing: <https://investors.23andme.com/news-releases/news-release-details/23andme-initiates-voluntary-chapter-11-process-maximize>

OIPC guidance document: Direct-to-consumer genetic testing and privacy (December 2017): <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/documents/guidance-documents/2002>

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