

DHS to start DNA testing to establish family relationships

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(by Priscilla Alvarez and Geneva Sands, CNN) – The Department of Homeland Security will start a DNA testing pilot program next week to help identify and prosecute individuals posing as families in an effort to target human smuggling, two department officials confirmed to CNN.

The **Rapid DNA testing**, as it's known, involves a cheek swab and can, on average, provide results in about 90 minutes, a senior Immigration and Customs Enforcement official said. The pilot program will run for two to three days in two border locations, the official added. ...

DHS has repeatedly warned that children are being exploited by traffickers to skirt the nation's immigration laws. Currently, the government can't hold migrant children in detention for more than 20 days, often leading to the release of families — or groups posing as families — until their immigration court hearing, a practice [known] as **"catch and release."**

[Acting DHS Secretary Kevin McAleenan said, "It's very clear that the cartels and smugglers know the weaknesses in our laws. They know that family units and unaccompanied children will be released with no consequences for their illegal entry."].

The information collected in the DNA test will not be stored or shared, an ICE official said. ...

According to DHS, there was a 315% increase "in the number of cases of adults with minors fraudulently posing as 'family units' to gain entry" from October 2017 to February 2018.

In the last year, immigration officials said they've identified about 3,100 people who lied about being part of a family or claimed someone who was over 18 years old was a child.

"Cases of 'fake families' are popping up everywhere. And children are being used as pawns," former Homeland Secretary Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen in a speech last month. She also said DHS had uncovered **"child recycling rings,"** a process of using children repeatedly in an attempt to be released in the US.

Both ICE and Customs and Border Protection — two agencies within DHS that handle the processing of migrants — will be involved in the pilot. CBP will make a referral for investigation and ICE Homeland Security Investigations will take it from there, the senior official said.

National Border Patrol Council President Brandon Judd said he supports the use of DNA testing as a means of preventing child abuse.

"Rapid DNA is really the only way that we are going to positively be able to identify these children. Even if the cost is great, in order to protect these children, I think the cost is well worth it," he said.

...In March, there were more than 92,000 arrests of undocumented migrants for illegal entry on the southern border, up from 37,390 in March 2018 — the majority of whom were families, according to data from CBP.

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Background

From the CNN article above:

On Monday, ICE announced that it's shifting additional resources and personnel to the southern border, this time from its Homeland Security Investigations office to investigate human smuggling and the use of fraudulent documents "to create fake families."

...In April, DHS sent teams with experience in detecting smuggling and trafficking -- including document analysts and victim assistance specialists -- to Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

"We're going to learn a lot from these (Homeland Security Investigations) teams that have deployed to El Paso and Rio Grande Valley," acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan said during a House hearing Tuesday. "They're bringing forensic interviewers, they're bringing biometric capability to try ensure that we establish those family relationships with clarity."