

# Henrietta Lacks: The Woman Who Changed Medicine Forever

In 1951, a woman named **Henrietta Lacks** walked into a hospital seeking help for cancer. She didn't know that a small sample of her cells would go on to change the course of human history. While Henrietta tragically passed away shortly after her hospital visit, her cells did something no other human cells had ever done: **they refused to die.**

## Why "HeLa" is a Scientific Miracle

Before Henrietta, scientists struggled to keep human cells alive in a lab for more than a few days. Henrietta's cells—labeled **HeLa**—divided and doubled every 24 hours, becoming the world's first "immortal" cell line, surviving and multiplying when all others failed.

## A Century of Miracles

The impact of Henrietta's cells is staggering. They haven't just helped us understand biology; they have been the literal "workhorses" behind the most significant medical wins of the last 75 years:

- **1950s: Ending Polio.** HeLa cells were the essential testing ground for Jonas Salk's vaccine, helping to eradicate a disease that paralyzed thousands of children.
- **Medical Breakthroughs:** They played a role in developing treatments for cancer, HIV/AIDS, and Parkinson's disease.
- **Scientific Breakthroughs:** From space travel research to cloning to gene mapping, HeLa cells continue to be at the forefront of every major scientific frontier.
- **2020s: Fighting COVID-19.** Decades later, HeLa cells were used in the rapid development and testing of COVID-19 vaccines, proving that Henrietta's contribution to humanity is not a thing of the past—it is protecting us right now.

---

## Meet the Women Behind the History

While the world knows the name "HeLa," few know the woman, the mother, and the family who lived in the shadow of this scientific revolution. This program offers a rare, personal look at the Lacks legacy through the eyes of her family:

- **Victoria Baptiste:** Henrietta's great-granddaughter, a nurse and advocate who carries her ancestor's torch into the future of healthcare and ethics.
- **Shirley Lacks:** Henrietta's daughter-in-law, who was a close confidante to Henrietta's daughter, Deborah. She provides a bridge to the personal struggles and triumphs of the Lacks family as they sought justice.

## Why This Event is Unmissable

This is more than a science lecture. It is a story of **medical ethics, racial justice, and the power of a family's voice.** Come hear how a woman whose cells were taken without her consent became the "Mother of Modern Medicine," and how her descendants are ensuring her name is never forgotten again.