Lead a Discussion

Have students read the feature. Then, explain that all citizens, not just scientists, need to have some knowledge of the human genome because the way data from genetic testing are used can affect everyone. Point out that they may be called upon as voters or jurors to decide on issues or cases related to access of data from genetic testing.

Divide the class into small groups, and have students discuss their viewpoints on regulating genetic data. One member of each group should record the group’s positions. Then, tell each group to devise a set of guidelines for the use of genetic data. Have each group share with the class its guidelines and the reasoning behind them.

Answers

1. Answers will vary. Check that students have investigated state laws regarding genetic discrimination. Sample answer: Proponents argue that genetic testing could lead to treatment of a health condition before symptoms appear. Critics argue that genetic testing could prevent some people from getting health insurance.

2. Accept all reasonable answers. Opinions should include reasonable explanations.

Research and Decide

1. Analyze the Viewpoints To make an informed decision, learn more about genetic testing by consulting library or Internet resources. Then, list the key arguments expressed by the proponents and critics of both points of view. Think about how effective the arguments are and the potential consequences of each viewpoint. Find out if laws preventing genetic discrimination have been proposed or passed in your state.

2. Form an Opinion Should access and use of genetic data be regulated? Weigh both sides of the issue. Who will benefit from the sharing of genetic data? Will anyone suffer? Do some arguments outweigh others? If so, which ones? Explain your answers.

Quick Facts

GENETIC DISCRIMINATION

Genetic discrimination is treating people differently because they are found to have differences in their DNA that increase their risk of developing a certain disease or disorder. For some diseases, such as diabetes or Alzheimer’s disease, a genetic predisposition for a disease does not mean the person will develop the disease, only that the risk is greater. Anti-genetic-discrimination legislation aims to prevent these people from being treated differently than other healthy individuals. The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) prohibits genetic discrimination by health insurers and employers. However, GINA does not protect against discrimination from insurers of life, disability, and long-term care policies.