

How long can people live? New study suggests there's a limit

By ALICIA CHANG
AP Science Writer

LOS ANGELES — Just how long can people live?

New research suggests there may be a limit to our life span — one that's hard to extend without some sort of breakthrough that fixes all age-related problems.

The record for the world's oldest person is 122 years and the odds of shattering that record are slim, according to an analysis published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

"It seems extremely difficult if not impossible to break through that ceiling due to the complexity of the aging process," one of the researchers, Jan Vijg, a geneticist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, said in an email.

Life expectancies in many countries have risen dramatically because of improvements in medical care and sanitation in the last century. The maximum age of death has also increased, leading some to believe that there's no boundary to how long people can live.

In the new study, researchers analyzed mortality data from a global database. They



AP Photo/Florian Launette

Thomas, 5, looks at Jeanne Calment after he brought her flowers at her retirement home in Arles, southern France. Calment, believed to be the world's oldest person, died at the age of 122 in 1997.

found that while there have been strides in reducing deaths among certain groups — children, women during childbirth and the elderly — the rate of improvement was slower for the very old, those over 100 years old.

Next they examined how old centenarians were when they died. The record holder is Jeanne Calment, of France, who lived until 122 years old. Since her death in 1997, no one has broken her record.

The researchers calculated the odds of someone reach-

ing 125 years in a given year are less than 1 in 10,000. They think the human life span more likely maxes out at 115 years.

Some aging specialists said the study doesn't take into account advances that have been made in extending the life span — and health — of certain laboratory animals including mice, worms and flies through genetic manipulation and other techniques. The goal is to eventually find treatments that might slow the aging process in humans and keep them healthier longer.

Who inherits a selfie? States seek to fill privacy law gaps

By IVAN MORENO
Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — When a loved one dies, laws cover how their houses, cars, and other property are passed on to relatives. But the rules are murkier — and currently far more restrictive — when it comes to pictures on Facebook, emails to friends or relatives and even financial records stored in online cloud accounts.

Google, Facebook and other companies have said a federal privacy law approved decades before digital storage became common prevents them from releasing electronic memories or records unless the account owner grants permission — even if the person is dead. Without an estate plan, families must try to crack their loved one's passwords or take the costly step of litigating the matter to access photos and emails — and some have, with little success.

The laws governing how to divide belongings after someone dies have not caught up with the technological advances that have permeated the ways people communicate, but states

have begun trying to bridge that gap. This year, Illinois was one of 19 states that passed similar laws to clarify what internet companies can release after someone dies and when information should remain inaccessible.

"I post quite a bit on Facebook. I post a lot of photos. If something were to happen to me, maybe my wife would like to have access to those photos," said Rep. Emanuel Chris Welch, a state legislator from suburban Chicago who sponsored Illinois' measure on the topic.

With the new laws, unless a person expresses otherwise, companies will release basic information from a user, such as the person's email contact list, to help find friends or gather an inventory of a person's assets. But to get the actual contents of the emails — even the subject lines — or photos and documents stored in a cloud service, people must proactively specify who they want to have their digital belongings.

Passed in 1986
The federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act, passed in 1986, doesn't anticipate the release of

online information when executing wills. Because probate law is typically left to the states, the laws legislatures are passing could effectively set new rules.

The Chicago-based Uniform Law Commission wrote the legislation states are passing with the support of internet companies, but that wasn't always the case. Initially, the commission wanted administrators of a person's estate to have access to everything from users' accounts in cases where someone did not leave instructions about what to do with their digital assets.

Only one state, Delaware, managed to pass that version of the commission's proposal, but 27 legislatures tried and failed in 2014.

Facebook allows users to choose a "legacy contact" to access their account, and Gmail has an "account trustee" option. In instances where people use those options, the companies' agreements with them will supersede the state laws.

Online: States with legislation: <http://bit.ly/JJH-j4rv> and *Oregon's law went into effect Jan. 1. Read it at* <http://bit.ly/2dFVzcs>

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