

Like Father, Like Son? Prince Michael Appears to Have Vitiligo

Photos Suggest Jackson's Firstborn Suffers Same Skin Bleaching Condition



29 comments

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Michael Jackson's eldest son may suffer from the same skin-lightening condition as the King of Pop.



Prince Michael, 13, is seen here showing a patch of de-pigmented skin that is consistent with vitiligo, the same skin condition the King of Pop suffered from. (NPG)

In recent pictures released from a [Hawaii](#) vacation, [Prince Michael](#), 13, is seen with a patch of de-pigmented skin on his right underarm that is consistent with vitiligo, the same skin condition to which [Jackson](#) attributed his perpetually lightening skin.

"That looks like vitiligo," said Dr. Raymond Boissy, professor of Dermatology at the University of [Cincinnati](#) College of Medicine and president of the [National Vitiligo Foundation](#) after seeing the vacation photos.

Though he said he cannot provide a diagnosis without examining Prince Michael directly, Boissy said "there are very few other dermatology issues that would render that spot so white."

In many cases, the appearance of de-pigmented lesions alone, especially in regions like the underarm, groin, and elbows, is sufficient evidence to diagnose vitiligo, says Caroline Le Poole, an associate professor of pathology at Loyola University who studies vitiligo.

Though no formal statement has been made by the family as to whether Prince Michael has the condition, these photos have prompted speculation that, like his father, who announced he had the condition in a 1993 [Oprah Winfrey](#) interview, Prince Michael suffers from vitiligo.

Given that vitiligo is a genetic disorder that can run in families, a diagnosis for Prince Michael would lend credence to [Jackson's claim to be the biological father](#) of the thirteen-year-old, Le Poole says.

"The odds of developing it spontaneously are around one percent, perhaps even less," she says, but those odds increase roughly tenfold when a parent or immediate family member has the condition.

A request for comment from Adam Stresian, attorney to Michael Jr.'s grandmother and guardian, Katherine Jackson, was not immediately returned.

Vitiligo and Jackson's Family

During Jackson's life, there was speculation as to whether he truly had vitiligo, but the official autopsy report from the L.A. County Coroner noted that he did, in fact, suffer from the condition and had noticeable "patches of light and dark pigmented areas."

Other members of the Jackson clan have noted that the condition runs in their family.

In an exclusive interview with ABC News' Chris Connelly, [Joe Jackson](#) said his son had vitiligo, and attributed [Michael Jackson's](#) whitened skin to the condition.

"Everybody tryin' to make a big thing out of it ... They say -- 'He try to paint his self white.' That's not true. Michael got vitiligo," Joe Jackson said. "We saw it comin' on him ... at [an] early age. You know, just a little spot. My aunt had the same thing."

In its early stages, there are treatments using corticosteroids or ultraviolet light that can re-pigment the lesions in some patients. However, once the lesions spread to 50 percent of more of the body, many patients elect to use skin lightening products so that their skin

becomes more uniform in color, though much more pale than their original skin tone, Le Poole says.

"A patient, especially of African American origin, can choose to have the remaining amount of pigment in the body removed," Boissy told ABC News.

"That is the situation with Michael Jackson. He had extensive vitiligo beyond the point where makeup could have hid it, and he choose to have the rest of his pigment removed."

For Prince Michael, there is a possibility that his white lesion is not due to vitiligo, Boissy says. Eczema or a severe burn could produce such a mark, but it wouldn't be permanent, he says, and from the photo, the teen's mark looks "pretty distinctly" like vitiligo.

A Mysterious Disease

Vitiligo is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks the pigment cells in the skin, causing the skin, and any hair in the affected area, to lose coloring.

It can develop at any time in life and generally "begins around the orifices of the body, or the joints of the body...around the eyes, mouth, knuckles, knees, or genitalia," Boissy says.

The lesions, as the de-pigmented areas are called, can develop spontaneously and with varying speed, though doctors have anecdotally noted that they tend to appear after physical or emotional trauma such as severe sunburn, pregnancy, or the death of a loved one.

"The mystery of vitiligo is that most people don't know what it is, and so when they see people with a white spot they're confused. People look at this and they think...'maybe this lesion is contagious?'" Boissy says.

This is not the case however, he says. In Prince Michael's case, he couldn't have contracted it from living with Jackson, he would have been born with the genetic predisposition to develop it.

ABC News' Lauren Cox contributed to this report