



BRAVE NEW WORLD

# What the FDA Won't Tell You about the VeriChip

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[CBN.com](http://www.cbn.com) – (CBN News) - A little electronic capsule, smaller than a dime, could be one of the biggest technological advances in how we share and store private medical records. It may also be one of the most controversial.



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Known as the VeriChip, it is a microchip that is implanted under a person's skin, and then scanned with a special reader device to reveal important medical data about that person.

Applied Digital, the Florida-based company that makes the VeriChip, hopes the implant will revolutionize how doctors obtain medical information, particularly in emergency situations. Theoretically, if a person can't speak, medics could scan that person and quickly be linked to a database that would provide crucial information like the patient's identity, blood type and drug allergies.

Dr. Csaba Magassi, a plastic surgeon in Northern Virginia, is among a nationwide network of doctors who are ready and waiting to implant the VeriChip into willing patients. His office receives calls daily from people inquiring about the chip.

Dr. Magassi said, "If you are in an auto accident, [and] you are unconscious, they could scan you, know exactly who you are; your medical history can easily be printed out onto the hospital record."

Dr. Magassi added, "If a patient comes in requesting the VeriChip, I usually tell them it takes between two and five minutes to place the device in place. A needle which contains the VeriChip is inserted. The needle pushes the device through, and it is implanted permanently. Put a bandaid on and you are done."

Dr. Magassi demonstrated the procedure for CBN News on an apple. Once the microchip was inserted, the hand-held scanner read the number on the chip using radio frequency waves. Think of it as a human barcode.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the VeriChip implant for medical use in humans in October, a huge victory for Applied Digital.

In an effort to jumpstart interest, the company launched the "Get Chipped" campaign. It is offering a discount to the first few hundred people who get the implant, and also plans to donate hundreds of scanners to the nation's trauma units to promote use of the VeriChip.

But in a letter obtained by CBN News from the FDA to the VeriChip makers, the microchip is not completely safe.

In fact, the letter lists a whole host of health risks associated with the device, including "adverse tissue reaction," "electrical hazards" and "MRI incompatibility."

Applied Digital and the Food and Drug Administration refused our requests for an interview to discuss these risks.

Consumer privacy advocate Katherine Albrecht said, "There are millions of people that have read the press reports about all the positives of this technology, but really have no idea about its dangers."

Albrecht strongly opposes the VeriChip for the physical risks it poses, as well as the privacy risks. She has been called "the Erin Brokovich of RFID chips."

On her Web site, [www.spsychips.com](http://www.spsychips.com), Albrecht reveals the potential dangers of the VeriChip and other radio frequency identification methods.

Albrecht said, "There's a very serious concern that, already, engineers and people who think along those lines are already thinking like hackers and criminals -- they're already starting to say, how can this system be compromised, how can it be abused?"

When you are dealing with a radio frequency device, by design, it is transmitting info using invisible radio waves at a distance. In this case, that distance is only a couple of inches or a couple of feet so it's not a huge distance, but it means that anyone who can get within a couple of inches or a few feet of you, even with a reader device they have hidden in a backpack or a purse, would be able to scan that number, obtain that info and potentially duplicate it."

And it is not just private medical information at stake. The microchip implant technology has been around for several years now, and has been used for a variety of different applications.

Thousands of chips have been implanted in pets by veterinarians for identification purposes. Livestock is now chipped to track things like mad-cow disease.

Manufacturers are putting chips in products like clothing and shoes for marketing research.

In Mexico, the attorney general and his top aides were chipped for security purposes. And, in Spain at the Baja Beach Club, patrons can get a microchip with their financial information implanted, so they can pay for their cocktails with a swipe of the arm. As these pictures seem to suggest, getting chipped is fun and painless.

Applied Digital also launched a brand new application for the chip last year called the "VeriPay." This implant would hold all of a person's financial information. Rather than swipe a card or pay cash, consumers would scan their wrists for purchases. And, if a swipe of the wrist becomes too troublesome, there are already prototypes made of doorway portals that can simply scan a person and their purchases as they walk through the door.

Allbrecht said, "I think there is a very real concern that, down the road, such a chip would become mandatory. And not necessarily initially, but it would be voluntary, in the same way let's say as credit cards or a drivers license is voluntary. No one forces you to have a driver's license or to have a cell phone, but yet the vast majority of people do, because it is very difficult to function in a normal society without it."

For now, though, a microchip implant is voluntary. Only a few thousand chips have been sold and only a fraction of those have been implanted in humans.

For someone who wants an implant for medical purposes, Dr. Magassi and others are standing by. Magassi says, "If they want it, God love 'em. I'll put it in. It's as simple as that."

The VeriChip just recently made its debut in a Miami, Florida nightclub, where patrons had the opportunity to "Get Chipped," much like the Baja Beach club patrons in Spain.