

Home fetal dopplers

Information for general practitioners

29 November 2022

Situation

- The purpose of this communication is to inform clinicians of the potential risk associated with use of home fetal heart monitors (dopplers) in pregnancy.
- The inappropriate use of home fetal dopplers may lead to an increase in preventable perinatal mortality.
- These monitors, designed for home use, may provide false reassurance to mothers about their baby's well-being. In untrained hands, the sounds detected can easily be misinterpreted and may influence delays for expectant parents to seek assessment.

Key Points

- Home fetal dopplers have become widely available as 'off the shelf' and on-line products.
- Unlike some international jurisdictions, in Australia, home fetal dopplers do not require a prescription and there is no pre-requisite training requirement prior to use for consumers.
- The Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA) is currently undertaking a review of the safety signals, benefits and harms associated with home use fetal dopplers. The investigations undertaken by the TGA will assist in determining whether the risk of using these devices outweighs the potential benefit. The TGA will publish information about the findings as the review progresses.

Communicating with patients

- Caution expectant parents about the potential risks of using home fetal dopplers.
- Advise expectant parents to contact their midwife or doctor and present immediately to a maternity facility for timely review if they are concerned about their baby's well-being.
- Include the risks of home fetal doppler use in messaging around Decreased Fetal Movements (DFM) during antenatal appointments and when clinicians are in contact with concerned expectant parents. Continue to reinforce the importance of early presentation for concerns, independent of home doppler reassurance of fetal heartbeat.

Recommendations

1. Distribute this communique to antenatal clinics and general practice clinics

2. If a death has occurred and false reliance on a home fetal doppler was a potential contributing factor, report the incident via usual local reporting mechanisms.
3. The TGA's medical device [incident reporting and investigation scheme \(IRIS\)](#)

Additional resources

1. Safer Baby Bundle [The Centre of Research Excellence in Stillbirth \(stillbirthcre.org.au\)](#)
2. Australian Government Therapeutic Goods Association (2022) <https://www.tga.gov.au/monitoring-communication/home-use-fetal-dopplers-heartbeat-monitor>.
3. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (2009) [Position Statement on Home Fetal Heart Monitoring](#)
4. [Your baby's movements - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
5. Daly, L. et al (2018). Care of pregnant women with decreased fetal movements: update of a clinical practice guideline for Australia and New Zealand. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 58(4), 463-468.

Contact details

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