



Advisory Statement:

Home use fetal dopplers - November 2024

New Zealand College of Midwives | Te Kareti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa (the College) does not recommend home use personal fetal dopplers as we are concerned about the risks outweighing the perceived benefits. Women who are experiencing anxiety about their baby's wellbeing during pregnancy, particularly if they have concerns about their baby's movements should contact their lead maternity carer for an urgent assessment.

The College is concerned about the increased home use of fetal dopplers. The sale of these dopplers is ending in Australia after their use has been linked to three stillbirths and one neonatal death.¹ The Therapeutic Goods Administration in Australia (TGA) undertook a post-market review of all home-use fetal dopplers included in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG), after receiving reports of dopplers providing false reassurance of fetal wellbeing and a subsequent delay in seeking medical attention.² As part of this TGA review, expert advice was sought from the Advisory Committee for Medical Devices (ACMD). The advice from the ACMD said that the overall risk of inaccurately using the device outweighs the benefits and limiting the supply of the device to appropriately trained health professionals was recommended.

There have also been calls to ban the sale of these devices to consumers in the UK. The Royal College of Midwives advised women against the use of personal dopplers in 2020³ and the UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Service do not recommend the use of fetal dopplers except by an obstetrician or midwife.⁴

The College has previously expressed concerns about the increasing use of these devices. Our concerns related to the potential issue of overuse, the lack of evidence of safety of non-clinically indicated ultrasound, the stress caused if the fetal heartbeat is not heard, and the false reassurance that could occur if women detect their own heartbeat via the doppler. This can be interpreted mistakenly as a sign of baby wellbeing resulting in a delay in contacting a midwife, doctor or hospital.

¹Dowling, J. (2024). Australia bans foetal heart monitor over 'false reassurance' and 'unnecessary panic'. Weekend Australian – archived link <https://archive.ph/Uyz5e#selection-739.0-739.84>

² Australian Government. (2024). Post-market review of home-use foetal dopplers. Therapeutic Goods Administration. <https://www.tga.gov.au/how-we-regulate/supply-therapeutic-good/supply-medical-device/medical-device-post-market-reviews/post-market-review-home-use-foetal-dopplers#:~:text=All%20home%2Duse%20foetal%20dopplers%20that%20were%20intended%20to%20be,the%20health%20of%20a%20baby>

³ Royal College of Midwives. (2020). RCM advises pregnant women against use of personal dopplers. <https://www.rcm.org.uk/media-releases/2020/january/rcm-advises-pregnant-women-against-use-of-personal-dopplers/>

⁴ UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Service. (2019). Medical devices: information for users and patients. Updated November 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/medical-devices-information-for-users-and-patients#fetal-dopplersimaging>