# Met Police use invisible DNA spray to curb London’s surge in phone thefts



As London grapples with a disturbing rise in phone thefts, law enforcement is turning to cutting-edge technology to combat the surge of mobile-related crimes. The Metropolitan Police have recently started utilising an invisible DNA tagging spray, known as SelectaDNA, aiming to identify and link suspects to specific thefts without engaging in potentially dangerous high-speed pursuits.

This innovative spray, which contains a unique DNA code only visible under ultraviolet light, is applied to the clothing and skin of individuals involved in thefts, particularly those using e-bikes—an increasingly popular mode of transport for criminals. Inspector Dan Jones of the Watford neighbourhood policing team stated, "It's another tool in our box of tactics to make it increasingly difficult for criminals to operate," during a recent briefing. The approach not only serves as a deterrent but also assists in the prosecution of offenders.

Statistics illustrate the alarming trend of thefts sweeping across the capital, with phone and bag thefts reported to have increased by 70 per cent nationally over the past year, marking a 20-year high according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales. This uptick in thefts seems closely tied to the rise in e-bike usage, which allows perpetrators to make quick getaways. The introduction of this DNA tagging spray comes as part of a pilot project aimed at evaluating its effectiveness over a six-month period in various hotspots, including London and Cambridgeshire.

The Met Police have previously employed SelectaDNA in various contexts, such as protecting vulnerable individuals under domestic abuse restraining orders and tackling shoplifting. The effectiveness of this spray has been evidenced in prior initiatives that resulted in a notable decrease in moped-related crimes. Between June and September 2017, for example, the use of DNA sprays contributed to a 24% reduction in such offences, showcasing the potential of this technology in crime prevention.

Furthermore, alongside enhanced patrols and operations in key areas like Westminster—where nearly 40 per cent of phone thefts occur—the Met has seized over 1,000 stolen phones and apprehended around 230 suspects in targeted operations. These efforts demonstrate a comprehensive approach to tackling a growing crisis that costs the UK economy an estimated £50 million annually. The recent arrests involving gang members who collectively handled over 5,000 stolen phones indicate that the authorities are making inroads, with various operations yielding a significant 27% drop in reported thefts by November 2024, and an even more promising 43% decrease the following month.

With the advent of the SelectaDNA spray and augmented policing efforts, the Metropolitan Police are sending a clear message to opportunistic thieves: the risks of being apprehended are increasing. The high-quality CCTV coverage in areas such as Westminster is expected to bolster these efforts, enabling rapid response to incidents and better chances of recovery for stolen property.

While the statistics and police reports paint a hopeful picture of progress, the very real human impact of these thefts cannot be overlooked. Public figures, including actress Rosamund Pike and former tennis player Annabel Croft, have shared their alarming experiences of being victims of mobile theft in broad daylight. Such accounts illustrate the anxiety and personalization of crime that affects so many Londoners. The increased vigilance and innovative strategies employed by the police speak to a broader concern for public safety and community resilience as this fight against mobile theft continues.

As the pilot programme unfolds, it remains to be seen how effective the DNA tagging spray will be in achieving long-term reductions in phone thefts. Nevertheless, the integration of modern technology into policing efforts exemplifies a proactive stance that aims not only to curb crime but also to restore a sense of safety and security to the streets of London.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/dna-spray-being-used-by-police-in-london-to-tag-and-identify-moped-criminals-a3998971.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-41822264)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/police-trial-chemical-spray-in-bid-to-clamp-down-on-surge-of-moped-enabled-crime-in-london-a3668081.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-68502487)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-43555996)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.selectamark.co.uk/news/selectadna-the-ultimate-theft-deterrent)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/police-trial-chemical-spray-in-bid-to-clamp-down-on-surge-of-moped-enabled-crime-in-london-a3668081.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-68502487)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14749773/fightback-London-phone-snatchers-Police-thieves-invisible-DNA-tagging-spray-warn-catch-you.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/dna-spray-being-used-by-police-in-london-to-tag-and-identify-moped-criminals-a3998971.html> - In November 2018, the Metropolitan Police in London began using invisible DNA spray to combat moped-related crimes. Officers deployed the spray to mark suspects, linking them to specific offences. The initiative aimed to deter criminals and enhance evidence collection, leading to successful convictions. The spray, visible only under UV light, provided a forensic method to identify and prosecute offenders involved in moped-enabled crimes.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/police-trial-chemical-spray-in-bid-to-clamp-down-on-surge-of-moped-enabled-crime-in-london-a3668081.html> - In October 2017, the Metropolitan Police in London trialled a chemical spray to address the rise in moped-enabled crimes. The spray, which adheres to clothing for months, allowed officers to mark suspects who could not be pursued safely. This forensic tool aimed to link offenders to specific crimes, contributing to a reduction in moped-related offences in the capital.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-68502487> - In 2022, Merseyside Police introduced a DNA 'marking spray' to combat shoplifting. The spray, which cannot be washed off, was issued to shopkeepers to deter thieves. Once sprayed, a suspected offender is forensically linked to a crime, with the unique code visible under UV light. The initiative aimed to prevent shoplifting and support retail staff by providing physical evidence to connect individuals to specific offences.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-43555996> - In 2018, Police Scotland began using a tagging spray in Edinburgh to target motorbike and anti-social crimes. The handheld device sprayed an invisible trace onto bikes, clothing, and skin, which could be detected with special light. This forensic evidence allowed officers to link suspects to crime scenes, even if they escaped arrest at the time. The initiative aimed to deter and detect illegal motorcycle activity in Edinburgh communities.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-41822264> - In October 2017, the Metropolitan Police in London revealed new tactics to combat moped crime, including the use of DNA tagging sprays. Four hundred officers were trained to use the forensic liquid, which marks suspects with a unique code visible under UV light. This method aimed to link offenders to specific crimes, contributing to a 24% reduction in moped-related offences between June and September 2017.
7. <https://www.selectamark.co.uk/news/selectadna-the-ultimate-theft-deterrent> - SelectaDNA is a forensic property marking system used as part of crime prevention strategies for businesses and residential properties. It combines synthetic DNA coding with microdot technology, allowing owners to mark valuable items with a unique code. In the event of theft, the marked items can be traced back to their owner, aiding in recovery and prosecution. The system has been implemented in various locations across the UK, including Stornoway in Scotland and Okehampton in Devon.