# NPCC guidelines spark privacy fears over police access to period tracking apps in stillbirth cases



New guidelines from the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) have ignited controversy by allowing police to investigate women's period tracking apps and search their homes when a stillbirth is reported, particularly if there are suspicions surrounding the circumstances leading to that loss. This move comes against a backdrop of heightened concern regarding reproductive rights and ongoing debates about abortion laws in the UK, where access remains both restricted and mired in legal complexities.

The NPCC's Practice Advice on Child Death Investigation lays the groundwork for how police should handle stillbirth cases that may involve unlawful abortions. Authorities now have the power to examine "menstrual cycle and fertility trackers," alongside other digital communications, if prompted by healthcare professionals, family, or friends. This directive explicitly states that investigators can seize data from phones and search homes for medication linked to abortions, such as mifepristone and misoprostol.

Critics of the guidelines include the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), which condemns the policy as detrimental to women's dignity and privacy. President Ranee Thakar expressed concern stating, "Women in these circumstances have a right to compassionate care and to have their dignity and privacy respected." Such invasive measures, they argue, risk creating a culture of suspicion and fear around abortion, further complicating an already sensitive issue.

Louise McCudden, head of external affairs for the abortion provider MSI, highlighted the harmful implications of these guidelines. She pointed out that the region's antiquated abortion laws inevitably lead to a policing culture that undermines women's autonomy over their bodies. The NPCC has attempted to frame its guidelines within a context of caution, asserting that investigations will only proceed if there is credible cause for concern, though many still fear the repercussions of such policies could create an environment of mistrust between women and medical practitioners.

In stark contrast, Australia presents a legislative landscape that is notably more permissive regarding abortion. In Australia, access to safe and legal abortions is guaranteed across all states and territories, typically allowing medical terminations up to nine weeks' pregnancy and further access under specific conditions thereafter. This divergence raises significant questions about the UK's regulatory approach and ongoing debates surrounding the decriminalisation of abortion.

Recent moves by Labour MPs in the UK to modify legislation reflect a growing desire for reform, especially as there have been six women charged with crimes related to their pregnancies in recent years—an increase that starkly contrasts historical statistics prior to recent amendments. Nicola Packer’s case, in which she was acquitted after being accused of illegal abortion, highlights the complexities faced by women navigating the existing legal frameworks.

The implications of these new guidelines extend beyond immediate policing actions; they also affect the technology sector. App companies that provide menstrual and pregnancy tracking services have openly opposed the NPCC's approach. Clue, a popular cycle tracking app, has asserted its commitment to protecting users' data privacy and declared its readiness to legally contest any requests by police for access to private health data. Flo, another app, echoed similar sentiments, warning that these guidelines set a precarious precedent for the responsible use of health technologies intended to empower women.

The scrutiny of police powers in accessing personal data raises broader societal concerns regarding civil liberties and women's health rights. As the NPCC navigates a balance between necessary policing and invasive practices, the call for compassionate care must be loud and clear, reminding all stakeholders of the profound emotional and psychological toll that comes with such investigations.

As the debate continues, both sides of the argument reflect a critical moment in women's health care and rights within the UK, mirrored by contrasting practices in nations like Australia where abortion laws have evolved to ensure accessibility and autonomy. The discussion surrounding these guidelines serves as a reminder of the ongoing necessity to defend women's rights and to approach the sensitive subject of reproductive health with compassion and care, rather than suspicion and punitive measures.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[2]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-6553325)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[3]](https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-1.6553325), [[6]](https://www.theage.com.au/world/europe/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-20250530-p5a5b6.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/30/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-6553325)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.theage.com.au/world/europe/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-20250530-p5a5b6.html), [[7]](https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-20250530-p5a5b6.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-1.6553325), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/30/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[2]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-6553325), [[6]](https://www.theage.com.au/world/europe/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-20250530-p5a5b6.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[2]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518> - The article discusses new guidelines issued by the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) that permit police to investigate women's period tracking apps and search their homes following a stillbirth, if they suspect the pregnancy loss resulted from an illegal abortion. This has sparked controversy, with critics arguing it could lead to invasive policing and undermine women's privacy rights. The piece also compares these developments to abortion laws in Australia, highlighting the differences in legal approaches to abortion and stillbirth investigations between the two countries.
3. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-1.6553325> - This article reports on the NPCC's new guidelines allowing police to access women's menstrual cycle and fertility trackers, as well as digital communications, when investigating stillbirths suspected to be the result of an illegal abortion. The guidelines have been met with criticism from healthcare professionals and privacy advocates, who express concern over potential overreach and the impact on women's rights. The piece also draws comparisons to abortion laws and practices in Australia, noting the differences in legal frameworks and investigative procedures.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/30/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy> - The Guardian covers the controversy surrounding the NPCC's new guidelines, which authorise police to examine women's health apps and digital communications in cases of stillbirths suspected to be caused by illegal abortions. Critics argue that this approach could lead to invasive policing and erode trust between women and healthcare providers. The article also compares the UK's approach to abortion and stillbirth investigations with that of Australia, highlighting the more permissive legal environment in Australia regarding abortion access and related investigations.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-6553325> - The BBC reports on the NPCC's recently issued guidelines that permit police to access women's menstrual cycle and fertility trackers, as well as digital communications, when investigating stillbirths suspected to be the result of an illegal abortion. The guidelines have sparked controversy, with critics expressing concern over potential invasions of privacy and the impact on women's rights. The article also compares the UK's approach to abortion and stillbirth investigations with that of Australia, noting the differences in legal frameworks and investigative procedures.
6. <https://www.theage.com.au/world/europe/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-20250530-p5a5b6.html> - This article from The Age discusses the NPCC's new guidelines that allow police to investigate women's health apps and digital communications in cases of stillbirths suspected to be caused by illegal abortions. The guidelines have been met with criticism from healthcare professionals and privacy advocates, who express concern over potential overreach and the impact on women's rights. The piece also draws comparisons to abortion laws and practices in Australia, highlighting the differences in legal frameworks and investigative procedures between the two countries.
7. <https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/npcc-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy-20250530-p5a5b6.html> - The Sydney Morning Herald covers the controversy surrounding the NPCC's new guidelines, which authorise police to examine women's health apps and digital communications in cases of stillbirths suspected to be caused by illegal abortions. Critics argue that this approach could lead to invasive policing and erode trust between women and healthcare providers. The article also compares the UK's approach to abortion and stillbirth investigations with that of Australia, noting the more permissive legal environment in Australia regarding abortion access and related investigations.