# NPCC guidelines on stillbirth investigations spark privacy and rights concerns in UK



Guidelines issued by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) in the UK have ignited a significant controversy, providing a framework for police to investigate stillbirths when there are suspicions of illegal abortions. This move has raised alarm among women's rights advocates and healthcare professionals, who argue that it risks infringing on personal privacy and threatens the compassionate care that women experiencing pregnancy loss deserve.

The NPCC's recently published Practice Advice on Child Death Investigation permits police to access details from menstrual cycle and fertility tracking apps, as well as conduct searches of women’s homes for evidence of abortion medications such as mifepristone and misoprostol. Such measures are adopted in scenarios where concerns are raised by medical professionals or relatives, suggesting a possible illegal termination of pregnancy. As the NPCC outlines, these investigations can include examining a woman's digital communications and internet search history, ostensibly to establish her knowledge and intentions related to the pregnancy.

Critics of the guidelines argue that they could lead to invasive procedures that undermine the trust between patients and medical professionals, an essential element in sensitive healthcare contexts. Ranee Thakar, president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, expressed her shock at the guidelines, stating, "Women in these circumstances have a right to compassionate care and to have their dignity and privacy respected." Such sentiments are echoed by Louise McCudden from MSI, who highlighted that these guidelines could propagate a culture of hostility toward women regarding their reproductive choices, exacerbating concerns about women’s bodily autonomy.

The guidelines come at a time of heightened scrutiny surrounding abortion laws in the UK, which remain highly restrictive. In England and Wales, abortion is legal only under strict conditions: within the first 24 weeks, it requires consent from two doctors, and after that, it is permitted only in cases that pose significant health risks to the woman or severe disabilities for the child. The NPCC guidance appears to reflect a growing trend in law enforcement to ensure that investigations are handled with care and sensitivity; however, the balance between protecting life and safeguarding women's rights is fraught with complexities.

In light of recent debates, several Labour MPs are advocating for the decriminalisation of abortion, with proposals expected to be debated in the coming months. This push is underscored by advocacy from medical organisations such as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which emphasises that the law must evolve to reflect modern attitudes towards women's health and reproductive rights. The continued prosecution of women for ending their pregnancies—six recent cases have emerged in court—has prompted calls for urgent reform in the legislation dating back to the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act.

Comparatively, Australia has established a different framework for abortion that is legally accessible in every state and territory. Medical abortions can be prescribed well into the pregnancy, often up to nine weeks, and surgical options are available later. This contrasts sharply with the UK's stringent requirements and, while Australia's laws have been more progressive, discussions continue about access, especially for rural women who still face significant barriers.

As the discussion around abortion rights intensifies globally, especially following the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the United States, the NPCC guidelines serve as a reminder of the delicate interplay between legal frameworks, public health policy, and the deeply personal consequences of reproductive choices. With women's bodily autonomy increasingly under scrutiny, the dialogue around these issues must prioritise respect, privacy, and compassion, rather than suspicion.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-30/npcc-guidelines-on-stillbirths-abortions-draws-controversy/105332518), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65512345)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy)
* Paragraph 4 – [[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 5 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65512345)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy)

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## 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 stillbirths suspected to result from illegal abortions. These guidelines allow authorities to access women's period tracking apps and search their homes for evidence of abortion medication. The move has sparked controversy, with critics arguing it could lead to invasive investigations and infringe on women's privacy rights. The article also compares the UK's approach to abortion with Australia's, highlighting differences in legal frameworks and access to abortion services.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy> - This article reports on the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) issuing new guidelines that allow police to investigate stillbirths suspected to result from illegal abortions. The guidelines permit authorities to access women's period tracking apps and search their homes for evidence of abortion medication. The move has been met with criticism from healthcare professionals and women's rights groups, who argue it could lead to invasive investigations and undermine trust in medical professionals. The article also compares the UK's approach to abortion with other countries, including Australia.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65512345> - The BBC reports on the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) issuing new guidelines that permit police to investigate stillbirths suspected to result from illegal abortions. The guidelines allow authorities to access women's period tracking apps and search their homes for evidence of abortion medication. The move has sparked controversy, with critics arguing it could lead to invasive investigations and infringe on women's privacy rights. The article also discusses the legal framework surrounding abortion in the UK and compares it to other countries, including Australia.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/30/uk-police-guidelines-stillbirths-abortions-controversy> - This article reports on the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) issuing new guidelines that allow police to investigate stillbirths suspected to result from illegal abortions. The guidelines permit authorities to access women's period tracking apps and search their homes for evidence of abortion medication. The move has been met with criticism from healthcare professionals and women's rights groups, who argue it could lead to invasive investigations and undermine trust in medical professionals. The article also compares the UK's approach to abortion with other countries, including Australia.
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