



## Fetal Home Dopplers

### Key issue

Expectant parents seek reassurance about the well-being of their unborn baby through various methods. In Queensland, perinatal mortality reviews over the last five years have reported four clinical incidents involving the use of home fetal dopplers. The four clinical incidents were of mothers, concerned by a lack of fetal movement, being falsely reassured about their baby's health with the use of a fetal home doppler. This caused a delay in presenting to a maternity facility for review and may have been a contributing factor to three babies being stillborn and one dying shortly after birth.

### Case Presentation\*

A 30-year-old woman at 36 weeks gestation presented for a routine antenatal visit with her midwife. She expressed concern about decreased fetal movements, which had been occurring since the previous evening. She had recently purchased a fetal home doppler device online to listen for her baby's heartbeat, which she believed she had been able to detect. Based on this reassurance and the fact that she had an appointment the next day, she chose not to present to a maternity facility for review, when she first noticed reduced fetal movements

Sadly, the baby was diagnosed as stillborn at the antenatal visit. The delay in seeking appropriate medical care due to the false reassurance provided from a home doppler may have contributed to the adverse outcome.

### Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)

TGA has issued clear recommendations on the use of fetal home dopplers and in addition, baby movement apps:

- All home-use fetal dopplers that were intended to be used without the supervision of a healthcare professional have been removed from the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG).
- Baby movement Apps should also not be used as a method of monitoring fetal well-being. These products are widely available for download by consumers.



\*Scenario based on a fictional clinical incident to maintain confidentiality

### Key Learnings

#### 1. **Limitations of fetal home dopplers:**

A fetal heartbeat detected with a home doppler does **not** guarantee the fetus is healthy. In the hands of untrained parents, there is a risk of either false reassurance about their baby's well-being or unnecessary panic.

#### 2. **False Reassurance:**

The lack of specialised training in using these devices can lead to false reassurance about the health of the baby. Parents may misinterpret the presence of a heartbeat on a doppler as confirmation of fetal well-being.

#### 3. **Delayed presentation for review:**

The use of home fetal monitoring devices can delay timely hospital review when parents are concerned about their baby's well-being.

### Good Practice Points

1. **Caution** expectant parents about the potential risks of fetal home dopplers & baby movement Apps. Inform expectant parents that these devices do not replace professional clinical evaluation for monitoring fetal well-being.
2. **Advise** expectant parents to contact their midwife or doctor and present to a maternity facility for timely review if they are concerned about their baby's well-being.
3. **Incorporate** the risks of fetal home doppler devices and baby movement Apps in messaging around decreased fetal movements with concerned expectant parents.
4. **Advise** expectant parents to avoid using all fetal home doppler devices.

### Useful links / References:

- [TGA: Post-market review of home-use fetal dopplers](#)
- [Update - home fetal heart monitors \(dopplers\)](#)