

# Non-Medical Use of Fetal Ultrasound

This policy statement has been reviewed by the Clinical Practice Obstetrics Committee and approved by the Executive of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

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Fetal ultrasound is a valuable resource for dating a pregnancy, for ensuring fetal health and appropriate growth, and for assessing fetal development. Ultrasound in a carefully monitored and supervised environment is also important in education and research; however, the fetus should not be exposed to ultrasound for commercial and entertainment purposes. This recommendation has been made by Health Canada<sup>1</sup> and the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA)<sup>2</sup> and by reputable professional medical and sonographic bodies.<sup>3–9</sup> SOGC also strongly opposes the non-medical use of ultrasound to view or photograph the fetus or for the sole purpose of determining fetal sex when there is no medical indication to scan. Although there have been no fetal abnormalities linked to diagnostic ultrasound, it involves targeted energy exposure to the fetus, and there remains a theoretical risk for subtle

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effects on fetal development. This is suggested by some biological effects of ultrasound observed at or near diagnostic intensities in both human studies and animal models.<sup>10–12</sup>

With the non-medical commercial use of fetal ultrasound, the maintenance of technical safeguards, operator expertise, and governing competency is no longer ensured. As a result, fetal energy exposure may not be appropriately monitored. Examinations may be of extended duration, and 4D ultrasound, Doppler, and colour-flow studies may be used, all of which further increase fetal energy exposure. With non-medical ultrasound, there is no obligation to report fetal concerns, and if fetal abnormalities are present but are not detected, parents are left with a false sense of security. In addition, there is a concern operators may attempt unsafe levels of abdominal pressure and fetal manoeuvring to obtain a suitable commercial product.

SOGC recommends that ultrasound be used prudently and that energy exposure be limited to the minimum that is medically necessary. The SOGC further recommends a complete ban on the non-medical use of fetal ultrasound and encourages government to join with the Society to find appropriate means to deal with this potential public health issue.

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