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# Call to ban pregnancy blood test over fears it encourages sex-selective abortions

By **Henry Bodkin**

A BLOOD test that shows the sex of a baby after nine weeks should be banned for routine use because it promotes sex-selective abortion, a government-backed think tank has said.

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics

has warned that unscrupulous private clinics are offering non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) to parents who only want to find out whether or not they are having a boy.

NIPT uses a blood sample taken from the pregnant woman and is seen as a breakthrough in pre-natal screening for

a range of serious conditions because it negates the risk of miscarriage caused by conventional invasive tests. From next year, the NHS will offer the test to expectant mothers to screen for the genetic conditions of Down's, Patau and Edwards' syndromes.

The test can also predict the sex of

the baby, however, and the Nuffield Council says private doctors are selling it to couples. Prof Tom Shakespeare, the chairman of the body's working group on NIPT, said: "We strongly believe there should be a ban on its use to find out the sex of the foetus."

Sex selection is not a lawful grounds

for abortion in the UK, but prosecutors have been accused of leaving the door "wide open" to the practice after blocking attempts to bring charges against doctors caught agreeing terminations based on the sex of unborn baby girls.

But the report was criticised by Genetic Alliance UK, a charity for patients

affected by chromosomal disorders, which described it as "poor quality".

A spokesman said parents should have the right to screen not just for neo-natal conditions, but also for early onset dementia and neuromuscular condition such as Parkinson's and muscular sclerosis.