

Why are safeguards needed?

The Database and some of the DNA samples linked to it have been used for genetic research without consent, including controversial attempts to predict 'ethnic appearance' from DNA. One of the companies involved also kept copies of people's genetic information.

Destroying the DNA samples once the DNA profiles used for identification purposes have been obtained, and having an independent regulator, would help prevent misuse. Time limits on how long people can be kept on the Database, unless they are convicted murderers or rapists, should be another important safeguard.

What you can do

- **Have your say:** the first public consultation on the National DNA Database outside Scotland is being held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, until 30th Jan 2007: http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/go/screen/ourwork/bioinformationuse/page_848.html
- **Write to your MP.**
- **Reclaim your DNA:** your local Chief Constable can remove you from the Database. For more information visit: [http://www.genewatch.org/sub.shtml?als\[ciid\]=539488](http://www.genewatch.org/sub.shtml?als[ciid]=539488)

GeneWatch UK believes

Important safeguards could be introduced without compromising the use of the National DNA Database in tackling crime. These include:

- destruction of DNA samples once the DNA profiles used for identification purposes have been obtained;
- an end to the practice of using the Database for genetic research without consent;
- more independent oversight to prevent misuse;
- a system of time limits on the retention of DNA profiles on the Database.

We do not think that putting everyone on the Database will solve the problems. Both the police and Government think this would be too expensive and impractical. It would also increase the potential for misuse by future governments.

Contact Details



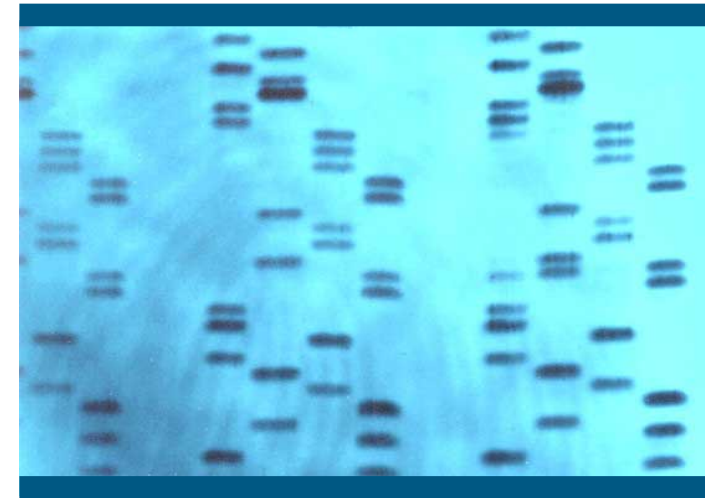
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The police National DNA Database

Now is the time to have your say



The Independent Genetics Watchdog

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Britain's police National DNA Database

Your DNA is unique to you. It can be used to trace wherever you have been. It can also reveal who your relatives are and some information about your health.

Britain's police National DNA Database is the largest in the world. It is a computer record of DNA profiles (a string of numbers used for identification purposes) from about 3.5 million people, over 5% of the population, and has been expanding rapidly due to a series of changes in the law. The original DNA samples are stored permanently, by the companies that analyse them for the police.

Since April 2004, in England and Wales, the police routinely take DNA without consent from anyone arrested for any recordable offence including begging, being drunk and disorderly, or taking part in an illegal demonstration. People are kept permanently on the DNA Database even if they are never charged, or are acquitted.

The DNA Database now includes more than:

- 124,000 people who were arrested but had no further action taken;
- 300,000 children and young people (aged 10 to 18), at least 24,000 of whom were arrested but had no further action taken;
- Up to 3 out of 4 young black men (aged 15 to 34).

In Scotland, the law is different and DNA cannot be kept permanently from innocent people.

What are the issues?

The use of DNA has been an important breakthrough in tackling crime. Few people disagree with taking DNA samples from suspects during an investigation, or with keeping DNA from crime scenes on a database. However, putting individuals on a database is different.

The aim of adding people to the National DNA Database is to identify people who may have committed a past crime. The process involves looking for a match between an individual's DNA profile and all crime scene DNA profiles stored on the Database.

Sometimes this can help to find the perpetrator of a crime. The main danger is the possibility of wrongly identifying someone as a suspect. Although many DNA matches are reported every day, matches are not convictions – many matches are with innocent passers-by or victims of crime.

Once an investigation is over, the DNA profiles taken from individuals are no longer needed. However, keeping people on the Database for longer allows matches to be made between their DNA and that from any future crime. This might deter someone from committing a serious offence or it might make them easier to catch if they do. However, this form of surveillance could also be open to abuse.

Why are time limits important?

Keeping people permanently on the DNA Database increases the likelihood of misuse by future governments (for example, to track political protestors, find out who they are related to, or refuse visas or a job to people who have been arrested).

Innocent people could be removed at the end of an investigation, and others after a fixed time depending on the seriousness of their offence. The police could still use DNA to check whether someone has committed a past crime. But they would not keep that person as a suspect on the Database forever, unless they had committed a serious offence. Time limits would save money because the police would not have to pay for so many DNA samples to be stored.

Time limits are unlikely to reduce the chance of solving a serious crime.

Making the National DNA Database bigger has not increased the chances of solving a crime using DNA.

More than a million extra people have been added since April 2004 but this has not increased the DNA detection rate (the likelihood that someone is prosecuted for a crime). This is probably because many people now kept on the Database are not very likely to commit future crimes in which DNA evidence is useful.