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Biotechnology and bioethics: what it's all about



Box 1.3 Case study

In 2009 a private company in the UK started marketing an 'over-the-counter' paternity testing kit. Customers send samples of their own DNA and that of the child whose paternity is in doubt and, for a fee, get results within 5 days (or 24 hours for a higher fee).

Two adults must consent to the procedure: the putative father and the mother of the child. Proof of identity is required and one adult will be telephoned to check that the consequences of possible test results have been considered.

Many have argued that such kits should be banned on the grounds that the consent requirements are too easy to get around, and that children may be summarily rejected by the man who has brought them up if he discovers he is not their biological father.

Until biotechnology came up with the techniques facilitating the development of such products paternity had to be taken on trust. Many think this was morally a more desirable situation, and that society should therefore ban or at least regulate the use of such a product. Others argue that men have the right to know their own children, and children the right to know their own fathers.⁶