

# ABORTION FAQs

In the ongoing abortion debate in Ireland there is a lot of misinformation, misconceptions and stretching of the truth. In this document we aim to give informative, factual, and clear answers to the most frequent questions we have been asked and expect to be asked in the run up to a referendum and beyond.

At the Abortion Rights Campaign our goal is for free, safe and legal abortion to be available in Ireland to any woman who requests one and we believe (and research has consistently shown) that criminalizing abortions doesn't reduce abortions – it only puts women in danger and makes access more difficult.

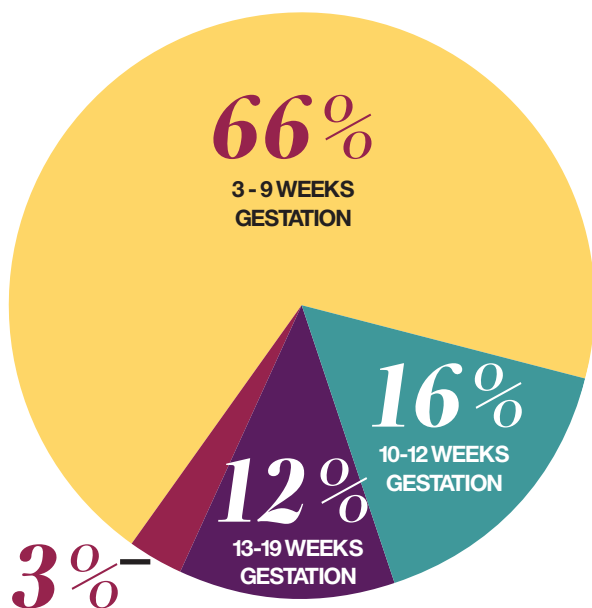
If you have a question that isn't covered below or just want to get in touch with the campaign please feel free to email us: [info@abortionrights.ie](mailto:info@abortionrights.ie)

## WHAT SHOULD BE THE TIME LIMIT ON ABORTION ACCESS?

In countries where abortion is legal and accessible, late term abortions are very rare. In the U.S 92% of abortions are carried out within the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. Only 1.2% take place on or after 21 weeks.

When late term abortions do take place they are normally due to the discovery of a fatal foetal abnormality or concern for the health or life of the pregnant person.

Making abortion legal and accessible means abortions take place earlier and are safer for women. When asked, the majority of women who have had abortions say they would have liked to have had them sooner, but financial limitations, lack of knowledge about, and difficulty in accessing, abortion services can cause delays in abortion access, which in turn leads to more late term abortions. Due to our restrictive laws and cost of travel, women who live in Ireland tend to have abortions later than those who live in the UK. 1/3 of Irish abortions are carried out at 10 weeks compared to 1/5 of UK women. Liberalising abortion laws here would mean abortions are carried out earlier.



Abortion statistics in England and Wales for 2014 from the UK Department of Health

## WHY SHOULD ABORTION BE FREE?

At the Abortion Rights Campaign we believe that abortion should be free, safe and legal and covered under the HSE like any other health care procedure. All maternity related health care is free to women living in Ireland, abortion is part of health care and so should also be free.

## SHOULD ABORTION BE AVAILABLE ON DEMAND?

Abortion should be available to any woman who asks for one. The reason, be it health concerns, rape, fatal foetal abnormality, or simply not wanting to remain pregnant, should be an issue only for the pregnant person, her doctor and anyone she wishes to tell.

"Abortion on Demand" is emotive language designed to demonise women who have abortions and paint them as unreasonable and demanding. Women should not be forced into carrying pregnancies they don't want and should not be judged for making the decision that is right for them.

## SHOULD ABORTIONS BE ALLOWED FOR SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THEIR BABY WILL HAVE A SERIOUS ILLNESS, CONDITION OR DISABILITY?

Abortion should be available where a woman asks for one. If a woman feels unable to raise a child with a serious illness or condition she should be entitled to an abortion if she feels that is the right choice for her.

We should not be here to judge the decisions made by women but rather ensure they have the agency and legal right to make those decisions. Whatever the reason for abortion the pregnant person is the best position to make decisions about her own circumstances and capacity.

Abortion due to disability or serious illness in the foetus is rare. A study carried out in 2009 in the UK showed that only 1% of abortions were carried out due to disability.

## DO WOMEN REGRET HAVING AN ABORTION?

Studies show that the vast majority of women do not regret their abortion. The American Psychological Association (APA) and the Johns Hopkins University have both carried out separate large-scale reviews of research on abortion and mental health. Both established that the large majority of women don't regret having chosen abortion. Research by the HSE's Crisis Pregnancy Programme in 2010 showed that 87% of women in Ireland who had an abortion said it was 'the right outcome' for them.

## MAIN BARRIERS TO TRAVEL

### FINANCIAL



### LEGAL STATUS



### CHILDCARE



### HEALTH



Of course it's possible to regret having had an abortion, possible to experience feelings of regret or loss afterwards, and we do not wish to erase the experiences of women who do. However it is also possible to feel a sense of relief and closure after having an abortion. Similarly, it's possible to regret having placed a child for adoption, having adopted a child, having given birth, not having given birth – or not having had the choice not to give birth. Such is the variety of human experiences and emotions.

Significantly, restricting women's access to abortion does provoke feelings of depression and anxiety and does increase the risk of suicide in pregnancy. This burden is merely exacerbated by the isolation and stigmatisation felt by those compelled to travel overseas for access to safe, legal abortion services.

### WHOSE CONSENT SHOULD BE NEEDED IN ORDER TO TERMINATE A PREGNANCY? SHOULD THE FATHER GET TO HAVE A SAY?

We believe in a woman's right to choose. While a woman can discuss her options with her doctor, her partner, and whoever else she wishes, the final choice on what to do with her body should rest with the woman alone. This includes continuing with a pregnancy or choosing abortion.

### HOW OLD SHOULD A PERSON BE TO GET AN ABORTION WITHOUT PARENTAL CONSENT?

Consent to any medical procedure is best covered by medical guidelines. Typically in Ireland a person over 16 can consent to treatment on their own behalf and in some cases consent of a mature minor (under 16) on their own can be sufficient. That being said, a situation where a teenager is forced into carrying a pregnancy she doesn't want because of the wishes of her parents would be unacceptable. Women and girls of all ages should be afforded agency over their own bodies.

### SHOULD ABORTION BE USED FOR FINANCIAL REASONS?

While in an ideal world financial concerns would not stop a woman from having a baby, the reality is that many women simply cannot afford to raise a child. Sometimes this is because they are young, perhaps still in school or college, or without a secure job. Other times they would not be able to support the children they already have if they were to have another.

Sometimes the only option for these women is abortion. Currently the cost of travelling from Ireland to the UK for an abortion is upwards of €1000, and while abortion pills are much cheaper,

women who take them here risk up to 14 years in prison. These limited options for women already in precarious financial situations are not good enough. These women need access to free, safe and legal abortion in Ireland.

### WOMEN WHO WANT ABORTIONS CAN JUST GO TO THE UK OR OTHER PLACES, WHY DO WE NEED TO LEGALISE IT HERE?

Unfortunately for many people in need of abortion access the short trip to the UK is not as simple as it might sound. There are 4 main barriers to travel:

**1 Financial:** A trip to the UK for an abortion can cost upwards of €1000. For many people this is a prohibitive amount of money and not something they can raise easily. Women have had to borrow from friends or family, or take out loans from the bank. Many of these women who cannot raise the money resort to desperate measures to end their pregnancies. Without the services of the Abortion Support Network who help many women raise the money they need for an abortion there would be many more deaths from botched abortion attempts.

**2 Legal status:** For many migrant and refugee women, travelling outside Ireland for an abortion is impossible due to their legal status. Many of these women arrive here unaware of Ireland's strict abortion laws, until it is too late. Trans\* men can also have issues travelling due to the gender on their passport or ID, if they have not yet gone through the legal recognition process. The horrific case of Ms Y in 2014 shows what happens when people who are unable to travel are forced to carry pregnancies against their will.

**3 Childcare:** It is reported in the US that just over 60% of women who have abortions already have 1 or more children. For Irish women with children seeking abortion in the UK, organising childcare is an issue. Many women cannot tell people they are travelling for an abortion and if they cannot arrange or afford someone to mind their children while they travel abroad, they will not be able to go.

**4 Health:** Abortion is legal in Ireland only where there is an immediate risk to the life of the pregnant person. This means that women who need abortions for health reasons still need to travel. If a woman has a condition that limits her mobility or means she cannot fly, this causes a barrier to travel.


## WHEN DOES LIFE BEGIN/IS ABORTION MURDER?

This is often considered the most difficult question about abortion. For many pro-life advocates, life begins at the moment of conception. For others life begins at birth. And for others still life begins at some part in between; perhaps when the foetus reaches 23 weeks (the cusp of viability—where it can survive outside the womb); perhaps at 6 weeks when the embryo can sometimes develop a heartbeat; or perhaps at week 14 when the brain impulses begin to fire. In medical language, the fusion of a sperm and egg results in a single cell called a zygote, which, as it goes through subsequent growth, becomes a blastocyst, morula, embryo and then a foetus. Only after birth is it scientifically correct to use the word ‘baby.’

The point is, nobody really knows when life begins, or if there is any specific point in time that can be pinpointed. Viability is a sliding scale: the chance of survival outside the womb increases dramatically between 24 and 28 weeks, from about 40% at the beginning of the 24th week to more than 80% four weeks later. While some people fiercely maintain that life begins at conception, science cannot provide a definite answer to this question, and in Ireland, these fiercely held views of some are denying human rights to all women.

Ultimately debates about whether or not a foetus has ‘personhood’ take the focus away from the experiences of women with unwanted pregnancies.

Realistically, up until the point of viability, the foetus needs the woman’s body in order to survive, and this is the important point. Even if you believe that life begins at conception, we have no legal obligation to keep others alive by sacrificing our own bodies. For example: no one is forced to donate blood even though people would die without blood transfusions. No one is forced to give bone marrow even though cancer patients need it to survive. And no one is forced to donate their kidneys to someone in need of a transplant, even if they are a match, even if the person would die without them, even if the person in need is a child.



**ACTUAL SIZE OF FOETUS  
AT 10 WEEKS. MOST  
TERMINATIONS HAPPEN  
BEFORE THE 10TH WEEK  
WHERE ABORTION IS  
READILY AVAILABLE**

Now, some people may feel you are morally obliged to do these things, but moral obligation and legal obligation are not the same thing, and in fact we would all be horrified if suddenly the entire country were legally obliged to give up their organs to those who need them. But this is what is demanded of women in Ireland, women are forced under the law to use their bodies as incubators and maintain the “life” of another. Under the 8th Amendment, a living, breathing, grown woman with thoughts, emotions, feelings, and memories is considered equal in rights to a foetus which up until 10 weeks is no bigger than a grape. Women’s lives are worth more than the value placed on them under the Irish Constitution.

The question of when life begins is an academic one, the suffering of women who are denied safe abortions is real. Being pro-choice does not mean we push women towards having abortions or assume the right to declare when life begins. However, criminalizing abortion has been proven to endanger women without reducing the number of abortions. Questions about morality and when life begins cannot be answered simply or in general statements – we trust women to make their own decisions.

## ARE YOU PRO-ABORTION?

Being pro-choice means that we believe every woman should have the right to choose whether to go through with a pregnancy or not. We believe women should have the right to a safe, legal abortion if that is her choice, but the term ‘pro-abortion’ suggests that we actively encourage women to have abortions, which is not the case. We support women whatever choice they make, including abortion or continuing with pregnancy.

## ISN'T ABORTION DANGEROUS?

No, it is a very safe procedure when carried out with medical supervision in a safe and legal context. Early medical abortion with pills is less risky than surgical abortions as any surgical procedure has some risks. However, legal abortion is markedly safer than childbirth – the risk of death associated with childbirth is approximately 14 times higher than that with abortion.

As with any medical procedure complications are possible, but they are rare (especially for medical abortion). Due to our restrictive abortion laws, women living in Ireland are at more risk than normal when having an abortion. This is due to a number of factors:

**1 Unknown quality of abortion pills:** many women who opt for early medical abortion in Ireland will order pills online. While organisations such as Women On Web and Women Help Women provide safe abortion pills to countries where it is illegal, there are many other disreputable sites selling pills of unknown quality to women in Ireland. There is always a risk when taking medicine from an untrusted source.

**ONLY 1% OF ABORTIONS  
IN THE UK WERE CARRIED  
OUT DUE TO DISABILITY**

**87% OF WOMEN IN  
IRELAND WHO HAD  
AN ABORTION SAID  
IT WAS ‘THE RIGHT  
OUTCOME’ FOR THEM**

**2 Doctors in the UK and other countries do not have full access to medical records.** Current legislation prohibits abortion providers abroad requesting complete medical files for the patients they treat, which unnecessarily puts some of them at risk. For example, some people require medicines to stop them bleeding if they bleed more heavily than others, or they may be allergic to certain antibiotics or anaesthetics. This information is in our medical files and without access to them an abortion procedure becomes more risky. It is best practice for people to receive care from their own doctor who is familiar with their medical history whenever possible, and no one should have to undergo a procedure by a doctor who can't access their medical records.

**3 Short window of time:** Many women will travel for an abortion without telling people where they are going. They often fly over in the morning and come back in the evening or early the next day. This means that they are not taking the adequate rest time advised by abortion providers, they are not going to the check up which is often required the day after the procedure, and they are flying which is not advised directly after any medical procedure. All of this puts women from Ireland at a higher risk of complication.

**4 Unsafe home methods:** Women who cannot afford to travel and cannot access abortion pills put their life at risk by trying home methods to carry out an abortion. Obviously these methods put women at a much greater risk of complications or death. Unsafe, backstreet abortions which women resort to when they have no other option account for 14.5% of maternal deaths globally, and almost all of these deaths happen in countries with restrictive laws.

When carried out by trained medical personnel in appropriate facilities, abortion is as safe as any other procedure. Safe abortions are carried out by medical professionals in clinics: making abortion free, safe and legal here in Ireland is the only way to ensure women in Ireland are getting the best possible care.

### **IF WE MAKE ABORTION LEGAL, WON'T PEOPLE HAVE THEM EVEN WHEN THEY SHOULDN'T/USE ABORTION AS CONTRACEPTION?**

Stats from the UK show that the majority of women who chose abortion were using contraception at the time they became pregnant. However we need to be mindful that no type of contraception is 100% effective and some types are not suitable for every woman.

Scientific research published earlier this year found that decriminalising abortion hasn't been shown to increase abortion rates. In France and Spain, minor increases in abortion rates happened for two to three years after it was legalised, but this was probably explained by the fact that secret abortions are always underreported. Since then, rates have dropped, and Portugal, where abortion is legal and widely available, has one of the lowest abortion rates in the world.

In addition, even when a pregnancy is a planned one where a couple is looking to conceive there are many reasons they may need to end the pregnancy: such as a risk to health of the pregnant person or due to fatal foetal abnormalities, etc.

### **WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN ABORTION PROCEDURE?**

Abortion can be performed medically or surgically. Medical abortion involves taking a pill to induce contractions and is the recommended method; however, it is only possible to use this method early in pregnancy. Due to logistical and financial difficulties in travelling abroad, Irish women are often forced to have later, surgical abortions, which involves the physical removal of the foetus. Ireland's laws prohibit people receiving accurate information about abortion: doctors face criminal charges even if they advise a patient about the best option for her. Overseas organisations such as the British Pregnancy Advice Service or the Abortion Support Network may be able to answer questions about the procedure.

Censoring reliable information on abortion to women who need it is a human rights issue in itself, and puts women at risk. For example, last year over 1,000 abortion pills were seized by customs, indicating that many women have in desperation illegally imported pills. It's very easy to find any kind of medicine for sale online, but not all of these sites are genuine. There are doctor-led, bona fide organisations which offer consultations to vulnerable women and will provide them with abortion pills if a medical abortion is safe and suitable for them. Current legislation prohibits us even letting women know about these websites, leaving them very unnecessarily vulnerable if they turn to the internet for help.

### **WHY IS THE CONSTITUTION SO IMPORTANT?**

Ireland's Constitution is the supreme form of law in Ireland, the Courts and the Government have to act and make decisions that are consistent with the Constitution. Each time the Government wishes to change or amend the Constitution, it must do it by holding a referendum. A referendum gives the people of Ireland the opportunity to express their opinion and vote for or against the proposed change or amendment.

Since our politicians are only allowed to make laws which do not contradict the Constitution, it is legally impossible for the Government to bring in free, safe and legal abortion under the current Constitution. This is because of Section 40.3.3, which was added by referendum in 1983 and is also known as the 8th Amendment. It states: "*The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.*". If this section is removed by referendum the Government will be legally able to bring in more progressive legislation on abortion.

### **HOW DO YOU CALL A REFERENDUM?**

In order to call a constitutional referendum, the Government (a majority of both the Dail and the Seanad) must vote in favour of a Bill calling a referendum.

### **WHAT IS THE WHIP SYSTEM?**

The Whip System is the term used when all of the elected representatives in a particular political position vote the same way based on how they are instructed to vote by the party leadership, for example if they were told to vote against a proposal to have a referendum on the 8th Amendment. This means that even if a politician does not agree with the position of their party they will still vote according to the party position. The opposite of the Whip System is a Free Vote. Several political parties have said that they will allow their TDs to have a Free Vote on repealing the 8th Amendment if a referendum is proposed.

## HOW AM I REPRESENTED IN THIS DEBATE?

To have the opportunity to vote on repealing the 8th Amendment, we must first convince our elected representatives to hold a referendum. We have different types of elected representatives:

TD's, who are your national representatives in the Dáil. TDs are extremely important as they get to vote on whether or not to hold a referendum. Ensuring your TDs know your position on abortion is an important step in making a referendum on the 8th Amendment a reality.

Senators who sit in the Seanad, and who are appointed by the Taoiseach or elected by vocational panels and university graduates.

MEPs who are members of the European Parliament. MEPS don't get to vote on holding a referendum but they are still important and influential politicians worth engaging with on this issue.

## HOW DO I LET MY REPRESENTATIVES KNOW THAT I WANT THEM TO REPEAL THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT?

Find out who your TDs are by visiting [whoismytd.com](http://whoismytd.com) or calling in to your local Citizens Information Centre.

Email and write to your TDs explaining that this issue is important to you and you will only vote for a candidate who is pro-choice and makes a definite commitment to repealing the 8th Amendment.

The most powerful way that you can tell your TD you want change is to meet them face to face. Some politicians have public clinics where they meet their representatives to discuss issues of concern to them. If your TD does not have a regular clinic you can contact them to ask them to meet you.

## SOURCES

[www.healthcentre.org.uk/abortion/abortion-facts-statistics.html](http://www.healthcentre.org.uk/abortion/abortion-facts-statistics.html)

[www.efc.org.uk/young\\_people/facts\\_about\\_abortion/disability.html](http://www.efc.org.uk/young_people/facts_about_abortion/disability.html)

[www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/mental-health.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/mental-health.pdf)

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[www.guttmacher.org/media/presskits/abortion-US/statsandfacts.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/media/presskits/abortion-US/statsandfacts.html)

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