

Get In the Know About Pregnancy, Contraception and Abortion

Pregnancy

How many of the world's women are in their childbearing years?

* About 1.45 billion women worldwide, including more than 62 million women in the United States, are between the ages of 15 and 44. (1)

How many women become pregnant each year?

* Each year, some 210 million women worldwide become pregnant. About 63% of pregnancies result in live births and about 22% in abortions; the remainder end in miscarriage. (2)

How many U.S. women become pregnant each year?

* About six million women become pregnant annually. Nearly two-thirds of these pregnancies result in live births and about a quarter in abortions; the remainder end in miscarriage. (3)

What proportion of pregnancies are unplanned?

* In the United States, about half of all pregnancies are unintended, and half of unintended pregnancies are terminated by abortion. Worldwide, almost two in five women who become pregnant have either an abortion or an unplanned birth. (4)

How many women die each year from pregnancy-related causes?

* An estimated 529,000 women die from pregnancy-related causes worldwide each year; 13% of these deaths are related to unsafe abortion. (5)

How high are teenage pregnancy rates in the United States?

* Teenage pregnancy, birth and abortion rates in the United States have been declining for a decade. Nevertheless, the United States continues to have a substantially higher teenage pregnancy rate than most other developed countries—for example, nearly twice the rate in Australia or Canada and more than four times the rate in France. (6)

Why has the teenage pregnancy rate in the United States declined?

* Between 1988 and 1995, most (75%) of the decline in teenage pregnancy was due to improved contraceptive use. The remaining 25% was due to reduced sexual activity. (7)

Prevention and Contraception

Contraceptive Use in the United States

How much of her lifetime does the average woman spend trying to avoid an unintended pregnancy?

* The typical U.S. woman wants—and has—two children. She therefore spends roughly three decades trying to avoid becoming pregnant. (8) In general, women worldwide are sexually active but do not want to have a child throughout most of their childbearing years. (9)

Do most women in the United States use contraceptives?

* More than nine in 10 women who are at risk of unintended pregnancy (women who are sexually active, able to become pregnant, and neither pregnant nor trying to become pregnant) are using a contraceptive method. (10)

How well do contraceptives work?

* Modern contraceptive methods are highly effective—so much so that nearly half (47%) of all unintended pregnancies in the United States occur among the small proportion (7%) of women at risk of unintended pregnancy who do not practice contraception. Women using contraceptives experience the following failure rates:

Failure rate: the percentage of women using contraceptives who will become pregnant during their first year of use, by method

Method	% of women who will become pregnant, according to type of use	
	Perfect use	Typical use
Cervical cap	18	28
Diaphragm	6	16
Implant	0.05	1
Injectable	0.3	3
IUD (Copper T 380A)	0.6	1
Male condom	3	15
No method	85	85
Periodic abstinence (calendar method)	9	25
Pill (combined [estrogen–progestin] oral contraceptive)	0.1	8
Spermicides	6	29
Sponge	15	30
Tubal sterilization	0.5	0.7
Vasectomy	0.1	0.2
Withdrawal	4	27

(For sources, see reference 11.)

What about women who were using contraception and still became pregnant?

* Sometimes even women who use their contraceptive method “perfectly” become pregnant. Condoms may break or slip, and even highly effective hormonal methods are not 100% effective, even when used correctly.

What are the most common contraceptives used in the United States?

* Female sterilization, the pill and the male condom, in that order, are the most widely used methods, according to the most recent national data available, which is for 1995. Patterns may have changed, however, in recent years. (12)

Public Funding for Contraception

How do poor women afford contraceptives?

* More than one-third of U.S. women need publicly supported contraceptive services and supplies because their income is below 250% of the federal poverty level. Publicly funded family planning services help women to prevent an estimated 1.3 million unplanned pregnancies and 630,000 abortions each year. (13)

How many U.S. women need publicly funded contraceptives, and why?

* Some 11.6 million women aged 20–44 need publicly supported contraceptive services because they are at risk of unwanted pregnancy and have incomes below 250% of the federal poverty level. An additional 4.9 million sexually active teenagers also need publicly supported services. (14)

What proportion of women obtain publicly funded reproductive health and family planning services?

* One in six U.S. women who received recent contraceptive or reproductive health care obtained these services at a publicly funded clinic. (15)

Contraceptive Use Among Women Seeking Abortion

How many women who had an abortion in 2000 were using contraception?

* Fifty-four percent of U.S. women who had an abortion in 2000 were using a method in the month they became pregnant. (16)

Does this mean that contraceptives are ineffective 54% of the time?

* No. Neither contraceptives nor the people using them are perfect, but failure rates for modern methods are very low when the method is used perfectly. (Fewer than one in 100 women become pregnant in their first year of using the IUD, female sterilization, the injectable, vasectomy or the pill.) However, because women who are using contraception are motivated to prevent an unplanned birth, a high proportion of these women will seek an abortion should they become accidentally pregnant. (17)

What proportion of U.S. women who had an abortion in 2000 had never used contraception?

* Eight percent had never used a contraceptive method—down from 11% in 1996. (18)

Why do women using contraception get pregnant?

* Women who use contraception and become pregnant offer a number of explanations, including their own inconsistent use of the method and their condoms' slipping out of place. Some 76% of women who had an abortion after becoming pregnant while using the pill, and 49% while using the condom, have reported that they had used the method inconsistently; 42% of women who had an abortion after becoming pregnant while using the condom have reported that the condom slipped out of place. (19)

Why did some women not use contraception in the month they became pregnant?

* Women give many reasons for not using contraception in the month they became pregnant. About one-third say they did not think they could get pregnant, and another third state that they had concerns about contraceptive side effects or had had problems with methods in the past. More than one in 10 report having had a problem accessing contraception. One-quarter said they did not expect to have sex, and just over 1% say that they had unwanted sex. Among minors, nearly one in six say they were afraid that if they used contraceptives, their parents would find out that they were having sex. (20)

Emergency Contraception (EC)

What is emergency contraception (EC)?

* Emergency contraception, sometimes called the "morning-after pill," consists of one or more of the same hormones found in ordinary birth control pills. When taken in a concentrated dosage within 72 hours after unprotected intercourse, these hormones can prevent pregnancy. (21)

Is the "morning-after pill" the same as the "abortion pill?"

* No. The "morning-after pill," more accurately called emergency contraception, is not the "abortion pill," also called mifepristone, Mifeprex or RU-486. When taken within 72 hours after unprotected intercourse, emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy, but it has no effect on an established pregnancy. (22)

How effective is emergency contraception (EC)?

* Research suggests that some types of EC reduce the pregnancy risk of a woman who has had unprotected intercourse by about 89%. (23)

Has emergency contraception (EC) had an impact on abortion in the United States?

* EC use prevented about 51,000 abortions in 2000. This estimate is based on the number of women having abortions who had used EC unsuccessfully, and it assumes that for each such woman, three abortions were prevented. (24)

Contraception Worldwide

What are the benefits of providing contraceptive services worldwide?

* Satisfying the unmet need for contraceptive services in developing countries would avert about 52 million unintended pregnancies annually, which, in turn, would save more than 1.5 million women's lives. (25)

How much would it cost to provide contraceptive services to the women who need them?

* The cost of providing contraceptive services to the 201 million women in developing countries with unmet need (those using traditional methods or no method) would be approximately \$3.9 billion per year. (26)

Abortion

Abortion Incidence

How many women around the world have abortions each year?

* Each year, women have an estimated 46 million abortions worldwide. Of these, 20 million are clandestine abortions and are generally unsafe. More than three-quarters of all abortions occur in developing countries. (27)

How many abortions occur in the United States?

* In 2000, 1.31 million abortions were performed in the United States. From 1973 through 2000, more than 39 million legal abortions occurred in the United States. (28)

Does the number include repeat abortions?

* Yes. In 2000, nearly three-quarters of all women having abortions had been pregnant before. Six in 10 women undergoing an abortion had had a previous birth, and almost half had had a previous abortion (approximately one-third had experienced both a birth and an abortion). (29)

What is the U.S. abortion rate?

* The abortion rate is the number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44 in a one-year period. In 2000, the abortion rate was 21.3, meaning that about 2% of all U.S. women aged 15-44 had an abortion in 2000. (30)

What is the U.S. abortion ratio?

* The abortion ratio is the proportion of pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) ending in abortion. In 2000, the abortion ratio was 25%, meaning that one-quarter of all U.S. pregnancies ended in abortion. (31)

Is abortion becoming less common in the United States?

* Yes. After increasing between 1973 and 1980, the abortion rate has been declining overall and for most subgroups. However, it increased in 2000 among poor and low-income women (those living at less than twice the poverty level or less than \$28,300 for a family of three) and women on Medicaid. (32)

What were the trends in abortion in the United States over the past 30 years?

* The number of annual legal abortions and the abortion rate increased through the 1970s, leveled off in the 1980s and fell during the 1990s. (33)

What proportion of U.S. women will have an abortion in their lifetime?

* On the basis of current abortion rates, one in three American women will have had an abortion by age 45. (34)

Which U.S. states have the highest abortion rates (by state of residence)?

* New York has the highest abortion rate (38.1 per 1,000 women) followed by New Jersey (36.5/1,000), Maryland (32.5/1,000), California (31.1/1,000), Nevada (30.6/1,000) and Florida (29.9/1,000). The abortion rate in Washington, D.C. is 39.7/1,000. (35)

Which U.S. states have the lowest abortion rate (by state of residence)?

* The states with the lowest rates of abortion are South Dakota (6.4 per 1,000 women), Utah (6.6/1,000), North Dakota (6.9/1,000), Kentucky (7.5/1,000), West Virginia (7.9/1,000) and Idaho (9.9/1,000). (36)

Characteristics of Women Having Abortions

What is the typical age of a woman having an abortion?

* The majority of U.S. women having abortions (56%) are in their 20s. (37)

Do women who have an abortion want children?

* Six in 10 U.S. women having abortions are already mothers. More than half intend to have (more) children in the future. (38)

Do women with religious affiliations have abortions?

* Nearly eight in 10 U.S. women obtaining an abortion report a religious affiliation (43% Protestant, 27% Catholic and 8% other). Among all women aged 15-44, 51% are Protestant, 28% are Catholic and 5% belong to other religions. (39)

Are there rural-urban differences in abortion?

* Most reproductive-age women in the United States (79%) live in metropolitan areas; women in these areas account for 88% of all U.S. abortions. Most abortion providers (95%) are also located in metropolitan areas, increasing access to abortion there. (40)

What is the racial or ethnic background of women who have abortions?

* No racial or ethnic group makes up a majority of women having abortions: 41% are white, 32% are black and 20% are Hispanic. (41)

What racial or ethnic group has the highest abortion rate?

* The overall abortion rate is 21 per 1,000 U.S. women (i.e., each year 2.1% of all women of reproductive age have an abortion). Black and Hispanic women have higher abortion rates than non-Hispanic white women do. (The rates are 49/1,000 and 33/1,000 among black and Hispanic women, respectively, vs. 13/1,000 among non-Hispanic white women.) (42) Black and Hispanic women have higher abortion rates primarily because they have higher rates of unintended pregnancy.

What are the trends in the characteristics of women having abortions?

* Over time, women having abortions have become increasingly likely to be poor, nonwhite and unmarried, and already have one or more children. (43)

Why do women have abortions?

* Most U.S. women cite more than one factor contributing to their decision to have an abortion: Three-quarters say that having a baby would interfere with work, school or other responsibilities; about two-thirds say they cannot afford to have a child; and half say they do not want to be a single parent or are having problems with their husband or partner. (44)

Timing of Abortion

When in pregnancy do most women have abortions?

* In the United States, nearly nine in 10 abortions occur in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and 56% occur in the first eight weeks. (45) The availability of medical abortion (the “abortion pill,” or mifepristone) and new techniques that allow surgical abortions to be performed earlier in pregnancy are likely to reinforce the trend toward earlier abortions.

Are an increasing proportion of women having their abortion earlier in pregnancy?

* Yes, an increasing proportion of abortions are performed early in pregnancy. (46) In addition, in 2000, more providers were offering both medical and surgical abortion early in pregnancy than had previously. A majority of nonhospital providers now offer abortion services beginning at five weeks from the last menstrual period (about three weeks after fertilization), and some even earlier. (47)

How many women have so-called “partial birth” abortions?

* The term “partial-birth” abortion does not refer to any particular medical procedure. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the term is not recognized by the medical community. (48)

What about dilation and extraction (D&X) abortions?

* Dilation and extraction (D&X) abortions are rare. An estimated 31 providers reported 2,200 D&X abortions in 2000. Overall, approximately 0.17% of all abortions performed in 2000 were done via D&X. The majority of these procedures were performed in the second trimester, previability. (49)

Medical Abortion

What is mifepristone?

* Mifepristone, also known as the abortion pill or RU-486, is prescribed for early, nonsurgical abortion.

When was mifepristone approved for use in medical abortion in the United States?

* Mifepristone (RU-486) was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in September 2000, and distribution began in November 2000. It had been approved in France 12 years earlier, in 1988.

How many medical abortions occur in the United States each year?

* About 37,000 medical abortions were performed during the first six months of 2001, representing about 6% of all abortions during that period. Distribution of mifepristone in the United States did not begin until November 2000, so this proportion is likely to have increased since then. (50) According to estimates from the manufacturer of mifepristone (also known as Mifeprex or RU-486), more than 100,000 women used mifepristone for medical abortion between September 2000 and September 2002. (51)

How many providers offer medical abortion?

* During the first six months of 2001, about 600 abortion providers performed medical abortions (33% of all providers). (52)

Abortion Providers

What types of facilities provide abortions in the United States?

* Abortions are performed at clinics (833 nationwide, representing 46% of providers), hospitals (603, representing 33% of providers) and physicians' offices (383, representing 21% of providers). (53)

Where are most abortions performed?

* The vast majority of U.S. abortions (93%) are performed at clinics. The remaining procedures take place at hospitals (5% of abortions) and physicians' offices (2% of abortions). (54)

Is the number of providers offering abortion falling?

* Yes. There were 1,819 abortion providers in 2000, down 11% from 1996. For comparison, the number of providers fell 14% between 1992 and 1996. (55)

Which states have the fewest abortion providers?

* Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming each have five or fewer abortion providers.

* More than 95% of counties in Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and West Virginia have no abortion provider.

* Only Hawaii has an abortion provider in every county. (56)

How early in pregnancy do providers offer abortions?

* In 2001, 37% of providers offered either medical or surgical abortion services at four weeks' gestation or earlier (i.e., four weeks from the woman's last menstrual period), up from 7% in 1993. (57)

How late in pregnancy do providers offer abortions?

* Some 97% of providers offer abortions at eight weeks, and 86% do so at 12 weeks; but provision drops off steeply after that. The proportion of providers offering abortion at 20 weeks increased from 22% in 1993 to 33% in 2001. (58)

Why are more providers offering abortions at earlier gestations?

* The use of new technologies (such as high-resolution ultrasound) increase the success rate of early surgical abortions without elevating risks, and an increasing number of providers are performing such early abortions. In addition, with the introduction of early medical abortion, women have been given another early option. (59)

How hard is it for U.S. women to reach an abortion provider?

* Eighty-seven percent of U.S. counties have no abortion provider; a third of women aged 15-44 live in those counties. Nearly one in four women obtaining an abortion travel more than 50 miles to reach a provider, and 8% travel more than 100 miles. (60) It is not known how many women are unable to obtain an abortion because of distance from a provider.

What proportion of abortion providers experience harassment?

* In 2000, 56% of all nonhospital providers, and 82% of those providing 400 or more abortions per year, experienced some kind of harassment. (61)

What types of harassment do abortion providers experience?

* Picketing is the most common type: 80% of large providers have experienced picketing. Other, more severe forms of harassment, such as physical contact and vandalism (e.g., jammed locks or other physical damage), have declined over the past decade. (62)

Has antiabortion activity around clinic sites been partially responsible for the decline in abortion rates?

* Although antiabortion activity has probably affected some women seeking abortions, and provider harassment in general has probably hampered some providers' ability to offer services, harassment does not appear to have had a large impact on the abortion rate. (63)

Cost of Abortion

How much does a surgical abortion cost?

* In 2001, the average charge for a surgical abortion at 10 weeks' gestation was \$468; but since most abortions in the United States are performed at low-cost clinics, women on average paid \$372 for the procedure. (64)

How much does a medical abortion cost?

* In 2001, the average charge for a medical abortion was \$487. (65)

Who pays for abortions?

* Some 74% of women pay for abortions with their own money; 13% of abortions are covered by Medicaid, and 13% are billed directly to private insurance. Some women who pay for the procedure themselves may receive insurance reimbursement later. (66)

Does the U.S. government help poor women who need abortions pay for them?

* Congress has barred the use of federal Medicaid funds to pay for abortions, except when the woman's life would be endangered by a full-term pregnancy, or in cases of rape or incest. However, as of March 2004, 17 states used their own funds to subsidize abortion for poor women. (67)

How many states prohibit public funding of abortions?

* A total of 32 states and the District of Columbia prohibit public funding of abortions, except in cases of life endangerment, rape or incest. South Dakota only provides public funding of abortions when necessary to protect the woman's life, which is not in compliance with the federal Medicaid statute. (68)

How do abortion rates vary among Medicaid-eligible women in states that do and do not pay for abortion?

* In states in which Medicaid covers medically necessary abortions, women with Medicaid had an abortion rate four times as high as that among women without Medicaid coverage. In states that do not cover abortions, the abortion rate among Medicaid recipients was twice as high as that among women without Medicaid coverage. (69)

Safety of Abortion

How safe is abortion?

* The risk of abortion complications is minimal when the procedure is performed by a trained professional in a hygienic setting; fewer than 1% of all U.S. abortion patients experience a major complication. (The risk of death associated with abortion is one-tenth that associated with childbirth.) (70) However, 68,000 women in countries where abortion is illegal die each year of abortion complications, and many times this number are injured by unsafe procedures. (71)

How many abortion-related deaths are there each year in the United States?

* In 1999, there were four deaths related to legal abortion in the United States. (72)

How many U.S. women die each year from pregnancy-related causes?

* In 2000, a total of 396 women in the United States were reported to have died of maternal causes. The number of maternal deaths does not include all deaths in pregnant women—only those in which the cause reported on the death certificate is related to or aggravated by pregnancy or pregnancy management. (73)

Does the rate of abortion-related deaths differ between developed and developing countries?

* In developed countries, where the procedure is usually legal, abortion mortality is low (0.2-1.2 deaths per 100,000 abortions). But in developing regions (excluding China), where abortion is often illegal or highly restricted, abortion mortality is hundreds of times higher (330 deaths per 100,000 abortions). (74)

How safe is abortion in the United States?

* Fewer than 1% of all abortion patients experience a major complication. (75) The risk of death associated with abortion is one-tenth that associated with childbirth. (76)

Legal Restrictions on Abortion

Does making abortion illegal stop it from occurring?

* No. Abortion rates are much less related to legal status than they are to levels of unintended pregnancy. In many countries in which abortion is illegal but unintended pregnancy is widespread—for example, Chile, Peru, Nigeria and the Philippines—the abortion rate is higher than in the United States. Some of the world's lowest abortion rates are in western European countries, where abortion is legal and covered by national health insurance systems, but where levels of unintended pregnancy are very low. (77)

What is *Roe v. Wade*?

* *Roe v. Wade* is the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that recognized that a woman has a constitutional right to decide whether to continue her pregnancy. The Court also ruled, however, that after fetal viability, states may restrict or ban abortions entirely, except when necessary to protect the woman's life or health.

Did abortion rates increase after abortion became legal in the United States?

* Immediately following the Supreme Court decision in 1973, the number of legal abortions increased rapidly for several reasons:

- o Legal abortions replaced those that would have occurred clandestinely;
- o the number of physicians trained and experienced in the procedure increased; and
- o a nationwide network of abortion clinics was established, enabling women who would previously have had an illegal abortion, or who would not have had one at all, to do so legally and safely. (78)

* However, the abortion rate peaked in 1980 and has been declining ever since. (79)

What is *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*?

* In 1992, in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, the Supreme Court upheld what it termed the "essential holding" of *Roe v. Wade*. However, the ruling significantly weakened the legal protections previously afforded women and physicians by giving states the right to enact restrictions that do not create an "undue burden" for women seeking abortion.

How is abortion legally restricted in the United States?

* States can restrict abortion or prohibit it entirely after viability (that is, the point at which the fetus is able to live outside the woman's body, with or without artificial aid)—except when necessary to protect the woman's life or

health—and the vast majority of states have done so. The most common restrictions on *early* abortion are parental involvement requirements, state-directed counseling and waiting periods, and limitations on public funding. (80)

How many states have parental involvement laws in effect?

* As of March 2004, 19 states require parental consent for a minor to obtain an abortion; 14 states require parental notification. (81)

What is wrong with parental notification laws on abortion?

* While parental involvement is desirable, *legally mandated* involvement in the form of parental consent or notification may not be to a minor's benefit in all cases. For sexually active adolescents who will not seek care if they have to involve a parent, access to confidential services, which enables them to talk candidly with health professionals, is critically important. (82)

How many women under age 18 had abortions in 2000?

* About 95,000 women younger than 18 had abortions in 2000. (83)

How many states have mandatory counseling or waiting periods in effect?

* As of March 2004, 27 states require that women receive counseling, which can include receiving specific information detailed by the state, before an abortion may be performed; in addition, five states require two visits to the provider because counseling must be provided in person before the waiting period begins. (84)

Research Methods

Where do AGI's data come from?

* AGI's abortion data are gathered through two national surveys, one of women having abortions and one of facilities that provide abortions.

- o AGI surveyed a nationally representative sample of more than 10,000 women obtaining abortions in the United States in 2000-2001. This was the third survey of its kind conducted by AGI; the two previous surveys were conducted in 1994-1995 and 1987-1988.

- o AGI also gathered information from all known abortion providers in the United States for 2000. This survey is the 13th of its kind. Providers were first surveyed in 1974, and the most recent survey before the current one involved data for 1996.

- o Data on abortion incidence and the characteristics of women having abortions are also compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from state health department reports.

Why did AGI do this research?

* The survey of women obtaining abortions in the United States is part of a larger research effort aimed at understanding contraceptive failure rates among women experiencing an abortion or unplanned birth, and providing accurate estimates of contraceptive effectiveness and use by various subgroups.

* The survey of abortion providers was the 13th such AGI survey since 1973, and is the only source of comprehensive national data on abortion incidence and abortion service provision in the United States. The survey also provides information on the geographic distribution and the accessibility of abortion services.

Is this study representative of the whole country?

* The survey of women seeking abortions is based on a nationally representative sample of abortion providers.

- o The survey of abortion providers involves all known abortion providers in the United States, and is the only national source of information on the number and type of providers, defined as hospitals, clinics and physicians' offices where abortions are performed, and their geographic distribution. The list of abortion providers is updated regularly by using a comprehensive process, and is considered to be complete except for a few small private physician providers.

- o In addition, for the United States as a whole and for most individual states, the AGI provider survey represents the most complete data on the number of abortions performed.

How do AGI data differ from those collected by the CDC?

* AGI surveys all known abortion providers in the United States.

* The CDC compiles data on abortion procedures that are submitted by state departments of health; it does not survey service providers. Data from the CDC depend on state reporting requirements and the completeness of reporting by providers to their respective departments of health, which vary from state to state.

* Four states did not collect or report data on abortion procedures at all in 2000 (Alaska, California, New Hampshire and Oklahoma). (Since then, three of these states have begun collecting data or have stated an intention to do so in the future.) Others undercount the number of abortions performed. As a result, AGI's data on abortion are more complete than the CDC's.

What is known about abortion in the United States before 1973?

* Before 1973, abortion was legal in only a few states.

* The CDC collected some information on legal abortions from most of these states.

* Many abortions were illegal, and almost no data on these cases exist. Estimates of the annual number of illegal abortions in the 1950s and 1960s range from 200,000 to 1.2 million. (85)

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