abortion
your questions answered
abortion

Are you pregnant but not sure that you want to have a baby?

Do you need more information about abortion?

This is a leaflet about abortion. It will give you information about getting an abortion and what’s involved. It’s not a leaflet about pregnancy choices. If you are undecided about whether to continue with the pregnancy, there are lots of people you can talk to, to help you make a choice, but ultimately the decision is yours.

Unplanned pregnancy is very common. About one in three pregnancies is unplanned and in one in five pregnancies the woman chooses to have an abortion. It can be a difficult choice to make and it can be a very emotional time. Talking to people you trust and making sure you have accurate information can help.
is abortion legal?

Abortion, sometimes called termination of pregnancy (TOP), is legal in Britain under the Abortion Act 1967, as amended by Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

The Act says that two doctors must agree that an abortion would cause less damage to a woman's physical or mental health than continuing with the pregnancy. Most doctors feel that the distress of having to continue with an unwanted pregnancy is likely to be harmful to a woman's health. They will refer you for an abortion if you've decided you don't want a baby.

Abortion is legal in Northern Ireland in exceptional circumstances, but current guidance is unclear and many women in Northern Ireland find it difficult to get an abortion unless they travel to England. Women in Northern Ireland can contact fpa Northern Ireland for confidential counselling, information and support on all the options available (see page 15).
what is the legal time limit for abortion?

Abortion is legally available up to 24 weeks of pregnancy. It is safer when it is carried out in early pregnancy, so it's important to seek advice quickly if you think you might want an abortion.

The majority of abortions (about 90%) are carried out before 13 weeks, and almost all (98%) before 20 weeks.

The law says that abortion is legal after 24 weeks only when the woman's life is in grave danger or 'there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped'.

Weeks of pregnancy are worked out from the first day of the last normal menstrual period. When the stage of pregnancy is not clear, it can be checked using an ultrasound scan.
how do I go about getting an abortion?

Abortion care is available free through the NHS or through private clinics and hospitals for a fee.

**NHS:** You should see your GP or go to your local family planning or sexual health clinic. If the doctor you see does not refer women for abortion, they must refer you to another doctor. Most abortions are funded through the NHS but availability of NHS funded abortions varies from area to area. The doctor will be able to advise you about local policy and services.

**Privately run clinics:** You can contact specialist abortion providers such as British Pregnancy Advisory Service and Marie Stopes (see page 15). You don’t have to be referred by a doctor. These are non-profit making charities that provide confidential abortion services. Current costs start from around £350 but vary, depending on the stage of pregnancy, the method of abortion and whether an overnight stay is necessary.

You may wish to contact them if you do not want to use the NHS or if you find that you are unable to obtain an NHS abortion. Some health services pay these charities to provide free NHS abortion services for their patients.
what if I'm uncertain about having an abortion?

The decision about whether to have an abortion or continue with a pregnancy is not an easy one to make.

Talking to friends and family can help or you might find it easier to talk to someone who is not so close to you. Your doctor may be able to refer you to a counsellor or you could contact one of the organisations listed on page 15. There are some other organisations that offer pregnancy testing and counselling but believe that abortion is morally wrong. They will not provide balanced information on it and will counsel you against it.

will a hospital or clinic tell my GP if I have an abortion?

There is no legal requirement for your GP to know about your abortion.

Many abortion services send a letter out of courtesy, to provide information in case you have any health problems after the abortion and to allow your medical records to be updated. Ask the hospital or clinic what they usually do and tell them if you do not want them to inform your GP.
if I am under 16, do I have to tell my parents?

No, you can have an abortion without telling your parents if both doctors believe that you fully understand what is involved and it is in your best interests.

This is called giving consent. The doctors will encourage you to involve your parents or another supportive adult but you don’t have to.

All information, advice and services are confidential, but health professionals are obliged, with your knowledge, to involve social services if they suspect you are at significant risk of harm (for example, sexual, emotional or physical abuse). This applies until you are 18 years old.

do I need the agreement of my partner?

No, your partner or the father of the child has no legal rights.

Many women do want to discuss the pregnancy with their partners and come to a joint decision, but you can go ahead with an abortion without your partner’s knowledge or agreement. Where partners have tried to prevent an abortion by legal action they have failed.