

State Facts About Abortion

District of Columbia

National Background and Context

Abortion is a common experience: At current rates, about one in three American women will have had an abortion by the time she reaches age 45. Moreover, a broad cross section of U.S. women have abortions. 58% of women having abortions are in their 20s; 61% have one or more children; 85% are unmarried; 69% are economically disadvantaged; and 73% report a religious affiliation. No racial or ethnic group makes up a majority: 36% of women obtaining abortions are white non-Hispanic, 30% are black non-Hispanic, 25% are Hispanic and 9% are of other racial backgrounds.

Contraceptive use is a key predictor of women's recourse to abortion. The very small group of American women who are at risk of experiencing an unintended pregnancy but are not using contraceptives account for almost half of all abortions. Many of these women did not think they would get pregnant or had concerns about contraceptive methods. The remainder of abortions occur among the much larger group of women who were using contraceptives in the month they became pregnant. Many of these women report difficulty using contraceptives consistently.

Abortion is one of the safest surgical procedures for women in the United States. Fewer than 0.5% of women obtaining abortions experience a complication, and the risk of death associated with abortion is about one-tenth that associated with childbirth.

In the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a woman, in consultation with her physician, has a constitutionally protected right to choose abortion in the early stages of pregnancy—that is, before viability. In 1992, the Court upheld the basic right to abortion in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. However, it also expanded the ability of the states to enact all but the most extreme restrictions on women's access to abortion. The most common restrictions in effect are parental notification or consent requirements for minors, state-sponsored counseling and waiting periods, and limitations on public funding.

Pregnancies and Their Outcomes

- In 2008, there were 6.4 million pregnancies to the 62 million women of reproductive age (15-44) in the United States. Sixty-six percent of these pregnancies resulted in live births and 19% in

abortions; the remaining 15% ended in miscarriage.

- In District of Columbia, 15,900 of the 147,193 women of reproductive age became pregnant in 2008. 58% of these pregnancies resulted in live births and 28% in induced abortions.

- In 2008, 1.2 million American women obtained abortions, producing a rate of 19.6 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. The rate is virtually unchanged from 2005, when the abortion rate was 19.4 abortions per 1,000 women 15-44.

- In 2008, 4,450 women obtained abortions in District of Columbia, producing a rate of 29.9 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. Some of these women were from other states, and some District of Columbia residents had abortions in other states, so this rate may not reflect the abortion rate of state residents. The rate decreased 45% since 2005, when it was 54.2 abortions per 1,000 women 15-44. Abortions in District of Columbia represent 0.4% of all abortions in the United States.

Where Do Women Obtain Abortions?

- In 2008, there were 1,793 abortion providers in the United States. This is virtually unchanged from 2005, when there were 1,787 abortion providers. Thirty-four percent of these providers were hospitals, 21% were abortion clinics (clinics where more than half of all patient visits were for abortion), 26% were clinics where fewer than half of all visits were for abortion, and 19% were private physicians' offices. Seventy percent of all abortions were provided at abortion clinics, 24% at other clinics, 4% at hospitals and 1% at private physicians' offices.

Restrictions on Abortion

- In 2008, there were 8 abortion providers in District of Columbia. This represents a 33% decline from 2005, when there were 12 abortion providers.

- In 2008, 87% of U.S. counties had no abortion provider. 1/3 of American women lived in these counties, which meant they would have to travel outside their county to obtain an abortion. Of women obtaining abortions in 2006, nonhospital providers estimate that 27% traveled at least 50 miles.

- In 2008, 0% of District of Columbia counties had no abortion provider. 0% of District of Columbia women lived in these counties.

- Public funding is available for abortion only in cases of life endangerment, rape or incest.

Definitions and Data Sources

References for information contained in this fact sheet are available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/sfaa-sources.html>



U.S. and District of Columbia abortion rates, 1991-2008

