

State Facts About Abortion

West Virginia

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 West Virginia, 28,300 of the 346,045 women of reproductive age became pregnant in 2008. 76% of these pregnancies resulted in live births and 8% 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, 2,280 women obtained abortions in West Virginia, producing a rate of 6.6 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. Some of these women were from other states, and some West Virginia residents had abortions in other states, so this rate may not reflect the abortion rate of state residents. The rate decreased 1% since 2005, when it was 6.7 abortions per 1,000 women 15-44. Abortions in West Virginia represent 0.2% 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.

- In 2008, there were 4 abortion providers in West Virginia. This represents no change from 2005, when there were 4 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, 96% of West Virginia counties had no abortion provider. 84% of West Virginia women lived in these counties.

Restrictions on Abortion

- The parent of a minor must be notified before an abortion is provided.
- A woman must receive state-directed counseling that includes information designed to discourage her from having an abortion and then wait 24 hours before the procedure is provided.

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 West Virginia abortion rates, 1991-2008

