

State Facts About Abortion

West Virginia

National Background and Context

Abortion is a common experience: At current rates, about three in ten 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 more than 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, limitations on public funding, and unnecessary and overly burdensome regulations on abortion facilities.

Pregnancies and Their Outcomes

- In 2011, there were 6 million pregnancies to the 63 million women of reproductive age (15-44) in the United States. Sixty-seven percent of these pregnancies resulted in live births

and 18% in abortions; the remaining 15% ended in miscarriage.

- In West Virginia, 27,500 of the 340,980 women of reproductive age became pregnant in 2011. 75% of these pregnancies resulted in live births and 9% in induced

abortions.

- In 2011, 1.1 million American women obtained abortions, producing a rate of 16.9 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. The rate is a decrease from 2008, when the abortion rate was 19.4 abortions per 1,000 women 15-44.

- In 2011, 2,390 women obtained abortions in West Virginia, producing a rate of 7 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 increased 6% since 2008, when it was 6.6 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 2011, there were 1,720 abortion providers in the United States. This is a slight (4%) decrease from 2008, when there were 1,787 abortion providers. Thirty-five percent of these providers were hospitals, 19% were abortion clinics (clinics where more than half of all patient visits were for abortion), 30% were clinics where fewer than half of all visits were for abortion, and 17% were private physicians' offices. Sixty-three percent of all abortions were provided at abortion clinics, 31% at other clinics, 4% at hospitals and 1% at private physicians' offices.

Restrictions on Abortion

- In 2011, there were 4 abortion providers in West Virginia; 2 of those were clinics. This represents no change in overall providers and a no change in clinics from 2008, when there were 4 abortion providers overall, of which 2 were abortion clinics.

- In 2011, 89% of U.S. counties had no abortion clinic. 38% 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 2008, one-third traveled more than 25 miles.

- In 2011, 98% of West Virginia counties had no abortion clinic. 90% of West Virginia women lived in these counties.

- 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.

- The parent of a minor must be notified before an abortion is provided.

- An abortion may be performed at or after 20 weeks postfertilization (22 weeks after the woman's last menstrual period) only if the woman's life is endangered or if her physical health is severely compromised, based on the spurious assertion that a fetus can feel pain at that point.

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, 1991-2011

