

# Laws and Rulings

## Abortion

An abortion is a medical procedure performed for the purpose of ending a pregnancy. Some pregnant females choose to have abortions. People's feelings about having abortions are not always simple, however, and can range from relief to sadness, from worry to fear.



The word *abort* means *to stop or to end something at an early stage*. An abortion is usually performed in a clinic or a hospital by a doctor or other trained health-care professional and is a safe procedure when done early. The pregnancy is ended by removing the embryo or fetus from the uterus. The procedure itself takes about five minutes and is usually performed during the first three

months of pregnancy, before most females even look pregnant.

There are pills that contain drugs that can end a pregnancy and are used as another method of abortion in some countries. In the United States, the government and health professionals are working on making these pills available. They can be taken by a pregnant female during the early weeks of pregnancy and require supervision and visits to a doctor. They cause the lining of the uterus and the embryo to leave the uterus.

There are many reasons why a female or a couple might want or need to end a pregnancy:

- The female has an illness or inherited disease that makes the pregnancy or birth dangerous to her health and might even cause her death.
- A test shows that the fetus is carrying a serious inherited disease or a serious birth defect.
- The mother or father is sick and unable to take care of a baby.
- The parents do not have enough money or time to take good care of a baby or they already have children and cannot afford another child.
- The parents feel they are too young to take care of a baby in a responsible manner.
- The female feels she was not ready to become pregnant.
- The female was forced to have sexual intercourse against her will—raped—and became pregnant as a result.
- The female is single and feels she is not able to raise a child on her own.
- The female did not intend or want to become pregnant.

People have very strong feelings about whether or not a female has the right to choose to have an abortion. In some countries, abortion is a right for all women and girls; in others, the right to abortion is either restricted or prohibited.

In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States, which is the highest and most powerful court in the nation, ruled that a

woman has the right to end an unwanted pregnancy. This ruling also says that no state can limit that right until very late in the pregnancy when the fetus could survive outside the womb. At this point, a woman can have an abortion only when her health or life is at risk.

The name of this Supreme Court decision is *Roe versus Wade*. Some individuals and groups are strongly for this decision and others are strongly against it.

People who support the Supreme Court decision call themselves “pro-choice.” They favor a woman’s right to choose for herself whether or not to have an abortion. They believe that this is a deeply private and personal choice and should therefore be made by the individual female, not by the government.

The people who believe that this decision should be changed call themselves “pro-life.” They believe that the ruling allowing a woman to choose for herself whether or not to have an abortion is wrong. They believe that life begins when a baby is conceived and that an embryo or fetus has a right to life—a right to grow in the mother’s body and to be born whether or not the

mother wants to have a baby.

The rulings and laws about a woman’s right to have an abortion have changed over the years and may continue to change. In 1992, the Supreme Court ruled to support their earlier 1973 decision guaranteeing a woman’s right to abortion. However, the Court also ruled that any state in the nation can impose some reasonable restrictions on a woman’s right to an abortion, but that it cannot outlaw abortion completely.

For example, some states require that before an abortion can be performed,

- any female under the age of eighteen has to have the consent of one or both of her parents or a judge’s permission, depending on the laws of the state.
- a female has to be told about alternatives to abortion, such as continuing the pregnancy and either keeping the baby and becoming a parent or giving the baby up for adoption.
- a female must first meet with a health-care professional about having an abortion and then wait twenty-four hours before having one.
- the doctor or clinic must keep a

detailed written record of all abortions performed.

Because laws can and do change, you might want to ask your parents or teacher what the laws and rulings about abortion are at this time, or what they are in your state.



Sometimes, usually during the early months of pregnancy, an abortion happens by itself, without a medical procedure. This is called a spontaneous abortion or a miscarriage. When this happens, the embryo or fetus is released from the mother’s uterus without warning, often because it is not developing normally. Doctors do not always understand why miscarriages happen, but they know that females who have miscarriages can usually become pregnant again and give birth to healthy babies. The same is true for females who have chosen to have an abortion.