



AVOIDING ILLEGAL/ UNSAFE ABORTION

What Every Woman
Needs To Know to
Stay Safe



MARIE STOPES
South Africa

What is a SAFE abortion?

A safe abortion is a termination of pregnancy that is performed by a registered professional nurse or registered doctor in a 'designated facility' such as a clinic. Doctors and nurses need to be registered with the Healthcare Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and have undergone special training to provide safe abortion services. The Department of Health has to accredit clinics to provide abortion services for them to be a 'designated facility'.

Abortion in South Africa – is it legal?

YES, women legally have the right to access abortion in South Africa up to the 20th week of pregnancy according to the **Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (amended 2008)**; abortion has been legal in South Africa since November 1996.

Up to 12 weeks of pregnancy an abortion can be performed by a registered nurse/midwife; after 12 weeks an abortion must be performed by a trained medical doctor.

After the 20th week, women may be able to have an abortion but only in the event that the pregnancy would endanger the woman's life, or if continued pregnancy would result in a severely malformed foetus. This type of abortion can only be performed at a designated government hospital.

The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act recognises that the right to decide whether or not to have children is fundamental to women's physical, psychological and social health. It calls for universal access to reproductive health care services which should include family planning and contraception, termination of pregnancy, and sexuality education and counselling services. The act promotes reproductive rights and extends freedom of choice by affording every woman the right to choose whether to continue with a pregnancy or have an early, safe and legal termination of pregnancy, according to her individual beliefs and circumstances.



Illegal abortion in South Africa

Despite the right to safe, legal abortion being inscribed in law, unsafe, illegal abortions needlessly injure and even kill women in South Africa every year. These unsafe, “backstreet” abortions are easily prevented if more women are informed of their rights. “Backstreet” is a term that can be misleading because today many unsafe, illegal providers appear somewhat legitimate posing behind slick marketing and flashy websites promising a “cheap, safe and painfree” abortion.

In fact, an illegal abortion provider is anyone who does not have the training, professional qualifications and clinical environment to provide a safe abortion. This includes those that: use the wrong or poor quality medication, do not have proper training to do the procedure, offer abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy as well as anyone performing abortions in a place that is not designated by the Department of Health.

Are UNSAFE PROVIDERS effective?

Aside from the other serious dangers, the most common result of all is ineffectiveness - when an unsafe provider passes off the incorrect medication claiming it will cause an abortion but instead the woman falls ill briefly only to discover she is still pregnant.



Dangers of illegal providers

Backstreet methods may lead to serious complications, infections causing prolonged absence from work, permanent infertility and, in the most heart-breaking cases, even death.

Immediate complications from unsafe abortions may include: severe bleeding, uterine perforation, tearing of the cervix, severe damage to the genitals and abdomen, internal infection of the abdomen and blood poisoning.

Medium term complications may range from reproductive tract infections and pelvic inflammatory disease to chronic pain.

Late complications may include a slightly increased risk of infertility and ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage or premature delivery in subsequent pregnancies.



How to recognise illegal, unsafe and dangerous providers

It is critical that you DO NOT go to any providers that:

- ▶ Supply abortions services outside the constraints of the law (after 20 weeks pregnancy), outside of public hospitals or other designated centres
- ▶ Operate in unsafe areas, do not have a clinic (physical building)
- ▶ Just have a mobile number and offer to meet you on a street corner
- ▶ Cannot give you their Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) registration number
- ▶ Use dangerous methods such as injecting poisonous liquids into the womb; inserting objects intended to dislodge the foetus or issuing tablets that are not prescribed by a doctor or registered nurse
- ▶ Administer medical abortion (a process using tablets) after the 9th week of pregnancy
- ▶ Do not perform physical examinations, take a medical history or provide a test/scan to confirm the stage of the pregnancy
- ▶ Do not follow basic infection prevention, such as wearing latex gloves, having running water and clean linen and having separate bins for medical waste disposal;
- ▶ Do not provide all your unplanned pregnancy options and offer counselling
- ▶ Do not offer follow up appointments and contact information in case of problems or questions
- ▶ Sell you medical abortion tablets over the Internet without the required clinical precautions



Does having a website LEGITIMISE a provider?

Do not be fooled by a flashy website that does not list specific clinic addresses and only provides mobile phone numbers. Having a website does not mean an individual or company is a safe, legal abortion provider.

How to choose a SAFE abortion provider:

Look for

- ▶ a trusted name or brand (like Marie Stopes or Department of Health approved clinic)
- ▶ a land line telephone number – not just a cell phone number
- ▶ a fixed address in clinical surroundings, NOT a street corner or flat/house

What safe abortion methods are available?

Medical Process

Medical abortion allows for the termination of a pregnancy using medication (pills/tablets) only. It is available for women who are between 4 and 9 weeks pregnant. The length of the process is different for each woman but usually takes a few days, during which a woman experience symptoms similar to a miscarriage. It involves precare counselling and a clinical examination with a post abortion check-up appointment. There are two different types of pills taken within 24 hours of one another for maximum effectiveness. Counselling is important because women have a right to choose and the clinical examination determines how far the pregnancy is and also whether there are any medical history issues to be aware of such as high blood pressure. It is very safe, has a low failure rate and is the preferred option for many women.

Surgical Procedure

Surgical abortion involves for a nurse (up to 12 weeks of pregnancy) and a doctor (from 12 to 20 weeks) providing a straight forward, same day procedure in a clinic or hospital. It involves precare counselling and a clinical examination after which the procedure is performed using a gentle suction method to remove the contents of the uterus. The farther along the pregnancy the longer the procedure may take as the doctor will need to provide medication that helps to dilate the cervix. Procedures that are very close to 20 weeks can be painful so presenting early for an abortion is very important.

Where can I get a safe abortion?

Government hospitals, designated private doctors and gynaecologist and non-profit providers such as the Marie Stopes network of centres nationwide offer safe and legal termination of pregnancy.

Women are encouraged to come as early as possible once you have decided to terminate a pregnancy. The process or procedure is easier at an early stage and a wider range of choices are available.

Is Marie Stopes safe?

Yes, Marie Stopes is safe. We are a government-accredited provider and have been operating in South Africa since 1993. We are part of the Marie Stopes International Partnership (MSI) and we offer sexual and reproductive healthcare services in 37 different countries across the world. In South Africa, we operate 14 centres across 6 provinces and are a Section 21 non-profit organisation widely recognised for the quality of our clinical services and our non-judgemental, client-friendly approach. Marie Stopes South Africa also has a toll free Client Services Centre that is open to all women considering an abortion. It is open to anyone who would like information and supports clients after their abortion so they can report any questions or concerns..

What should I do if I know of an Illegal Abortion Providers?

To report illegal abortion providers, please contact your nearest South Africa Police Service station or speak to someone at your provincial National Department of Health office. Marie Stopes South Africa is also actively notifying the authorities of illegal abortion providers.history issues to be aware of such as high blood pressure. It is very safe, has a low failure rate and is the preferred option for many women.

How can unsafe abortions be prevented?

Our country enjoys one of the most liberal sexual and reproductive health laws in the world so that women are empowered to have control over their fertility and have access to safe and legal sexual and reproductive health information and services.

We believe that by getting the word out and educating women on the choices available to them, we will continue to reduce unsafe abortions.

You can prevent future unsafe terminations by informing yourself and those you care about. Ask yourself: does every woman in your life know about the dangers of unsafe abortions?

Call 0800 11 77 85 toll-free
Or visit <http://www.mariestopes.org.za>

COME EARLY, BE SAFE!

What if I have already had an unsafe abortion?

If you have been to an illegal abortion provider and you feel unwell or are facing complications, please go to your nearest gynaecologist, clinic or public hospital immediately for assistance.



AVOIDING ILLEGAL/ UNSAFE ABORTION

0800 11 77 85

www.mariestopes.org.za

 www.facebook.com/mariestopes.org.za

 [@MarieStopes_SA](https://twitter.com/MarieStopes_SA)



MARIE STOPES
South Africa