

Abortion in Northern Ireland

What you need to know



INFORMING
CHOICES NI

Formerly FPA NI

The Law

On 22 October 2019 abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland through the repeal of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

A moratorium on criminal prosecutions has taken effect, meaning that no police investigation may be carried out, and no criminal proceedings may be brought or continued e.g. if a woman has purchased abortion pills online. Section 25 (1) of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945 currently remains meaning that abortions '*where the foetus is capable of being born alive*' will continue to be unlawful.

The UK Government will bring forward regulations to introduce a new framework on abortion in Northern Ireland to include where there is a risk to a woman's health, in cases of fatal and severe fetal abnormalities, or in circumstances of rape and incest.

A public consultation seeking the views of healthcare professionals and others on how the changes will be implemented is being conducted and services will be in place by 31 March 2020.

Interim Period

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) has issued guidance for healthcare professionals to cover the interim period between 22 October 2019 and 31 March 2020.

This supersedes previous guidance issued by the Department of Health in March 2016.

The NIO guidance states there are no plans for additional services to be routinely available in Northern Ireland before 31 March 2020 and that there is no expectation that GPs will prescribe medication for early medical abortion.

However, if a health professional does choose to offer an abortion service during the interim period, they should do so in line with their professional competence and guidance from their professional body.

Healthcare professionals may also choose to treat a woman where a fatal or serious fetal anomaly has been detected. Clinical guidance is available from NICE and RCOG.

Doctors remain under a duty to act where a woman's life or health is at risk.

Central Booking System

A funded abortion service, including travel for all women and girls from Northern Ireland, is in place in England. Women should be provided with the number for the Central Booking System (**0333 234 2184**). Health professionals can also refer into this service. This will remain until services are in place to meet the needs of women in Northern Ireland.

Abortion Pills Online

Some women may continue to purchase abortion pills online and if required can seek medical assistance in Northern Ireland following their use. Health professionals are no longer under a duty to report an offence.

Conscientious Objection

Consideration is being given to providing for conscientious objection in the new framework from the end of March 2020. GMC guidance states if you have a conscientious objection to abortion you must tell your patients in a timely manner about their right to see another doctor and make sure they have enough information to exercise that right.

Pregnancy Counselling

Informing Choices NI offer counselling on all pregnancy choices. Whether considering continuing with the pregnancy, adoption or abortion our counsellors provide non-directive support and information.

Many women who attend our counselling service are referred by their GP or local contraception and sexual health clinic.

You can offer your patient information about our service, including providing the number for our helpline (**028 9031 6100**) to make an appointment.

We also provide post abortion counselling.

Client Evaluations

"The staff were both helpful and friendly and made me feel like I wasn't being judged."

"Great support and the counsellor was simply my rock."

"Helpful, supportive and kind, before, during and after."

Our Ethos

The work of Informing Choices NI is based on a pro-choice ethos.

We believe:

Women have the right to acknowledge all of their experiences of pregnancy and to have those experiences valued.

Women have the right to access accurate information about pregnancy and abortion.

Counselling should be non-directive and respect the woman's own values.

Women have the right to have an abortion.

Abortion is a healthcare issue.

Those who choose abortion have a right to acknowledge loss and grief.



Informing Choices NI
3rd floor, Ascot House
24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast
BT2 7DB

Tel: 028 9031 6100
Email: info@informingchoicesni.org
Website: www.informingchoicesni.org

Informing Choices NI (trading as ICNI) Ltd is a charity
and a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland.

This leaflet was produced by ICNI in October 2019

