

Abortion Surveillance in The USA

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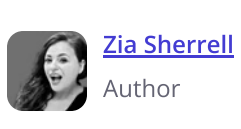


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For nearly half a century, abortion was legal across the USA, thanks to [Roe v. Wade](#), a landmark decision that decriminalized abortion in 1973. However, the U.S. Supreme Court has recently ended the constitutional protection of abortion at a federal level, thereby infringing on a person's fundamental right to control their own body.

The implications of this are significant, and as a result of the ruling, individual states now have the authority to pass their own laws regarding abortion. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a patchwork of state laws, with some states outlawing abortion altogether and others keeping it legal and accessible.

The new ruling could devastate the availability of safe and legal abortions in the USA.

The situation is complex and ever-changing, but one thing is clear: the fight for reproductive justice is far from over. In light of these recent developments, it is more important than ever to stay informed about the current state of abortion in the USA.

Abortion surveillance

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the primary national data source on abortion. They began [abortion surveillance](#) in 1969 to document the number and characteristics of those obtaining legal abortions. It also records the number of deaths attributable to abortion.

Individual states voluntarily report data to CDC for inclusion in the annual report. There isn't a national requirement for data submission or reporting.

The CDC defines legal induced abortion as a medical intervention performed by a licensed clinician that terminates a suspected or known ongoing intrauterine pregnancy and doesn't result in a live birth.

The intervention can use medications or surgery, and the clinician can be a physician, nurse-midwife, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant.

Another organization, the Guttmacher Institute, also measures abortion statistics but uses different methods and publishes different figures. Rather than relying on state reporting, they contact clinics, hospitals, and physicians' offices throughout the country to compile data. They also provide estimates for abortion providers that don't respond.

The Guttmacher figures include data and estimates from all 50 states, so its totals are typically higher than the CDC's.

Key abortion figures in the USA

The most recent CDC [abortion statistics](#) were published in November 2021 and captured 2019 data.

In total, 629,898 abortions were reported from 49 reporting areas, a slight increase from 619,591 in 2018. Of the 49 areas, only 48 had annual data from 2010–2019. In the 48 areas, 625,346 abortions were reported, equating to an abortion rate of 11.4 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44. The abortion ratio was 195 abortions per 1,000 live births.

Key figures:

- 56.9% of abortions were performed on women in their twenties.
- 27.6% of abortions were performed in women aged 20–24, with an abortion rate of 19 abortions per 1,000 women.
- 29.3% of abortions were performed in women aged 25–29, with an abortion rate of 18.6 abortions per 1,000 women.
- 0.2% of abortions were performed on adolescents under 15 years, with an abortion rate of 0.4 abortions per 1,000 women.
- 3.7% of abortions were performed in women aged 40 or older, with an abortion rate of 2.7 abortions per 1,000 women.
- 92.7% of abortions were performed before 13 weeks gestation.
- 6.2% were performed at 14–20 weeks gestation.
- Less than 1% were performed past 21 weeks gestation.
- Less than 42.3% of abortions were early medical [abortions involving medications](#) to induce an abortion at fewer than 9 completed weeks' gestation. 1% were performed past 21 weeks gestation.

Most interventions (49%) were surgical abortions performed before 13 weeks, followed by early medical abortions (42.3%) before 9 weeks. The remaining procedures were surgical abortions at more than 13 weeks gestation (7.2%) and medical abortion at more than 9 weeks' gestation (1.4%).

Overall, abortion rates decreased from 2010 to 2019 across all age groups. The decrease was highest among adolescents.

The Guttmacher Institute figures are more recent and capture 2020 figures. It recorded 930,160 abortions nationwide, equating to 14.4 abortions per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44. The number of abortions rose from 916,460 in 2019.

The most recent data on abortion-related death is from 2018, when two women died due to complications.

What are the demographics of women who had abortions in 2019?

According to CDC data, 38% of women who had abortions were non-Hispanic Black, 33% were non-Hispanic White, 21% were Hispanic, and 7% were of other races or ethnicities.

In people aged 15 to 44, the abortion rate was:

- 23.8 abortions per 1,000 non-Hispanic Black women
- 11.7 abortions per 1,000 Hispanic women
- 6.6 abortions per 1,000 non-Hispanic White women
- 13 abortions per 1,000 women of other races or ethnicities

Most women (85%) who had abortions were unmarried. For 58% of women having abortions, it was the first time. For 24%, it was their second. For 11%, it was their third, and for 8%, it was their fourth or more.

How many women experience medical complications from abortion?

Most safe and legal abortions have a very low risk of complications. Experts estimate that [only 2%](#) of all abortions in the U.S. result in complications.

Of these complications, most are minor such as pain, bleeding, infection, and complications related to anesthesia.

The CDC calculates the number of deaths from abortion-related complications for every 100,000 procedures. The case-fatality rate has been dropping since the 1970s, when it was 2.1 deaths per 100,000 legal induced abortions. In the period from 2013 to 2018, there were 0.4 deaths per 100,000 legal induced abortions.

In 2018, two women died from legal, induced abortion. Compare this to the 35 deaths from illegal abortions in 1972, the last full year before Roe v. Wade.

How accurate are these figures?

The Guttmacher Institute and CDC statistics only include legal induced abortions only using clinical facilities or using abortion pills dispensed from such facilities. They don't include data on abortions using pills obtained outside clinical settings or without a prescription.

Furthermore, the CDC figures do not include every state, and the Guttmacher Institute relies on some estimations. The true number of abortions in the USA may be much higher than the reported figures.

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