

# State Facts About Abortion

## the District of Columbia

### National Background and Context

Abortion is a common experience: At current rates, about one in three 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. 57% of women having abortions are in their 20s; 60% have one or more children; 86% are unmarried; 57% are economically disadvantaged; 88% live in a metropolitan area; and 78% report a religious affiliation. No racial or ethnic group makes up a majority: 41% of women obtaining abortions are white non-Hispanic, 32% are black non-Hispanic, 20% are Hispanic and 7% 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 almost half of all abortions—46% in 2000. 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, state-sponsored counseling and waiting periods, and limitations on public funding.

### Pregnancies and Their Outcomes

- In 2005, 6.3 million of the 62 million American women of reproductive age (15-44) became pregnant. 66% of these pregnancies resulted in live births and 19% in abortions; the

remaining 15% ended in miscarriage.

- In the District of Columbia, 17,500 of the 133,368 women of reproductive age became pregnant in 2005. 46% of these pregnancies resulted in live births and 41% in induced abortions.

- In 2005, 1.2 million American women obtained abortions, producing a rate of 19.4 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. The rate declined 9% from 2000, when the abortion rate was 21.3 abortions per 1,000 women 15-44.

- In 2005, 7,230 women obtained abortions in the District of Columbia, producing a rate of 54.2 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age. Some of these women were from other states, and some District of Columbia residents had abortions in other states, so this rate may not reflect the abortion rate of state residents. The rate declined 20% since 2000, when it was 68.1 abortions per 1,000 women 15-44. Abortions in the District of Columbia represent 0.6 of all abortions in the United States.

### Where Do Women Obtain Abortions?

- In 2005, there were 1,787 abortion providers in the United States. This represents a 2% decrease from 2000, when there were 1,819 abortion providers. 34% of these providers were hospitals, 21% were abortion clinics (clinics where more than half of all patient visits were for abortion), 24% were clinics where fewer than half of all visits were for abortion, and 21% were private physicians' offices. 69% of all abortions were provided at abortion clinics, 25% at other clinics, 5% at hospitals and 2% at private physicians' offices.

- In 2005, there were 12 abortion providers in the District of Columbia. This represents a 20% decrease from 2000, when there were 15 abortion providers.

- In 2005, 87% of U.S. counties had no abortion provider. 1/3 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 2005, nonhospital providers estimate that 25% traveled at least 50 miles, and 8% traveled more than 100 miles.

- In 2005, in the District of Columbia no counties were without an abortion provider. In the South census region, where the District of Columbia is located, 21% of women having abortions traveled at least 50 miles, and 10% traveled more than 100 miles.

## Restrictions on Abortion

In the District of Columbia, the following restrictions on abortion were in effect as of January 2008:

- Public funding is available for abortion only in cases of life endangerment, rape or incest.

## Credits

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## Definitions and Data Sources

References for information contained in this fact sheet are available at [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/sfaa\\_sources.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/sfaa_sources.html)



**U.S. and District of Columbia abortion rates, 1991–2005**

