

**Information for Pregnant
Women on the**

**Protection of Life During
Pregnancy Act 2013.**



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Termination of pregnancy is legally available in Ireland only in limited circumstances. This leaflet sets out those circumstances and the process that a woman must follow to see if she may have her pregnancy terminated in Ireland. The information in this leaflet is based on the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act 2013.

In this leaflet the word “termination” is used to refer to an abortion. The word “doctor” refers to a doctor currently registered on the Irish Medical Council Register.

In what circumstances can I have a termination in Ireland?

You may have a termination in Ireland if specialist doctors are of the opinion that:

- You have a physical illness and there is a real and substantial risk to your life if you do not have a termination
- You have a medical emergency and there is an immediate risk to your life if you do not have a termination
- You are suicidal and there is a real and substantial risk to your life if you do not have a termination

The risk must be real and substantial. A risk to your health is not sufficient; the real and substantial risk must be to your life.

If you are pregnant and have a serious illness, it is important that you get emotional support from your partner, family and close friends. GPs, public health nurses, social workers, crisis pregnancy counsellors and other health professionals are also there to support you, your partner and family, through this difficult time. Crisis Pregnancy Counselling is not just for women, it is also available to partners and other family members. See the back of this leaflet for a list of crisis pregnancy counselling services.

A booklet cannot take the place of a supportive and empathetic listener. It provides the information that you need and the process you must follow to request a termination of pregnancy in Ireland, if you have a physical illness or are suicidal.

At any stage you should immediately go to the Emergency Department of a general hospital if you are worried about any aspect of your physical or mental health or your pregnancy.

If you have a physical illness and your life is at risk if you do not have a termination:

Two doctors will examine you. One will be a specialist in your physical illness e.g. cancer, heart condition, the other will be an obstetrician. If the risk to your life is related to your pregnancy, rather than a different physical illness, both doctors will be obstetricians. The doctors must answer three questions about your case:

- 1.** Is there a real and substantial risk to your life because of a physical illness?
- 2.** Can this risk only be averted by a termination of the pregnancy?
- 3.** Have the doctors considered that, where practicable, the life of the unborn should be preserved?

What this means for you may depend on your medical circumstances of your pregnancy, including how many weeks pregnant you are. It is a matter that the doctors will discuss with you.

If they can answer “yes” to these questions it means that the “test is satisfied” and the doctors will jointly certify that a termination can be performed in your case.

How will this happen?

- 1.** If you are under the care of a specialist doctor for a physical illness and he/she is of the view that the test is satisfied, then he/she will refer you to an obstetrician.
- 2.** The obstetrician will examine you, and if he/she is also of the view that the test is satisfied, both doctors will jointly certify that a termination can be performed in your case.
- 3.** As part of the certification process, if practicable, one or both of the certifying doctors must speak to your GP (if you have a GP), but only if they have your permission to do so.

4. You will be informed of the decision and the obstetrician will make arrangements for you to have a termination as soon as possible.
5. The obstetrician will consult with you in relation to which hospital the procedure should be carried out in. Your preference will be adhered to, whenever possible.
6. Your GP will be kept informed of the clinical decisions made in relation to your care but only if they have your permission to do so.
7. The obstetrician who carries out the procedure will provide appropriate follow-up care. This might include referral for post-termination services, such as free medical check-ups for you and free counselling for you, your partner and your family members if required. A list of services that might be helpful to you can be found at abortionaftercare.ie

If you are not currently under the care of a specialist doctor for your physical illness, you can attend a GP, who will provide you with a referral to a relevant specialist in your physical illness. This should take place within two to three working days, but if your case is urgent you would be referred immediately, in line with normal procedure. The seven steps outlined above must then be followed to assess whether you meet the test for certification for a termination.

If you have a medical emergency and your life is at risk if you do not have a termination of pregnancy:

In a medical emergency, if a doctor believes that there is an immediate risk to your life from a physical illness if your pregnancy is not terminated, he/she may terminate your pregnancy.

The doctor must answer three questions about your case:

- 1.** Is there an immediate risk to your life because of a physical illness?
- 2.** Can this risk only be averted by a termination of the pregnancy?
- 3.** Has the doctor considered that, where practicable, the life of the unborn should be preserved?

What this means for you may depend on the medical circumstances of your pregnancy including how many weeks pregnant you are.

If the doctor can answer “yes” to these questions it means that the “test is satisfied” and the doctor will certify that a termination can be performed in your case and will perform the termination immediately.

The doctor must formally certify the procedure within three days of it being carried out.

If you are suicidal and your life is at risk if you do not have a termination of pregnancy:

Three doctors (two psychiatrists and one obstetrician) must examine you. All three doctors must answer three questions about your case:

- 1.** Is there a real and substantial risk to your life by way of suicide?
- 2.** Can this risk only be averted by a termination of the pregnancy?

3. Have the doctors considered that, where practicable, the life of the unborn should be preserved? What this means for you may depend on the medical circumstances of your pregnancy, including how many weeks pregnant you are. It is a matter that the doctors should discuss with you.

If they can answer “yes” to these questions it means that the “test is satisfied” and the doctors will jointly certify that a termination can be performed in your case.

How will this happen?

1. If you are under the care of a psychiatrist, and he/she is of the view that the test has been satisfied, he/she will refer you to another psychiatrist.
2. The second psychiatrist will examine you and if he/she is also of the view that the test has been satisfied, he/she will refer you to a consultant obstetrician.
3. If the obstetrician agrees with the two psychiatrists, all three doctors will jointly certify that a termination can be performed in your case.
4. As part of the certification process, if practicable, one or all of the certifying doctors must speak to your GP (if you have a GP), but only if they have your permission to do so.
5. You will be informed of the decision and the obstetrician will make arrangements for you to have a termination as soon as possible.
6. The obstetrician will consult with you in relation to which hospital the procedure should be carried out in. Your preference will be adhered to whenever possible.
7. Your GP will be kept informed of the clinical decisions made in relation to your care but only if they have your permission to do so.

8. The obstetrician who carries out the procedure will provide appropriate follow-up care. This might include referral for post-termination services, such as free medical check-ups for you and free counselling for you, your partner and your family members if required. A list of services that might be helpful to you can be found at abortionaftercare.ie

If you are not currently under the care of a psychiatrist, you can attend a GP who will provide a referral to a psychiatrist. This should take place within two to three working days, but if your case is urgent you would be referred immediately, in line with normal procedure. The eight steps outlined above must then be followed to assess whether you meet the test for certification for a termination.

What happens if the doctors do not certify me for a termination of my pregnancy?

If your condition does not meet the test you will not receive certification for a termination of your pregnancy in Ireland. You may then:

- Ask to be referred to another specialist for a further clinical opinion
- Explore other treatment options under the care of your existing medical team
- Ask for a formal review of the decision to not certify you.

There are organisations that can support you in these circumstances such as the crisis pregnancy counselling services listed at the end of this leaflet.

What is the review process?

You are entitled to a review of a decision to not certify you for termination of your pregnancy.

How do I request a formal clinical review?

You have to request a formal clinical review by completing a form. Another person, such as a spouse, partner, family member, friend, doctor or crisis pregnancy counsellor can fill out the form on your behalf, with your consent. The form is available [here](#).

It should be delivered in a sealed envelope, marked 'Strictly Private and Confidential and to be opened by addressee only', to:

National Director for Quality Improvement
HSE
Dr. Stevens' Hospital
Dublin 8

Who will review the decision?

When your request for clinical review has been received a clinical review committee will be established within three days (inclusive of bank holidays and weekends).

If you have a physical illness, the clinical review committee will be made up of an obstetrician and a doctor who is a specialist in your physical illness. If you are suicidal, the review group will be made up of two psychiatrists and one obstetrician. A doctor who was involved in your first assessment may not be on the clinical review committee.

What happens at the clinical review?

The doctors must actually examine you. It is not enough for them to just review your medical records. You are entitled to address the clinical review committee. If you personally do not want to address them, someone else may do this on your behalf. It is important that you have support from family, friends or counselling professionals during this process.

The group has to complete its review of your case as soon as possible and at least within seven days (inclusive of bank holidays and weekends) from the day on which the group was formed. All doctors must agree that a termination is appropriate in your circumstances and meets the relevant test in your circumstances. The group must write to you to inform you of the decision as soon as possible.

If the clinical review committee provides certification, the termination will be arranged in consultation with you.

If the clinical review committee does not provide certification, you may consider your other options such as your right to a second opinion or seek the support of a crisis pregnancy counselling service to discuss what your options may now be. You also have a constitutional right of access to the courts if you are unhappy with the decision and it would be advisable to discuss this with a lawyer. If a medical emergency develops during the review process and before a decision has been made, and there is an immediate threat to your life, the termination may go ahead if it meets the certification test for termination in the event of a medical emergency.

Frequently asked questions

Is there a stage in my pregnancy beyond which I am not entitled to a termination in Ireland?

If a real and substantial, or immediate, risk to your life develops during your pregnancy, you may need a termination, regardless of how many weeks pregnant you are. Doctors are legally required to preserve unborn human life as far as practicable, without compromising the woman's right to life. What this means for you may depend on how many weeks pregnant you are and the medical circumstances of your pregnancy. This is something that the medical team should consider in relation to your case and discuss with you.

Do I have to pay?

If you are a medical card holder, your costs will be covered. If you have private health insurance, some costs may be covered, depending on your plan, and your health insurer will provide you with more information. If you are not a medical card holder and you do not have private health insurance, you will have to pay standard hospital charges. Details of standard charges can be found at [here](#).

Can a doctor refuse to treat me?

A doctor, nurse or midwife may refuse to be involved in carrying out a termination because of his/her personal morals or religious beliefs. This is called "conscientious objection". If a doctor chooses not to take part in the procedure, he or she must explain this to you in a respectful manner and refer you immediately to another doctor who will help you. If your life is at immediate risk and the risk can only be averted by terminating your pregnancy the doctor treating you must perform a termination even if they have a conscientious objection.

What post-termination services are available following a termination in Ireland?

Post-termination services offer free medical check-ups to a woman who has a termination, and free counselling to her, her partner and her family members if required. Most services that provide crisis pregnancy counselling (listed at the end of this leaflet) also provide post-termination counselling. Visit abortionaftercare.ie for more information.

Other support services

If you have been raped

If you are pregnant as a result of rape it is important to get the support you need from your partner, family and friends. You can also attend counselling at a rape crisis centre or at a crisis pregnancy counselling service. It is free of charge. See the list of crisis pregnancy services on the back of this leaflet. It is important that you are supported through this difficult and distressing time.

If you wish to have a termination, you will have to travel abroad. In Ireland, you cannot legally terminate a pregnancy as a result of rape, without any of the circumstances stated in this leaflet being present.

You can attend crisis pregnancy counselling and request to discuss the option of termination. If you decide that you wish to have a termination, you can request details of clinics in other jurisdictions in order to make an appointment. It is legal to travel to another country for a termination. You should check that there are no general visa requirements or restrictions on entering another country or returning to Ireland if you are considering travelling abroad.

Most crisis pregnancy counselling services also provide post-termination counselling should you require it after having a termination.

If your baby has a significant abnormality or will not survive birth

If you are pregnant and have learned that your baby will have a significant and/or fatal abnormality and you wish to have a termination, it is important to get the support you need from your partner, family and friends. You can also attend a crisis pregnancy counselling service. It is free of charge. See the list of crisis pregnancy services on the back of this leaflet. It is important that you are supported through this difficult and distressing time.

If you wish to have a termination, you will have to travel abroad. In Ireland, you cannot legally terminate a pregnancy due to a significant and or fatal abnormality, without any of the circumstances stated in this leaflet being present.

You can attend a crisis pregnancy counselling service and request to discuss the option of termination. If you decide that you wish to have a termination, you can request details of clinics in other jurisdictions in order to make an appointment. It is legal to travel to another country for a termination. You should check that there are no general visa requirements or restrictions on entering another country or returning to Ireland if you are considering travelling abroad.

Most crisis pregnancy counselling services also provide post-termination counselling should you require it after having a termination.

Support from others

Some women can turn to their mothers, sisters, close friends or husband/partner for emotional support. But some people have difficulty in giving support, they can feel helpless that they are unable to change the situation. Doctors too can sometimes appear detached as their primary focus is on providing medical care rather than emotional support. If you need support of someone outside of family and friends, you can attend crisis pregnancy counselling free of charge. For a list of services see the back of this leaflet.

Partners, family and friends

If you are the partner, family member or friend of a woman who finds herself in the circumstances stated in this leaflet, you will be going through a difficult time too. Your partner, daughter or sister may need your support as she goes through this process. It is important that you also get the support you need. If you need support of someone outside of family and friends, you can attend crisis pregnancy counselling free of charge. Counselling is not just for the woman, it is also for her family, partner and close friends. It is free of charge. See the back page of this leaflet for a list of services.

Guidelines for Health Professionals

Separate guidelines have been prepared to help doctors and health and social care professionals understand their duties under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act, 2013 and their obligations towards you. These guidelines are available [here](#).

Crisis pregnancy counselling services

Crisis pregnancy counselling is available to help and support you if requested, counsellors will discuss the option of termination. Counsellors will discuss the option of termination and, if requested, will provide contact information for termination clinics abroad. GPs can also provide information on travelling abroad for a termination or refer you immediately to another GP who will give you this information. If you do not receive a certification for a termination in Ireland, you may be referred to a crisis pregnancy counselling service. It is important that you get the support that you need during this time. For a list of these services, please see the back of this leaflet.

Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Services

Ballinasloe Crisis Pregnancy Support Service

LoCall: 1850 20 06 00
Tel: 090 964 8190
E-mail: ballinasloecps@hse.ie

Bray Women's Health Centre

Tel: 081 822 7034
www.braywomenshealthcentre.ie

Femplus Clinic

Dublin 15
Tel: 01 821 0999
E-mail: info@femplus.ie
www.femplus.ie

Here2Help – Crisis Pregnancy Service

Dublin 14 & Cavan
LoCall: 1850 67 33 33
E-mail: info@here2help.ie
www.here2help.ie

Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA)

LoCall: 1850 49 50 51
E-mail: post@ifpa.ie
www.ifpa.ie/pregnancy-counselling

Mayo Crisis Pregnancy Support Service

LoCall: 1890 20 00 22
E-mail: mayopsc@hse.ie

Midlands Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Service

LoCall: 1800 20 08 57
E-mail: crisispregnancy.counselling@hse.ie

One Family

LoCall: 1890 66 22 12
Tel: 01 662 9212
E-mail: info@onefamily.ie
www.onefamily.ie

Sexual Health Centre, Cork

Tel: 021 427 6676 or 021 427 5837
E-mail: info@sexualhealthcentre.com
www.sexualhealthcentre.com

South West Counselling Centre, Killarney

Tel: 064 663 6416

The Tralee Women's Resource Centre

Tel: 066 712 0622
www.twrc.ie

The Well Woman Centre

Liffey Street, Tel: 01 872 8051
Ballsbridge, Tel: 01 660 9860
Coolock, Tel: 01 848 4511
E-mail: info@wellwomancentre.ie
www.wellwomancentre.ie

West Cork Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Service

LoCall: 1800 252 359
E-mail: wccss@eircom.net

Youth Health Service, Cork

Tel: 076 108 4150
E-mail: YHS@hse.ie

All services are free of charge



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www.crisispregnancy.ie