



Department  
of Health

# Background to abortion notifications in England and Wales

**This document contains an overview for those interested in the Department of Health's role in both monitoring the Abortion Act and producing statistics. More detail is given in the links on the [GOV.UK](#) website**

## Introduction

Registered medical practitioners are legally required to notify the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of every abortion performed. The Department of Health receives these notifications on form HSA4 and undertakes the statistical processing and analysis.

## Contact Details

If you require further information please phone 020 7972 5537 or email [abortion.statistics@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:abortion.statistics@dh.gsi.gov.uk) or [HSA4@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HSA4@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

## Monitoring the Abortion Act and Statistics

The Department of Health uses a thorough process for recording and monitoring information received on Abortion Notification form HSA4. Checks on the forms assist in monitoring the Abortion Act and ensuring that best practice guidance from the Department of Health is followed. The resulting data are used to inform policy and to improve service provision, in areas such as teenage conceptions, rubella in pregnancy and reducing repeat abortions, for example.

The data are subject to the [National Statistics Code of Practice](#) and associated protocols on data release. The Data Protection Act 1998 places a statutory obligation on the Department of Health to ensure that the statistics we release on abortion do not relate to a living individual who can be identified from those data alone or in conjunction with other available information, unless the conditions laid out in the Act are met. In recent years, the Department has attempted to meet this obligation by following the disclosure guidance for abortion statistics developed by the Office for National Statistics in July 2005. A judgment down in 2011 by the High Court in a case relating to the release of information on principal medical condition for abortions performed under Ground E, showed that the disclosure controls set out in the guidance were overly cautious in some circumstances. The format of the tables in the annual report have therefore been revised, with a more limited degree of suppression applied, where still necessary to avoid the disclosure of personal data.

The Department of Health also process and publish abortion notifications on behalf of the Chief Medical Officer of Wales.

A statistical bulletin is published around May/June each year. The bulletin provides tables of abortion data for residents of England and Wales and non-residents (of England and Wales) with some information at Clinical Care Group level (Locality Office in Wales). The tables provide the abortion data broken down by a range of variables: age, marital status, purchaser, statutory grounds, procedure, ethnicity, parity, complications, gestation period, medical conditions and country of residence for women not resident in England and Wales. The data are displayed as counts, percentages or rates.

The Department of Health consulted users of abortion statistics between 15 April 2013 and 10 June 2013. The aim of the consultation was to ensure the abortion statistics reports remain as relevant and as useful to users as possible within resource constraints. The 2012 statistics bulletin (published July 2013) includes some additional tables and information from previous years based on the suggestions from users.

Statistical bulletins for 1991 to 2001 are available on request to [abortion.statistics@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:abortion.statistics@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

[Statistical bulletins 2002 - 2012](#)

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