Abortion care guideline

Resource Kit

23 March 2022
Introduction to this Abortion care guideline
What is this guideline?
What is this guideline?

Replacing the recommendations in previous WHO guidelines

*Abortion Care Guideline* (2022) is an updated consolidated guideline, which replaces previous guidelines and related products:

- **Safe abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems, second edition** (2012);
  - and the related *Clinical practice handbook for safe abortion* (2014);
- **Health worker roles in providing safe abortion care and post-abortion contraception** (previously known as the “task sharing” guidance) (2015);
- **Medical management of abortion** (2018).

The above publications are no longer valid. From now on, one should only refer to this updated, consolidated guideline *Abortion Care Guideline* (2022).
What is this guideline?

Consolidating the latest evidence

This updated guideline reflects recent evidence related to abortion care, on:

* clinical management
* service delivery
* law and policy

Unchanged, updated and additional recommendations

- A few recommendations remain unchanged.

- A majority of the recommendations have been updated.

- Additional recommendations have been included. These are either:
  - entirely new recommendations; or
  - recommendations that are now presented as separate recommendations, rather than as composite recommendations.
Conceptual framework
The individual and her needs and preferences at the centre

The conceptual framework for abortion care in this guideline recognizes and acknowledges the needs of all individuals with respect to abortion and is centred on the values and preferences of abortion seekers, considering them as active participants in—as well as beneficiaries of—health services.

Individual health preferences may vary; no one model of abortion care will meet the needs of everyone seeking abortion care.

However, the core values of dignity, autonomy, equality, confidentiality, communication, social support, supportive care and trust are foundational to abortion care and are reflected throughout this guidance.
Conceptual framework

Comprehensive abortion care

The guideline covers Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC) across the continuum of care, including:
- provision of information,
- abortion management (including for different clinical indications), and
- post-abortion care (including follow-up care, treatment of complications and post-abortion contraception).

Recommendations across the abortion care pathway

The guideline includes clinical service recommendations for abortion management for different clinical indications, including induced abortion, incomplete abortion, missed abortion, and intrauterine fetal demise (fetal death).

As indicated by the arrangement of the guidance in this document, as a woman, girl or other pregnant person moves through the abortion care pathway –
- pre-abortion,
- abortion and
- post-abortion care

— health services must be integrated within the health system to ensure that service delivery meets people’s needs equitably and without discrimination.
Recommendations on the How, Where, What, and Who

As each individual moves through the abortion care pathway, this guideline provides guidance on:

**How**
An outline of the service-delivery models that can be used

**Where**
Information on the locations where services can be provided

**What**
Specific recommendations on the interventions needed

**Who**
Guidance on the individuals who may safely carry them out
Conceptual framework

Enabling environment

Multiple actions are needed at the legal, health system and community levels so that everyone who needs it has access to comprehensive abortion care. A person’s environment plays a crucial role in shaping their access to care and influencing their health outcomes.

An enabling environment is the foundation of quality comprehensive abortion care. The three cornerstones of an enabling environment for abortion care are:

1. respect for human rights within a supportive framework of law and policy
2. availability and accessibility of information, and
3. a supportive, universally accessible, affordable and well functioning health system.
Key concepts underpinning this guideline
Key concepts

Abortion is health care

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and based on lessons learned from previous disease outbreaks – when SRH services have been severely disrupted, causing individuals to feel disempowered and be exposed to preventable health risks – WHO has included comprehensive abortion care in the list of essential health services in certain recent technical publications and guidance.

Different areas, even within the same country, may require different approaches to designate essential health services and to reorient health system components to maintain these services.
Emphasis on quality abortion care, beyond safe abortion

Unsafe abortions continue to be a critical public health issue, putting the health and well-being of women and girls at risk, and being a significant and preventable contributor to maternal mortality and morbidity.

However, it is not enough that abortion is safe. The new WHO guideline on abortion reflects an increased emphasis on quality of abortion, highlighting the need of abortion care to not only be safe, but also

- Effective;
- Efficient, maximizing resource use and minimizes waste;
- Accessible (including being timely, affordable, and geographically reachable);
- Equitable (ensuring that access to and quality of abortion care is does not vary based on the personal characteristics of the person seeking care, such as their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, if they are living with a disability, or based on their geographic location within a country.)
- Acceptable/person-centred, incorporating the preferences and values of individual service users and the cultures of their communities.

This is in line with the WHO definition of health — as not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. It is also in line with the WHO quality of care framework.
Human rights integration

While human rights have been addressed in previous work including in several previous WHO publications, this new guideline integrates human rights standards and obligations in a more formal and systematic manner. Human rights are integrated into the guideline as an overarching theme across the continuum of care. Each clinical care, health service delivery, and law and policy recommendation is accompanied by a box listing key human rights considerations relevant to the recommendation or broader topic.

This incorporation of human rights throughout the guideline is in line with the WHO mandate to include human rights in our recommendations.
Updated and additional recommendations
Updated and additional recommendations

The guideline includes a range of updated and additional recommendations, including related to:

**Expanding which abortion services that different types of health workers can provide**

For most of the clinical interventions, the updated recommendations include a wider range of health workers who can provide the respective clinical service. Sometimes these health workers are introduced in the recommendation for the first time, in other cases, they are upgraded from being a weaker recommendation, to a stronger recommendation.

This includes expanded recommendations on which abortion care services (along the continuum of care) that can be provided by pharmacy workers, pharmacists, auxiliary nurses, nurses, midwives, associate/advanced associate clinicians, and the pregnant person herself.

**Self-management approaches**

As in previous WHO abortion guidelines, this new guideline supports self-management of medical abortion in early pregnancy (≤ 12 weeks of gestation). In this guideline, the overall process of self-management, as well as the three component parts of self-management, are now strong recommendations.

**Telemedicine**

The guideline includes an added recommendation on telemedicine services, which are now recommended as an alternative to in-person interactions with the health worker to deliver medical abortion care in whole or in part.

**Best practice statements on service-delivery**

The guideline includes best practice statements on service-delivery approaches for abortion care. These statements include emphasis on that there is no single recommended approach to providing abortion services and that a plurality of service-delivery approaches can co-exist. They also point out that, regardless of the service-delivery approaches used in any setting, the total range of options together must ensure certain elements, including access to accurate information and quality medicines, referral support, and linkages to post-abortion contraception for those who want it.
Law and policy recommendations as individual recommendations

While the previous WHO guideline Safe abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems, second edition (2012) included a composite law and policy recommendation, the new guideline clearly outlines law and policy recommendations as individual recommendations on specific aspects of law and policy, including: criminalization, grounds-based approaches, gestational age limits, mandatory waiting periods, third-party authorization, provider restrictions, and conscientious objection.

Additional regimen included for medical abortion

Some recommendations on regimens are carried over from previous guidelines and remain unchanged. The strong recommendations remain unchanged: the combination regimen of mifepristone plus misoprostol; and the recommendation for dosage when using misoprostol alone.

In addition, a recommendation of a weaker strength has been included, outlining an additional regimen as an option: a suggested combination regimen of letrozole plus misoprostol.
Access
the guideline
Access the guideline

GUIDELINE IN INTERACTIVE DIGITAL FORMAT

GUIDELINE IN PDF FORMAT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN PDF FORMAT
Communications resources
Social media resources

Download the new guidelines on abortion to help countries deliver SRHR. The World Health Organization (WHO) launched global guidelines on abortion care in 2021. The guidelines aim to provide evidence-based, safe, and rights-respecting abortion care to women and girls around the world. The guidelines cover a wide range of topics, including abortion in pregnancy, miscarriage, and stillbirth. They are intended for use by healthcare providers, policymakers, and others who support reproductive health care.

Twitter handles:
- @WHO
- @HRPresearch

Hashtags:
- #SRHR
- #HumanRights
Abortion is health care

Removing barriers to abortion protects women's lives, health and human rights.

All health workers who provide abortion services must be supported to provide quality care.

We must be treated without:
- Judgement
- Discrimination
- Abuse
- Violence
- Stigmatization

Download in 6 UN languages
Social media tiles

Health systems, laws and policies, and information grounded in evidence and human rights support abortion care for all who need it when they need it.

Quality abortion care includes:
- Respect
- Confidentiality
- Support for informed decision making
- Knowledge of laws and policies
- Human rights safeguarded
- Prioritizing women’s needs over health workers’ personal beliefs

Policy makers can support safe and respectful abortion care by:
- Removing barriers to timely, equitable and non-judgemental abortion care
- Investing in abortion provider workforce
- Eliminating financial burdens to abortion care
Planned implementation resources
Planned implementation resources

- Operational guidance on implementation of the recommendations
- Evidence brief for the law and policy recommendations
- Informational materials, e.g. posters on selected recommendations
- Pocket charts/cards for use by health workers, and referral cards
- User-friendly decision-support tools for health workers and policy-makers (e.g. mobile app)
- Clinical practice handbook
- Quality abortion care Monitoring and Evaluation framework
Other resources on abortion care
Other resources on abortion care
Other resources on abortion care

WHO TOPIC PAGE ON ABORTION

FACT SHEET

ACCESS
In 6 UN languages

ACCESS
In 6 UN languages
Other resources on abortion care

GLOBAL ABORTION POLICIES DATABASE

ESTIMATES: ABORTION BY SAFETY
Other resources on abortion care

GLOBAL ESTIMATES:
UNINTENDED PREGNANCY
AND ABORTION

COUNTRY ESTIMATES:
UNINTENDED PREGNANCY
AND ABORTION
CONTACT THE WHO PREVENTION OF UNSAFE ABORTION UNIT:
srhpua@who.int