

Thinking It Over

**Information on abortion and services
available for women in Sheffield**

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NHS Foundation Trust

So you're pregnant but think you don't want to be and you're wondering about abortion.

It's the moment that many women dread – finding out you're pregnant when you don't want to be. Lots of thoughts may be going through your mind and lots of feelings as well.

There is the possibility of having an abortion – but would that be the right thing for you?

This is one of the questions that you may be asking yourself. We hope you may find some of the answers to this and other questions helpful in deciding what to do next.

Is abortion legal?

Yes. Abortions are carried out safely and legally every day in the UK. Each woman needs to decide in consultation with health care professionals what is the best way forward for her.

What if I am not sure whether I want an abortion or not?

If you are uncertain whether you want to continue with the pregnancy, it's a good idea to go and see a doctor, nurse or counsellor to discuss the choices available to you as soon as possible.

Will people know I've had an abortion?

No – not unless you decide to tell them. Abortion is a common and ordinary medical procedure and every year lots of women have one. In fact 1 in 5 pregnancies end in abortion. All our services are highly confidential.

The only time we would inform anyone else is if you told us that you or someone else under the age of 18 was at risk of serious harm e.g. from sexual exploitation, or if you fail to attend for an appointment in the abortion service. However, we would always try to tell you why we need to inform someone and what we would say.

Will having an abortion make it harder to get pregnant if I want to in the future?

Most women who have an abortion don't have any complications and their fertility isn't affected. However, you may have a slightly increased risk of miscarriage (losing the pregnancy) or the baby being born early.

What is the best time for me to have an abortion?

If you are considering an abortion, the sooner it is carried out the better. This reduces the likelihood of any side effects or complications. Ideally it should take place before 10 weeks of pregnancy, although abortions are available legally up to 24 weeks in England and Wales.

Later abortions (those that happen after 18 weeks of pregnancy) are not commonly available and you will have to travel outside Sheffield for the abortion. If this is the case, you will be referred to **bpas** (formerly British Pregnancy Advice Service), who will provide you with an appointment for an abortion outside of Sheffield. If you live in Sheffield and are registered with a Sheffield GP, this will usually be paid for by the NHS.

What does having an abortion involve?

There are two types of abortion - dependent on bed availability and how long you have been pregnant for. These are:-

- Medical abortion, or
- Surgical abortion

Medical abortion

This involves taking two separate drugs two days apart at the hospital.

The first stage of the treatment involves taking an oral tablet and the second stage involves the insertion of vaginal pessaries.

This method is available in Sheffield up to 18 weeks into the pregnancy. If you are less than 8 weeks pregnant you may be able to complete the abortion at home. Between 18 and 24 weeks, this type of abortion can take place but is only available through referral to **bpas** and will take place outside of Sheffield.

Surgical abortion

This involves a surgical operation carried out at the hospital by a doctor. This is usually carried out under general anaesthetic between 8 and 12 weeks into the pregnancy. If you are less than 8 weeks pregnant, you may be offered this procedure under a local anaesthetic.

How do I make an appointment?

In order to have an abortion in Sheffield, you can either see your nurse or doctor at your local GP surgery who will make an appointment for you. Or you can attend one of Sexual Health Sheffield's clinics. They will

then refer you to the Termination of Pregnancy Service at the Gynaecology unit of the Royal Hallamshire Hospital.

If you are aged 20 or under, you can also call into the Youth Clinic based at Sexual Health Sheffield. Please check Sexual Health Sheffield's website for opening times.

What happens at the abortion clinic?

You will be seen on ward G1 of the Gynaecology unit at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital. It is important that you arrive in time for your appointment as we will be unable to see you if you are late and you will need to make another appointment.

At the clinic, a nurse or doctor will ask you questions about your general and sexual health. An ultrasound scan will be performed to check how far pregnant you are, vaginal swabs will be taken to check for infection and you may need a blood test.

Methods of abortion will be discussed with you depending on how far pregnant you are and you will be given admission details to attend the Gynaecology unit for the procedure. You will also have the chance to discuss your future contraception plans.

Is there anyone I can talk to at the abortion clinic about my situation?

Yes. There are trained counsellors available on ward G1 who will be able to help you go through your options regarding the pregnancy. If you are aged 17 or under you will need to see the counsellor. The counsellor is there to help and support you in your decision making and will support you whatever you decide to do.

It is often a good idea to tell a close friend, family member or partner if you can – someone who you trust, who will support you and the decision you make and who you will be able to talk to about the abortion.

What if I want to talk to someone afterwards?

After an abortion, most women are simply relieved that they have been helped through this, but some women may experience difficult feelings, guilt or confusion. If you do, it is a good idea to seek out someone to help you explore your concerns – whether that's supportive friends, your GP or a counsellor at the Termination of Pregnancy Service.

Sexual Health Sheffield

Visit Sexual Health Sheffield's website for opening times

www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk

0114 226 8888

Useful Numbers

bpas (formerly British Pregnancy Advisory Service)

Tel: 0345 730 40 30

Marie Stopes International

Tel: 0845 300 80 90



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