

News story: Government confirms plans to approve the home-use of early abortion pills

The government will legalise the home-use of early medical abortion pills in England by the end of the year.

Under the plans, women will be allowed to take the second of 2 early abortion pills in the safe and familiar surroundings of their own home.

With clinical and legal advice clear that the use of abortion pills at home is safe and legal, women will have the choice of whether they wish to take the second pill at home or at a clinic.

The current system requires women to take both pills, mifepristone and misoprostol, 24 to 48 hours apart in a clinic to end an early pregnancy before 10 weeks gestation. Women leave the clinic after taking the second pill and pass the pregnancy at home. The 2 visits can be difficult to organise and often uncomfortable or traumatic, and in some cases women can begin to miscarry before they have reached their home.

4 in 5 terminations are early medical abortions, carried out under 10 weeks gestation. This means the majority of women seeking abortions will now have the option for home-use. However, women will still be able to take the second pill in a clinic if they choose to do so.

The plans will not change the way women are assessed and treated for an abortion. Any woman seeking an early medical abortion will be given the usual checks including the criteria under the Abortion Act.

Safeguards will be introduced to protect women undergoing this treatment at home, and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will work closely with partners in the health system to make the changes quickly and safely.

The next step will be to work with partners, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, to develop clinical guidance for all professionals to follow when providing the treatment option to patients.

Professor Lesley Regan, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), said:

Today's announcement that use of misoprostol at home will be allowed in England is hugely welcomed and a major step forward for women's healthcare.

This simple and practical measure will provide women with significantly more choice and is the most compassionate care we can give them.

It will allow women to avoid distress and embarrassment of bleeding and pain during their journey home from an unnecessary second visit to a clinic or hospital. It will also improve access to safe and regulated abortion care and take pressure off NHS services.

Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies said:

Abortion can be a difficult experience so it is important that women feel safe and as comfortable as possible. This decision will increase choice for women and help ensure they receive safe and dignified care.