



## 1. Sexual And Reproductive Health

Sexual and reproductive health allows you to have happy, healthy sexual relationships throughout your life. It also allows you to decide whether or not you want children. If you do want children, you should have access to information about contraception (ways to prevent pregnancy) so that you can plan the number of children you'll have.

**Sexual and reproductive health rights protect all people, particularly women, homosexuals (gays and lesbians) or people living with HIV.**

### Why Are Sexual And Reproductive Health Rights Important?

In many countries, women's rights aren't protected and they face unwanted pregnancies; disability or death during childbirth; and illness or death due to unsafe abortions. Women who aren't ready to have children or women who'd like to space their pregnancies, may not be able to do so if they don't know about contraception or don't have access to reproductive health information and services.

According to the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, all South Africans have the right to quality healthcare services, including reproductive healthcare services. But what's written on paper is often very different from what happens in people's lives. So it's important that you know your rights, feel confident to use them and strive to make them a reality. Here are your sexual and reproductive health rights:

- The right to life: You have the right to good quality reproductive health. Women also have the right to choose to become pregnant and to live through a safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth.
- The right to freedom and security: You have the right to control and protect your body and to make decisions about your reproductive health. You have the right to refuse sex, even if you're married. You have the right to decide whether or not to have children and if you do want children, the right to decide how many. Women have the right to become pregnant or to terminate their pregnancy. The right to freedom and security also includes the right to be free from violence. No person has the right to abuse you sexually, physically or emotionally.
- The right to equality: This right protects you from discrimination. It means that women can't be fired from work or expelled from school because they're pregnant. It means that pregnant women have a right to maternity leave. Gays and lesbians are included in the right to equality and may not be discriminated against in any way because of their sexuality. People who are HIV-positive may not be treated differently or face discrimination because of their status.
- The right to privacy and confidentiality: Everyone has a right to privacy and confidentiality when dealing with health workers and doctors. If a woman chooses to have an abortion, for example, a health worker or doctor has no right to tell anyone else.
- The right to freedom of thought: No religion, culture or political party has the right to try to change or stop the way you think and act in your sexual and reproductive life.
- The right to information and education: You have the right to information and education about sexual and reproductive health so that you can make informed decisions about relationships and children.

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**Ensure that you know what your rights are, so that you can protect yourself and others. Remember that your sexual and reproductive health is your business. Respect it - and others will respect you!**

## 2. Pregnancy

How does pregnancy happen?

You probably know this stuff by now, but let's go through it one more time... Pregnancy happens when a man's sperm fertilises a woman's egg after sex. The fertilised egg moves down the fallopian tube and settles on the wall of the womb. It then starts to grow into a baby.

**A woman is most likely to get pregnant if she or her partner don't use contraceptives! Contrary to some beliefs, a girl or woman can get pregnant:**

- even if she is having sex for the first time;
- even if she has sex standing up;
- even if the man comes (ejaculates) outside her vagina;
- even if she washes immediately after sex;
- any time between her periods;
- even if she is menstruating;
- even if she is breastfeeding.

### **How can a girl or woman tell if she is pregnant?**

She may be pregnant if her period is 1 or more weeks late and she has had sex without using contraception, or if there was a problem with her contraceptive method (for example, if the condom broke). Other signs of pregnancy can include breast tenderness, nausea and tiredness.

### **When can she have a pregnancy test?**

A girl or woman can have a pregnancy test if her period is 1 or more weeks late. She can have the test at most clinics, or she can buy a pregnancy test kit at a pharmacy and do the test herself.

### **Why do periods stop during pregnancy?**

A woman does not get her periods when she is pregnant because the lining of the womb is needed to protect and nourish the baby.

## 3. Pregnancy Prevention

There are many different ways to prevent pregnancy. These include condoms, contraceptive pills, contraceptive injections, IUDs (intra-uterine devices) and emergency contraception.

### **Barrier methods**

Condoms are called barrier methods because they stop the transfer of body fluids from one partner to the other. A condom is the only contraceptive method that also protects against HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)!

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## The male condom

- Is easy to remove.
- Is available for free at clinics and is sold cheaply at most pharmacies and shops.
- Requires the man to take responsibility for preventing pregnancy and reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs. The female condom
- Can be inserted a few hours before sex.
- Takes practice to use correctly.
- Requires the woman to take responsibility for preventing pregnancy and reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

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## Hormonal methods

Hormonal methods are contraceptives for women. They are pills or injections containing hormones that stop the ovary from releasing an egg each month.

## Contraceptive pills

Contraceptive pills usually come in packets of 28 and a single pill must be taken at the same time every day. If you're starting the pill for the first time, it'll only be effective after 2 weeks (14 days). You must abstain from sex or use condoms during this time. If you forget to take your pill for 2 or more days you can become pregnant!

Some women have side effects from using pills. These include nausea, headaches, depression or breast tenderness. Your health worker will advise you about which type of pill is suitable for you.

## The contraceptive injection

There are two types of contraceptive injection: Nur-Isterate, which is given every 2 months (8 weeks) and Depo Provera or Petogen, which is given every 3 months (12 weeks). When you have the injection for the first time, or after a break, it'll only be effective after 7 days. You must abstain from sex or use a condom during this time. And you must have your injections on the date your health worker advises.

Injections can cause changes to a woman's periods, including spotting or no bleeding at all. Some women also experience increase in appetite, stomach pain, tiredness or headaches.

## The intrauterine device

The intrauterine device (IUD) or loop is a small device that is put into a woman's womb to prevent pregnancy. It's usually made of plastic and copper and can prevent pregnancy for a number of years. The IUD works by preventing a fertilised egg from settling on the wall of the womb.

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The IUD is only available at certain clinics and can only be fitted by specially trained health workers. Some women find it painful when the IUD is put in. Some also have heavier periods, cramps or discharge in the first few months after it has been put in. The IUD is more suitable for women who've already had a baby.

#### NOTE

**Emergency contraception To prevent pregnancy, you can take emergency contraceptive pills or morningafter pills up to 3 days (72 hours) after unprotected sex. The pills are available at most clinics. An IUD can also be used for emergency contraception up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex.**

#### 4. Teenage Pregnancy

For people who've planned for and wanted a child, the news of pregnancy is wonderful. For young people however, the news can come as a massive shock. A young woman might think, "Why me?". She may fear her parents' or community's reaction. She may feel loneliness, fear, shame, anger, sadness and despair. She may deny, even to herself, that she is really pregnant and not do anything about it.

A young man with a pregnant girlfriend might fear parental reactions, feel helpless or feel pushed aside. So in a situation of teenage pregnancy, a young person really needs a trusted adult or close friend to turn to and shouldn't have to make decisions alone.

#### Telling your parents

It can be pretty scary figuring out how to tell your parents! And the way you tell them will depend a lot on the relationship you already have with them. Sometimes your idea of how they'll react is worse than reality; often parents are very supportive.

Give your parents time to get used to the idea and to think about it. It was probably a shock for you at first, but you've had some time to get used to the idea and do some pretty heavy thinking. Your parents' reaction may change over time.

**Ignoring the possibility of pregnancy can reduce a young woman's choice and mean that she won't get the medical care she needs.**

If the pregnancy is a shock for you, making choices about what to do won't be easy. But getting accurate information is the best way to help you make the right choice. Your beliefs and values about pregnancy will influence your decision. Other people could try to press their values and beliefs on you and pressure you into a choice that isn't right for you. Don't try to please others - only you know what's right for you!

#### Going ahead with the pregnancy

If you decide to go ahead with the pregnancy it's very important to get good healthcare – and the sooner, the better for you and the baby. A doctor or health worker can give you lots of advice about your health and the baby's health.

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## Adoption or fostering

If you want to go ahead with your pregnancy and have your baby adopted or fostered, remember that adoption is a permanent arrangement. It's important to have some counselling before you make this choice! In many cases, adoption can offer the baby a better life if you're not ready or able to be a parent, but sometimes mothers later deeply regret parting with their babies.

## Parenthood - single or together?

If you decide to go ahead with the pregnancy and go on to parenthood, there are many things to think about. Will you parent with your partner or alone? It can be a good idea to go to counselling together to explore the various benefits and drawbacks.

### Here are some possible options:

- Get married and share parenting.
- Live together and share parenting.
- Share parenting while living separately.

If you intend to parent on your own, there are other options depending on your individual situation: you can bring your baby up alone or stay with parents or close family who might be prepared – or even delighted - to help you look after the baby.

Remember that the father of a baby has a legal duty to support his child. He must pay maintenance every week or month for the children as they grow up. If he refuses, the mother can get a maintenance order from the Magistrate's Court to make him support the child. A man has a duty to pay maintenance for all children he fathers, from any woman.

## 5. Termination Of Pregnancy (Abortion)

What is termination of pregnancy?

Termination of pregnancy is a term used to describe abortion. Abortion ends pregnancy before the birth of a baby.

### Can anyone have an abortion?

An abortion is a special procedure that can only be carried out by a trained health worker in a Government-approved clinic or hospital.

Any girl or woman can ask for an abortion in the first 3 months (12 weeks) of pregnancy. It's important to act quickly if you think you're pregnant and don't want to go through with the pregnancy!

If a woman is 3 to 5 months pregnant, the abortion is much more complicated. The doctor will only carry out the abortion if there's a risk to the physical or mental health of the woman or baby; if having the baby will cause major social or economic problems for the mother; or if the woman is pregnant from rape or incest.

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## What happens if I ask for an abortion?

Your health worker will give you more information. Remember that counselling is available and it's very important for you to talk about your feelings and concerns! You should also ask about other choices like adoption and fostering.

## Where can I go for an abortion?

Not all clinics and hospitals can offer abortions, so your health worker may refer you to a clinic or hospital that does offer the service. You may have to wait some time before the procedure can be done.

You will be asked to sign an informed consent form to give permission for the abortion to be done. You don't need your parents or partner's consent, even if you're a teenager, BUT it will make things easier for you to share your decision and the process itself with someone you trust!

Is abortion safe?

Yes. An abortion is safe if it is carried out by a trained health worker in an approved clinic or hospital. As with any medical procedure, there is some risk.

### NOTE

**Remember: abortions are much safer if they're done in the first few weeks of pregnancy!**

## What is a 'backstreet' abortion?

Before abortions were legal in South Africa, many girls tried to terminate their own pregnancies or had abortions by untrained people using unsafe methods. These backstreet abortions resulted in serious infections, infertility and even death - and they still do. 500 South African women die each year from complications associated with unsafe abortions! It makes sense, then, that one of the main reasons for legalising abortion was to provide a safe alternative to 'backstreet' abortions.

### NOTE

**Babies not only require love, affection and attention but also cost money! They need food, clothing, medical attention, toys and eventually, education. So it's a very bad idea to have a baby just to qualify for a monthly Government child-support grant!**

For more info on sexual rights, pregnancy, contraception or abortion, phone the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPASA)  
Tel: (011) 523 1400 Web: [www.ppasa.org.za](http://www.ppasa.org.za)

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