



Frequently Asked Questions: No. 1

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How safe is abortion?

In Aotearoa New Zealand, abortion is extremely safe. There has not been a death since the collection of reliable data began in 1980. However, the World Health Organisation estimates that 47,000 women die from complications of unsafe abortion each year. In countries with good health-care, abortion is safer than continuing a pregnancy. In 2010, our maternal mortality ratio was 17.8 deaths per 100,000 maternities.

Does abortion cause breast cancer?

No. Reviews by panels convened by the US and British governments have consistently found no association between abortion and breast cancer.

Does abortion cause mental health problems?

No. Major reviews of the literature, including by the American Psychological Association in 2008, and the UK Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in 2011, have failed to find a causal link.

What about later term abortions?

Very few abortions take place during the third trimester (after 20 weeks). In 2009, there were 93 abortions at 20 weeks or later (0.52% of the total); and 14 at 24 weeks or later (0.08%). Abortions at this stage are rare because women very rarely seek them. In addition, they are more complex, needing specialised services, which few doctors provide. Do we need a law to cover these exceptional cases? These abortions will always be rare and exceptional whether there is a law or not, and we must trust women and their chosen doctor in these cases.

Does Emergency Contraception cause abortion?

No. Emergency contraception, also known as the 'morning after pill' or, in the US as 'Plan B', does not cause abortion. If a person is pregnant, it will have no effect on that pregnancy. EC is available over the counter at pharmacies without a prescription, but only a specially trained pharmacist can dispense it.

Some people believe abortion is murder?

Abortion isn't murder under the law. Morally, ALRANZ doesn't believe it is either. Anti-abortionists often argue abortion is murder, and they are certainly free to hold this view, but the morality of abortion should be up to the person who is pregnant. On a disputed issue such as this, anti-abortionists should not be able to impose their morality on others by law.

'A person from the moment of conception'?

Some anti-abortionists argue a person, with the full legal rights of personhood, is created at the point the egg is fertilised by the sperm (and even before implantation in the womb, which is when pregnancy actually begins). If fertilised eggs were granted the same legal rights as adults and children, the consequences for women's autonomy and legal standing would be dire. And how would this be policed? If a woman miscarried, could she be charged if she was suspected of somehow contributing to that miscarriage? Did you know that at least 50% of fertilised eggs are lost naturally, some before and others after implantation? How would a personhood law deal with that?

Aren't there too many abortions?

This one can't be answered by a yes or a no. ALRANZ supports reducing the number of abortions by reducing the number of unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, not by cracking down on access. Let's focus on making reliable, safe contraception more easily available to people who want it, and on making sure those who continue their pregnancies are well supported. Where there is a need for abortion, it must be available.