

Script

First, about abortions in general

There are two types of abortions: medical and surgical

- For a medical abortion, you take two medications to end the pregnancy. [The law allows this until](#) you're 12 weeks pregnant.
- For a surgical abortion, the foetus is removed during a small operation. This is usually for pregnancies between 12 and 20 weeks.

A phone-in abortion is a self-managed medical abortion

This means you take the same medication at home as you would in the clinic.

The public sector doesn't yet offer [phone-in services](#).

Marie Stopes South Africa, [a private clinic, does phone-in abortions](#) for around R2 100 and R1 900 if you are a student.

10 things to know about phone-in abortions

1. How does a phone-in abortion work?

You phone a clinic and have a private phone consultation with a doctor or a nurse.

If you aren't further along than 9 weeks pregnant and the healthcare workers say it is the right option for you, they send you the pills.

You get clear instructions on how to use the medication at home.

You can phone a 24-hour helpline in case you need any help.

Why are phone-in abortions only done up to nine weeks of pregnancy?

The medication used in a self-managed abortion is [most effective in the first nine weeks](#) of pregnancy.

2. Who can get an abortion like this?

Melusi Dhlamini

So In South Africa , anyone who is pregnant, who is eligible to have a self managed abortion, at home by themself can actually get the service

3. Who can not get an abortion like this?

Melusi Dhlamini

There are a few exclusion criterias. if there's any suspicion that you might have an ectopic pregnancy, for example, or you're not sure about your period. Or if you don't have access to a nearby health facility that runs 24 hours, just in case there's a complication that occurs.

The service has to be safe and there has to be access to emergency help should there be a need.

4. How would you check if the provider is legit?

Melusi Dhlamini

First of all, before you actually call any abortion facility, you should probably just check if it's legit. The easiest way to see if it's not legit. They will say things like '30 minutes procedure', 'pain free' 'same day service.' Your unregistered or unsafe providers would be located in the mall. They want to meet you in a park in a car. So there isn't much information and they're not able to answer a lot of questions.

Any person who offers any kind of abortion service needs to be registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) or the South African Nursing Council (SANC)

You can check if a practitioner is registered with the HPCSA through their call centre: 012 338 9300/9301

Or go to www.hpcsa.co.za and click "Search the register" to look up their registration number or name.

To search the nursing register, go to www.sanc.co.za/eRegister.aspx.

5. What should happen when you ask for a self-managed abortion?

If you call they need to ascertain how far pregnant you are because they need to know if they can help you or not. They will direct you to a health care provider who will then ask you questions related to your pregnancy, you will answer a few questions that try to execute certain risk factors.

6. What can exclude you from getting a phone-in abortion services?

- **An ectopic pregnancy***
- **Your general state of health**
- **Being over nine weeks pregnant**

*An ectopic pregnancy is when a [fertilised egg grows outside of the womb](#), most commonly in one of a person's fallopian tubes.

7. What happens next?

Melusi Dhlamini

What happens next is that you get the pills. It's either you collect or you get a delivery of the pills. They tell you what kind of pills they are, what they look like, how these are supposed to be taken, and what to expect once you've taken them and how long after you've taken them should you expect anything to happen.

8. What are the pills given and how should you take them?

Melusi Dhlamini

We use two types of pills, one is called Misoprostol. It's small, it's white, its hexagon [shaped] and it's got a line in the middle. They are usually called Cytotec. That's what we have in South Africa. The other one is maybe Mifepristone. A little bit more expensive. It's also white, it is a small pill but some of them are a little bit big.

Mifepristone makes the lining of the uterus breakdown.

Misoprostol makes the uterus contract, which causes cramping and bleeding.

Melusi Dhlamini

The Mifeprestone it comes in a single package, it's just one pill which you swallow like any other pill, but your Misoprostol they come in a pack people use different dosing. But the most common one is four pills that you take at least 24 hours after taking the first pill which is mifepristone. Put them under the tongue, you wait for them to dissolve. And once they dissolve, they can just drink water. You don't drink or eat anything while they dissolve, they dissolve quite fast, but usually we tell people to wait for 30 minutes and once they are fully dissolved, just swallow whatever is in the mouth or just wash it down with water.

9. What should you expect after having taken the pills?

Melusi Dhlamini

Once you take the pills, you will get pains, you will get bleeding. You might get some of the side effects from the medications like vomiting, diarrhoea, a bit of fever. But you will bleed for a couple of days and obviously the first day probably will be the heaviest...It could literally take the people three days to bleed and after that they just spot. Some people can be a bit longer, depending obviously on your anatomy, and some people do pregnancy tests after two weeks, which should be negative. By then abortion should be complete.

10. How do you know the abortion is complete?

Melusi Dhlamini

The one thing that will definitely happen is that you will continue to bleed. Some people might have pains, and they might also still feel pregnant. So people might still experience pregnancy signs and sense even after the two weeks have passed. The other thing is that you may take the pills, but the bleeding doesn't happen, or the bleeding is much less than what you were told to expect. Some people don't bleed it all. And that could actually tell you that the abortion pills did not work for a number of reasons. Either the pregnancy is too big or you have a big pregnancy, or the dosing for the pregnancy was just not adequate.

[Disclaimer note]

Mifepristone and misoprostol are available on prescription only. Always talk to a registered health practitioner before getting an abortion.

Sources:

Abortion statistics, Marie Stopes South Africa, February 2022

Cost of phone-in abortion services, Marie Stopes South Africa, February 2022

Medical abortion with mifepristone and home administration of misoprostol up to 63 days' gestation, *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*, July 2014

Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1996 [No. 92 of 1996]

Ectopic pregnancy, Mayo Clinic, accessed 28 February 2022

Guidance on the application of telemedicine guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Professions Council of South Africa, March 2020