

What's the difference between self-managed abortion and telehealth abortion?

Abortion with pills, also called a medication abortion, is medically safe and effective. There are several ways someone may choose to have an abortion with pills, and there are different legal considerations for each. If you're writing about medication abortion, here is a guide to help you understand the different ways someone can have an abortion with pills.

The bottom line: no one should be investigated, arrested, or prosecuted for having an abortion.

To speak with an If/When/How attorney about these issues, please contact communications@ifwhenhow.org.

What is medication abortion?

Medication abortion means an abortion with pills. In the U.S., health care providers prescribe mifepristone and misoprostol together for a medication abortion. Around the world, people use those two medications, or misoprostol alone, for medically safe and effective abortion. A medication abortion can be a self-managed abortion, or it can be a medically-supported abortion provided by a health care provider in a clinic or through telehealth.

Both options can be and are taken and experienced at home, without the supervision or monitoring of a healthcare provider. Both medications are on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines, including self-managed abortion.

What is self-managed abortion?

Self-managed abortion is an abortion that someone does on their own. It takes place outside contact with traditional medical systems. It doesn't mean the person is alone—a person's self-managed abortion is often supported by friends, family members, or partners. More and more people around the world are using abortion pills to self-manage, and some use herbs or other means. Regardless, no one should be criminalized for their abortion.

Two states — South Carolina and Nevada — still retain laws that criminalize self-managed abortions, putting people at risk of prosecution even though such laws are unconstitutional.

Even in states that have no such laws, people who end their own pregnancies or those who help them may be investigated, arrested, prosecuted, or even jailed because of politically motivated police or prosecutors. Black, brown, and Indigenous people, people experiencing economic insecurity, immigrants, people who live in rural areas, young people, and trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive people are disproportionately targeted for criminalization. No matter what path a person chooses, no one should be criminalized for self-managing their own abortion or helping someone else do so.

Criminalizing someone for any abortion causes deep and lasting harm to them, their families, and their communities. It also undermines public health and violates a person's human and constitutional rights.

What is telehealth abortion?

Telehealth abortion is when someone takes abortion pills that they obtained through a U.S.-based provider after meeting with the provider virtually, through video or audio. In 2021 the FDA issued new guidance, allowing mifepristone to be delivered by mail, instead of requiring the patient to pick up pills in person from a licensed provider. Recently, the F.D.A. officially removed the in-person requirement from its regulations for mifepristone, allowing pharmacies who comply with certain requirements to dispense the pills in store or by mail order.

Unfortunately, whether you can actually get abortion pills through telemedicine depends on where you live. Currently, 19 states require the prescribing healthcare provider to be physically present when medication abortion is dispensed, which effectively bans telehealth for abortion care in those states. Some of these laws may be challenged in court.

Resources

[If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice](#) transforms the law and policy landscape through advocacy, support, and organizing so all people have the power to determine if, when, and how to define, create, and sustain families with dignity. We provide legal information and advice to people with questions about the law and self-managed abortion; legal defense to people who are criminalized for their pregnancy outcome; and bail and other financial assistance to support the legal defense of people who have been criminalized for self-managed abortion.

- The [Repro Legal Helpline](#) is a free, confidential source for legal advice and information on self-managed abortion. Visit [ReproLegalHelpline.org](#) or call 844-868-2812.
- The [Repro Legal Defense Fund](#) provides financial assistance to people criminalized for self-managed abortion and pregnancy loss assisting with bail, court fees, and funding expert witnesses. Visit [ReproLegalDefenseFund.org](#).

