



Medical Abortion Glossary

These definitions are relevant to the context of medical abortion.

Abortifacient - A drug, herb or device that can cause an abortion.

Abortion - The termination and expulsion of a pregnancy before viability.

Abortion Pill - Popular term for mifepristone, a medication used to terminate pregnancy. Sometimes used to describe the general process of medical abortion.

Administration (of a medicine) - How medicine is taken into the body.

Advanced Practice Clinicians - (See "Midlevel Providers").

Adverse Event - Any adverse or serious change in health that occurs related to any treatment the patient is receiving, or that occurs within a pre-specified period of time after their treatment has been completed.

Advocacy - The strategic use of information and action to influence opinion, policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Amenorrhea - A lack of menstruation.

Approval (of drugs) - Process through which a drug receives authorization for sale or use by a government regulatory agency. This includes any required pre-clinical or clinical testing, review, submission, and evaluation of the applications and test results, and post-marketing surveillance of the drug.

Back-up Birth Control - Any birth-control method — including condoms, diaphragms, sponges — that is used while waiting for hormonal birth-control methods to become effective in a woman's system, when hormonal methods are not taken on schedule or to further reduce the likelihood of pregnancy (for example, condoms and birth-control pills). Some people also refer to emergency contraception as back-up birth control.

Barrier Methods - Contraceptives that prevent sperm from fertilizing the egg by forming a physical or chemical barrier between the two. These are the condom, female condom, diaphragm, cervical cap Lea's shield, spermicides and the sponge.

Bimanual Examination - Physical (two-handed) examination of the size, shape and position of the uterus. Used to compare the size of the uterus with the history of amenorrhea.

Buccal - One route of administration for many drugs, including misoprostol, in which medication is placed between the gum and cheek on either side of the mouth, where it is absorbed. In the case of pills, the pills dissolve.

Birth Control - An umbrella term for behaviors, devices or medications used to avoid pregnancy. Birth control methods include all forms of contraception, as well as sterilization procedures.

Cervix - A small canal which forms the opening to the cavity of the uterus.

Clandestine Abortion - Abortion performed in secret, outside the formal health-care system, often used to refer to abortion performed beyond the limits of the law.

Combined Regimens - Combined regimens for medical abortion include mifepristone and misoprostol used together; this combined regimen is more effective than single agents (one drug used alone).

Complete Abortion - An abortion in which products of conception (POC) are completely expelled or removed. A medical abortion is complete once the gestational sac/embryo is expelled, even if endometrial thickness appears on an ultrasound.

Complete Miscarriage - A miscarriage in which all the pregnancy tissue is passed.

Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC) - Comprehensive abortion services - including treatment of incomplete abortion - that include safe abortion options in the first and second trimester, as well as pre- and postabortion information and counseling, follow-up care, and referrals for contraception and other services (see "Woman-Centered Abortion Care").

Conception - The moment when the pre-embryo attaches to the lining of the uterus and pregnancy begins. Also used to describe the fertilization of the egg.

Contraception / Contraceptive - The intentional use of any behavior, device, medication or procedure used to prevent conception. All forms of contraceptives are also forms of birth control (though some forms of birth control, such as sterilization, are not contraceptives).

Contraction - Tightening of the muscle layers of the uterus in a synchronous, rhythmic pattern. Contractions occur during labor, miscarriage and medical abortion, and after vacuum aspiration. These contractions aid in expulsion of the uterine contents, cause the uterus to shrink to pre-pregnant size, and also clamp tightly around interwoven blood vessels, thereby preventing hemorrhage.

Contraindications - A condition or factor that increases the risks for a particular drug, medical procedure or activity. Some contraindications are absolute, meaning that there are no reasonable circumstances for undertaking a particular treatment. Other contraindications are relative, meaning that the patient has some risk of complications, but that these risks may be outweighed by other considerations or mitigated by other measures.

Curette - An instrument with a small, sharp metal loop used to scrape tissue. Used in dilation and curettage.

Cytotec® - A brand of misoprostol, marketed as a prescription ulcer medication that can induce abortion in pregnant women (see "misoprostol").

D & C (Dilatation/Dilation and Curettage) - Also known as sharp curettage, D&C involves dilating the cervix through the use of mechanical dilators or pharmacological agents and using a sharp metal curette to scrape the walls of the uterus, removing its contents. The World Health Organization recommends vacuum aspiration and medical abortion in favor of D&C.

D & E (Dilatation/Dilation and Evacuation) - A surgical technique in which the cervix is dilated and then the uterus is emptied with suction, curettage and forceps. D&E is the World Health Organization-recommended method for second-trimester surgical abortion.

Dilatation/Dilation - Stretching an orifice (such as the cervix) beyond normal dimensions. In an abortion procedure it is usually accomplished by inserting a series of rounded instruments with progressively larger diameters through the external and internal os.

Dosage - Administration of a medicine in specific, prescribed amounts.

Ectopic Pregnancy - A pregnancy in which a fertilized egg attaches outside of the uterus, most often in a fallopian tube. An ectopic pregnancy can be life-threatening. Methotrexate can be used to treat some ectopic pregnancies; However, mifepristone and/or misoprostol neither cause nor treat ectopic pregnancy.

Elective Abortion - An abortion that is brought about intentionally. Also called an artificial or induced abortion, as opposed to a spontaneous abortion/miscarriage.

Electric Vacuum Aspiration - The use of an electric pump which creates suction to perform uterine evacuation. Tubing is connected at one end to the electric pump, and the other end is connected to a cannula inserted through the cervix into the uterus.

Embryo - The organism that develops from a successfully fertilized and implanted egg (zygote), from the second through the 10th week of pregnancy.

Emergency Contraception (EC) - Medicines such as Plan B® or certain high-dose birth control pills used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected vaginal intercourse. EC must be started within 120 hours (five days) of intercourse, but is most effective if used as early as possible. IUDs can also be used as EC if they are inserted within the five-day period.

Endometrium - The lining of the uterus that develops every month in order to nourish a fertilized egg. The lining is shed during menstruation if there is no implantation of a fertilized egg. Also called the uterine lining. If pregnancy occurs, the endometrium thickens to accept the implantation of a fertilized egg.

Fetus - The stage of development of a pregnancy after an embryo. Beyond 10 weeks after a woman's last menstrual period, the pregnancy is called a fetus.

First Trimester - The first three months of pregnancy

Follow-up - The visit, phone call or other mechanism through which a health-care provider confirms that the woman's abortion was successful, and that her progress is checked and any needs are met.

Gestational Age - The duration of pregnancy, calculated from the first day of last menstrual period. It is usually measured in weeks.

Gestational Sac - The first formation of an embryonic structure, which develops in the uterus early in pregnancy. In an ultrasound, the gestational sac should be visible by five weeks of pregnancy. In early pregnancy, the gestational sac is the first indication of an intrauterine pregnancy visible by ultrasound.

Gestational Trophoblastic Neoplasm / Molar Pregnancy - A non-viable mass of proliferating cells that occurs when a fetus is not able to fully form in the uterus. Treatment includes removal and pathology review for definitive diagnosis.

Harm-reduction Model - A range of pragmatic and compassionate public health policies or programs designed to reduce the harmful consequences associated with high-risk activities such as unsafe abortion.

Hemorrhage - Heavy bleeding or the abnormal flow of blood, typically defined as loss of more than 500 cc of blood.

High-risk Pregnancy - A pregnancy at increased risk of complications for the woman or the fetus.

Hormonal Contraceptives - Prescription methods of birth control that use hormones to prevent pregnancy. These include the implant, the Mirena® IUD, the patch, the pill, the ring and injectables.

Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (HCG) - A hormone normally produced during pregnancy. It can be tested for in urine or blood (serum hCG).

Ibuprofen - A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) commonly used to treat pain, swelling and fever.

In-clinic Abortion - A termination of pregnancy that is done with instruments in a health center, doctor's office or hospital. In the first trimester, suction alone is often used. Later in pregnancy, other instruments are used as well.

In-Clinic Administration - The administration of drugs for medical abortion in a clinical setting, under direct medical supervision.

Incomplete Abortion - An abortion – whether spontaneous or induced – in which some pregnancy tissue passes out of the uterus but some remains.

Induced Abortion - The intentional termination of pregnancy.

Indication for Abortion - Specific conditions under which an abortion is legal according to a law or a policy, for example, a pregnancy caused by rape, or a pregnancy that threatens the life of the woman.

Informed Choice / Consent - Voluntary decision to accept or not to accept a health service after receiving adequate information about the risks and benefits of the procedure, as well as information about other available options.

Intermediaries - People who play a variety of roles providing women with health care or information about health care. Intermediaries may provide information, act as referral agents, or help women make decisions about their pregnancy status and duration. Intermediaries may be part of the health system or members of local communities. They also can provide support for women who have had a medical abortion, helping to judge whether the medical abortion was successful, recognize danger signs and advise follow-up as appropriate.

Intra-uterine Device (IUD) - A small, plastic device containing copper or a hormone that is inserted into the uterus to prevent pregnancy. This reversible method of birth control must be inserted by a health-care provider.

Last Menstrual Period (LMP) - The first day of the last menstrual period, used to calculate the duration of pregnancy.

Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA) - An in-clinic, early abortion procedure in which the uterus is emptied with the gentle suction of a hand-held syringe.

Maternal Morbidity - Serious disease, disability or physical damage to women caused by pregnancy-related complications.

Maternal Mortality - Deaths of women while they are pregnant or within 42 days of the end of a pregnancy (either an abortion or birth) caused by or related to the pregnancy or its management.

Medabon® - Product consisting of mifepristone (taken orally) and misoprostol (taken vaginally or sublingually) in a combination pack for use up to 63 days of pregnancy.

Medical Abortion - The use of one or more medications to end pregnancy. These medications terminate the pregnancy, which is then expelled by the uterus in a process similar to miscarriage. Medical abortion is sometimes called medication abortion or the abortion pill. Medical abortion is not the same as emergency contraception (EC), also known as the "morning-after pill," which prevents pregnancy from occurring.

Menstrual Regulation - A procedure to restore or regulate the menstrual cycle of a woman who has missed her periods due to any reason (pregnancy or otherwise).

Menstruation - The blood that periodically flows as a discharge from the uterus if pregnancy does not occur. It occurs about every four weeks.

Methotrexate - An anti-metabolite drug used for a variety of purposes, sometimes to end pregnancy. It blocks cell division and DNA synthesis and repair, and it specifically interferes with rapidly dividing cells, thus stopping development of an early pregnancy. For medical abortion, methotrexate is used with a prostaglandin such as misoprostol, which causes the uterus to contract and expel the pregnancy. Methotrexate with misoprostol is effective for abortion up to seven weeks of pregnancy. However, the World Health Organization recommends against the use of

methotrexate for termination of early pregnancy because of the possible risks to the woman's health and the potential for the birth of infants with severe congenital abnormalities if treatment fails and the pregnancy continues to term.

Midlevel Providers - A range of non-physician health-care providers, including midwives, nurse practitioners, clinical officers, physician assistants and others. Midlevel providers' training and responsibilities differ from country to country, but they are trained in a range of clinical procedures related to reproductive health and can be trained to provide early abortion. Also referred to as Advanced Practice Clinicians.

Mifepristone - Originally known as RU-486, mifepristone blocks progesterone activity in the uterus, which stops the growth of the fetus and leads to detachment of the pregnancy. Additionally, it sensitizes the uterus to prostaglandins (such as misoprostol), increasing their effects and softens the cervix.

Misoprostol - A prostaglandin analogue often used for medical abortion in the first or second trimester, with or without mifepristone. It is administered at varying intervals to soften the cervix, stimulate uterine contractions and cause expulsion of the pregnancy. Misoprostol is inexpensive, stable at room temperature and available in many countries for the prevention and treatment of gastric ulcers. It can also be used for:

- cervical preparation prior to a vacuum aspiration abortion or second-trimester surgical abortion;
- labor induction;
- prevention of post-partum hemorrhage;
- treatment of intrauterine fetal death, missed abortion and incomplete abortion.

Missed Abortion - A kind of miscarriage; the pregnancy ends, but the tissue remains in the uterus. Treatment can be managed in a variety of ways, including waiting and watching to see if the tissue is expelled on its own, or medical treatment with misoprostol or vacuum aspiration.

Morning-after Pill - (See "Emergency Contraception").

Multiple Pregnancy - A pregnancy involving more than one fetus, such as pregnancies with twins, triplets or quadruplets.

Nonviable - Not able to live, as in an embryo or fetus which has not yet developed enough to survive outside the womb. Or, for example in missed abortion, the embryo has ceased to grow and there is no longer cardiac activity, but it has not expelled.

Oral - One route of administration for many drugs, including mifepristone, in which the medication is swallowed.

Ovulation - The release of the ripe egg (ovum) from the ovary. The egg is released when the cavity surrounding it (the follicle) breaks open in response to a hormonal signal. Ovulation occurs around fourteen or fifteen days from the first day of the woman's last menstrual cycle. When ovulation occurs, the ovum moves into the fallopian tube and becomes available for fertilization.

Pain Management - Using medications, psychological support and other means to decrease a patient's reaction to pain.

Policy - Includes statements, plans, practices, and regulations adopted by a government or other organization that are designed to guide or control institutional and community behavior.

Postabortion Care (PAC) - A specific set of services for women experiencing complications of abortion, especially unsafe abortion, including retained tissue, hemorrhage, and infection. PAC consists of several elements:

- (1) Uterine evacuation
- (2) Counseling to identify and respond to women's emotional and physical health needs and other concerns;
- (3) Contraceptive information and method provision for women who desire to postpone or limit future pregnancy;
- (4) Reproductive and other health services that are preferably provided on-site or via referrals to other accessible facilities in providers' networks;
- (5) Community and service provider partnerships that help prevent unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion and mobilize resources to help women receive appropriate and timely care for complications of abortion.

Precaution - Though not an outright contraindication, a precaution necessitates a more careful evaluation of risks and benefits, and the individual clinical situation, before starting a health-care treatment.

Products of Conception (POC) - The pregnancy tissue mass, which is removed during the process of abortion.

Progesterone - A hormone produced in the ovaries of women that is important in the regulation of puberty, menstruation and pregnancy.

Prostaglandin - One of a number of hormone-like substances that participates in a wide range of bodily functions such as the contraction and relaxation of smooth muscle, the dilation and constriction of blood vessels, control of blood pressure, and modulation of inflammation. Misoprostol or Cytotec® is a synthetic prostaglandin used to induce uterine contractions for childbirth or abortion.

Regimen - A plan or regulated course of behavior or treatment designed to give a particular result. In medical abortion, the regimen refers to the dosages of specific medicines given and the timing and route of administration.

Reproductive Health - A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes.

Reproductive Rights - A set of recognized human rights pertaining to individuals' reproductive systems and reproductive capacity. Reproductive rights recognize that all people should be able to:

- decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and have the information and means to do so;
- attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.

Reproductive rights also include the right of all individuals and couples to be free from discrimination, coercion and violence when making decisions concerning reproduction.

Rh-immunoglobulin - A substance given to prevent a woman who has Rh-negative blood from forming antibodies to the blood of an Rh-positive fetus if there is maternal/fetal blood transfer. If the mother with Rh-negative blood is exposed to the blood of an Rh-positive fetus, she may or may not become sensitized. If she does become sensitized, the life of future babies may be jeopardized because Rh antibodies cross the placenta and may cause the destruction of fetal red blood cells.

RU-486 - A name given to mifepristone during product development which is sometimes still used to refer to the drug (see "Mifepristone").

Safe Abortion - Termination of pregnancy by a skilled person at a place having all the required medical equipment/supplies.

Sanitary Pad - An absorbent "napkin" made of cotton or similar fibers that is worn against the vulva to absorb menstrual flow.

Second Trimester - The second three months of pregnancy.

Self (home) Administration - Administration of a medicine by the individual outside of a clinical setting. The individual may have instructions from a health care provider and may visit a health care provider for follow-up.

Side Effects - A peripheral or secondary effect, especially an undesirable secondary effect of a drug or therapy. The most common side effects of medical abortion are caused by misoprostol and may include: headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, chills or fatigue.

Signs of Pregnancy - The most common signs of pregnancy include a missed period, frequent urination, headaches, fatigue, nausea, and sore or enlarged breasts.

Sonogram - A picture of the embryo or fetus in the uterus produced by the visualizing technology called ultrasonography (see "Ultrasound").

Spontaneous Abortion - A miscarriage; the unintentional termination of any pregnancy that is not viable (the fetus cannot survive). Spontaneous abortion occurs in at least 15-20 percent of all recognized pregnancies and usually takes place before the 13th week of pregnancy.

Sublingual - One route of administration for many drugs, including misoprostol, in which the medication is placed under the tongue, where it is absorbed. In the case of pills, the pills dissolve.

Tampon - A firm roll of absorbent cotton or other fiber that is worn inside the vagina to absorb menstrual flow.

Telemedicine - A rapidly developing application of clinical medicine wherein medical information is transferred via telephone, the Internet or other networks for the purpose of consulting. It is sometimes employed for remote medical procedures or examinations.

Teratogenicity - Having the ability to cause defects in a developing fetus. A teratogen is an agent (for example, a chemical or a medicine) that can disturb the development of the embryo or fetus by halting the pregnancy or producing a congenital malformation (a birth defect).

Termination of Pregnancy (TOP) - The intentional ending of a pregnancy before the fetus has grown enough to live outside the womb (see also "Abortion").

Third Trimester - The last three months of pregnancy.

Trimester - The nine months of pregnancy are traditionally divided into three trimesters: distinct periods of roughly three months each in which different phases of fetal development take place.

Ultrasound - A medical technology that creates an image by bouncing sound waves off the internal organs. In the case of ultrasound during pregnancy, sound waves rebound differently from various tissues, making bone or muscle tissue appear lighter in color than fluid, such as amniotic fluid, which appears dark. The image allows for accurate measurement of fetal structures to determine gestational age (see "Sonogram").

Unsafe Abortion - A procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary knowledge or skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards, or both.

Uterine Contractility - The innate ability of a woman's uterus to contract, which varies from woman to woman. During pregnancy, uterine contractility is suppressed by progesterone until delivery. The progesterone receptor inhibitor, mifepristone, increases uterine contractility and sensitizes the myometrium to prostaglandins.

Uterine evacuation - The removal of the contents of the uterus, especially related to pregnancy tissue.

Uterine Perforation - Puncture of the uterine wall by a medical instrument or other object.

Uterus - The pear-shaped, muscular reproductive organ from which women menstruate and where normal pregnancy develops. Also called the "womb."

Vacuum Aspiration - A procedure in which a suction tube attached to an electric or manual vacuum pump is inserted through the cervix into the uterus to remove its contents.

Vaginal/Intravaginal - One route of administration for many drugs, including misoprostol, in which medication is inserted into the vagina, where it is absorbed. In the case of pills, the pills dissolve.

Viable - A fetus is said to be viable when it is able to survive outside the uterus.

Woman-Centered Abortion Care (WCAC) - A comprehensive approach to providing abortion services that takes into account the factors that influence a woman's individual mental and physical health needs, as well as her ability to access services and her personal circumstances. A woman-centered model for

abortion care comprises three key elements: choice, access, and quality (see "Comprehensive Abortion Care").

Zygote - The single-celled organism that results from the joining of the egg and sperm. It later develops into an embryo.