

Family planning services in Ireland

This information was sourced from www.dohc.ie

Information

The Health Service Executive (HSE) in Ireland is obliged to ensure that an impartial, accessible and comprehensive family planning service is provided in its area.

Health Service Executive (HSE) offices are encouraged to have a choice of service providers and must provide a choice of providers if, for example, the local GP refuses to prescribe contraception. They are also obliged to provide information on the services available in their area.

Services, including information and advice and prescriptions for contraceptive drugs and devices, are provided mainly by family doctors (GPs), by maternity and other hospitals and by a number of voluntary organisations. All maternity hospitals and most large public hospitals as well as some private hospitals provide surgical contraception services.

Genetic testing and counselling is not widely available in Ireland and fertility treatment services are generally only available from private specialists or abroad.

Pregnancy counselling is provided by a number of voluntary organisations. Most have branches throughout the country. The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has been established to prepare a national strategy to address the number of unwanted pregnancies in Ireland and to reduce the number of Irish women travelling abroad each year for abortions.

Abortion in Ireland remains illegal except in very limited circumstances, but women may not be prevented from travelling abroad for abortions and abortion information may be made available in certain circumstances.

Rules

The HSE has an obligation to ensure that comprehensive family planning services are available in their area. They may fulfil this obligation directly in health centres through public health nurses or through GPs and family planning organisations.

Information on family planning

Information and education on family planning services and on contraception is provided directly by HSE offices, family doctors (GP's) and the Health Promotion Unit in the Department of Health and Children. Guidelines from the Department of Health and Children state that each Local Health Office should provide a leaflet that outlines the type and range of family planning services available in its area and details of service providers or contact phone numbers.

Contraception

In practice, advice on contraception and prescriptions for contraceptive drugs and devices are provided by GPs, voluntary organisations and specialist private family planning clinics.

If you have a medical card, you are entitled to free GP services including contraceptive advice and prescriptions for contraceptive drugs and devices. Occasionally, a GP or pharmacist may refuse to provide these services. If this happens, the HSE is obliged to provide you with an alternative service - either through another GP, another pharmacist or a family planning organisation, voluntary or private.

If you do not have a medical card, the costs of contraceptive drugs and devices may be included in the subsidy arrangements for prescribed drugs and medicines.

Voluntary and private family planning clinics also provide contraceptive services. The voluntary providers usually have charges but may waive them or accept lower amounts in certain cases.

Age

There is no set minimum age in Ireland at which contraceptive advice and prescriptions may be provided. The age of consent to sexual activity is 17 and it may be a criminal offence to have sex with a person under the age of 17. This means that providers of contraceptive services are entitled to refuse to provide those services to people under 17. In general the age of consent for health services purposes is 16. There is no doubt that services may not be refused to adults - that is, anyone aged 18 or over.

Surgical procedures

The decision to have a sterilisation operation for family planning purposes, is a matter for the patient, in conjunction with their consultant. If the service is not available at a particular hospital, you have the right to ask your consultant for a referral to a hospital where this procedure is available. Your HSE office should make the arrangements.

The Department of Health and Children has asked the HSE to ensure that vasectomy services are available through hospitals, family doctors (GP's) and family planning clinics in their areas. Your entitlement to free services is the same as for public hospital services generally. A number of private hospitals also provide these procedures. You have to pay the full cost involved.

Genetic counselling

Specific genetic testing and counselling is not widely available in Ireland. Your family doctor (GP) may refer you to a specialist doctor to discuss genetic counselling in general.

As there is no entitlement to such a service, you are unlikely to recoup costs from the Health Service Executive (HSE) if you go abroad for the service.

Crisis pregnancies

A crisis pregnancy is a pregnancy that is neither planned nor desired by the woman concerned and that represents a personal crisis for her. There are a number of voluntary organisations that provide counselling for women and some also provide abortion information.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has been established to try to reduce unwanted pregnancies and to reduce the number of women going abroad for abortions.

Abortion

Abortion is illegal in Ireland except where there is a real and substantial risk to the life (as distinct from the health), of the mother. This includes a risk arising from a threat of suicide. The Irish Medical Council ethical guidelines to doctors state that it is 'not unethical if a child *in utero* should suffer or lose its life as a side effect of standard medical treatment of the mother'.

Women in Ireland **may not be prevented** from travelling abroad to get an abortion. It **is lawful** to provide information in Ireland about abortion abroad, subject to strict conditions. It is **not lawful** to encourage or advocate an abortion in individual circumstances.

Pregnancy counselling

Pregnancy counselling is provided by a number of voluntary organisations. Most have branches throughout the country.

[One Family](#), (formerly 'Cherish')

2 Lower Pembroke Street,

Dublin 2.

Lo-call: 1890 6622 12

Tel: (01) 662 9212

E-mail: info@onefamily.ie

[Cura](#),

National Office,

St. Patrick's College,

Maynooth,

Co. Kildare.

Tel: (01) 708 4689

Fax: (01) 708 4688

E-mail: cura@iol.ie

[Life Ireland](#),

29 Dame Street
Dublin 2
Lo-call: 1850 281 281
Tel: (01) 679 8989
Fax: (01) 679 0694

[PACT,](#)

15 Belgrave Road,
Rathmines,
Dublin 6.
Lo-call: 1850 67 33 33
Tel: (01) 497 6788
E-mail: pact@eircom.net

Pregnancy counselling and family planning services

[Irish Family Planning Association](#)

60 Amiens Street
Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 806 9444
Fax: (01) 806 9445
E-mail: post@ifpa.ie

[Well Woman Centre,](#)
67 Pembroke Road
Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 660 9860

Natural family planning services

[NAOMI \(National Association Ovulation Method Ireland\)](#)

16 North Great George's Street
Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 878 6156
Fax: (01) 878 8158
Office Hours: 9.30am-1.00pm
E-mail: eng@naomi.ie

[ACCORD](#)

Central Office
Columba Centre
St. Patrick's College
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
Tel: (01) 505 3112
Fax: (01) 601 6410
E-mail: admin@accord.ie