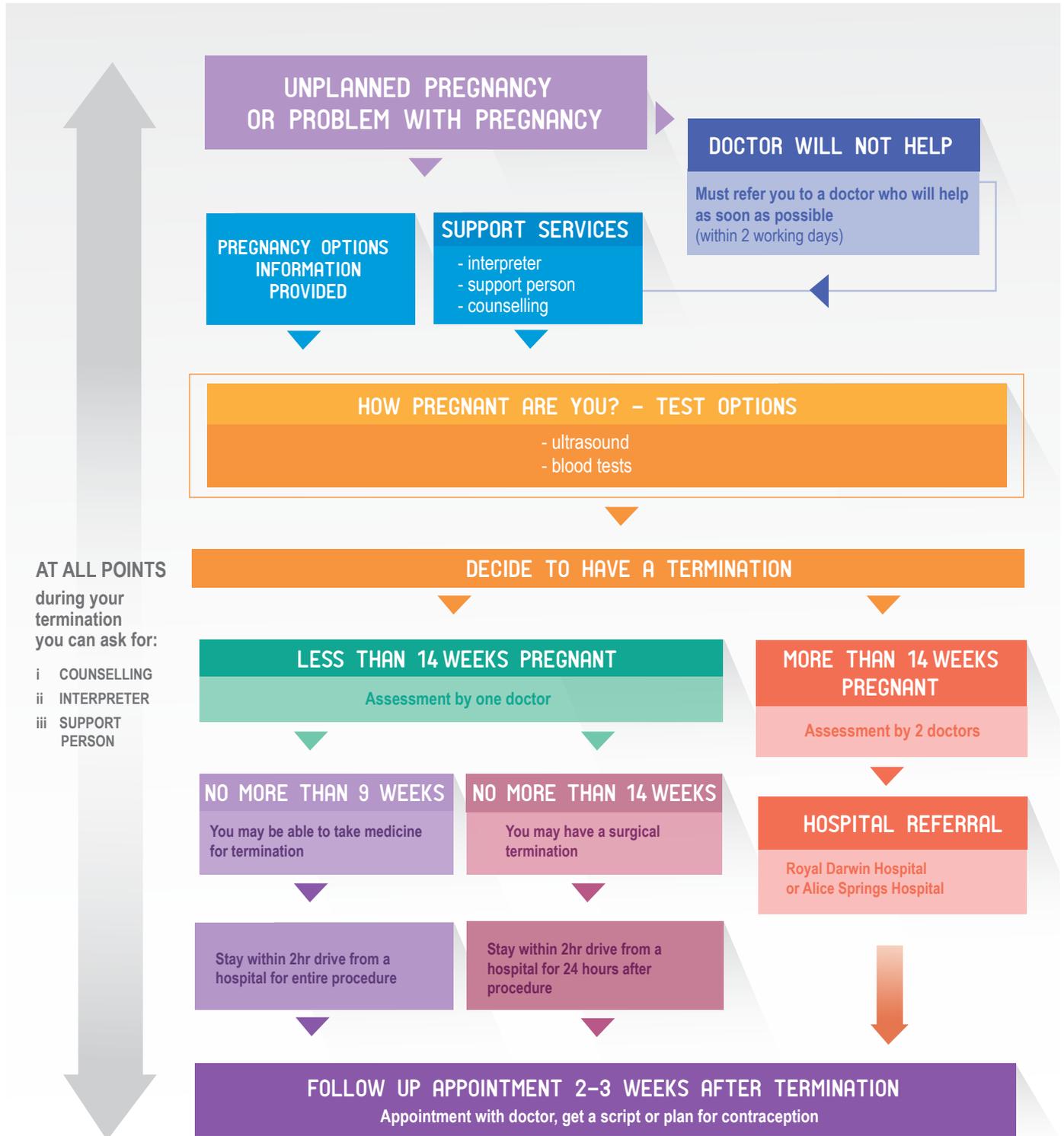


Having a termination of pregnancy (abortion)

in the Northern Territory

Termination of pregnancy

The termination of pregnancy (abortion) pathway





What is this booklet about?

If you are pregnant and want a termination of pregnancy (also known as an abortion), this booklet gives you some unbiased information about your possible options.



I had unprotected sex – what do I do?

If you have been sexually assaulted, had unprotected sex or contraception has failed (for example a condom 'broke') and you don't want to get pregnant, you may be able to take the emergency contraceptive pill (which used to be known as the 'morning after pill'). Emergency contraceptive pills **MUST BE TAKEN WITHIN FIVE (5) days** after having unprotected sex. *They work best when taken as soon as possible after having unprotected sex.*

These pills are taken at a very early stage, before it would be possible to tell if a pregnancy would happen. They are to stop it from happening and are very different from the medicine needed once it has been confirmed you are pregnant.

Emergency contraceptive pills are available from most pharmacies after you talk with a pharmacist. You do not need a prescription. If you live in a remote community these pills are usually available from your local health care centre (clinic).



What do I do if I find out I am pregnant?

Many women (as many as 1 in 3) have an unplanned or unexpected pregnancy at some time in their life. If you think you are pregnant you need to confirm this with a pregnancy test.

Options for a pregnancy test include:

- using a home pregnancy test from a pharmacy or supermarket
- seeing your local doctor who can do a urine or blood test
- going to your local healthcare centre (clinic) if you live in a remote community
- visiting or making an appointment at Family Planning Welfare NT (in Darwin and Palmerston).



The pregnancy is planned but there is a problem with the pregnancy and I don't know what to do?

You may have a planned pregnancy but find out there is a problem with the pregnancy. This can be a very concerning and confusing time. You will need to get as much information as you can about the pregnancy from your doctor, other specialists and the results of various tests. You can then discuss all of your options with your doctor or others, such as counsellors.

Options for your pregnancy

If you have an unplanned or unexpected problem with a pregnancy you have three options:

- continuing with the pregnancy with a view to parenting the child
- continuing with the pregnancy and placing the child with an agency for adoption
- terminating the pregnancy (also called abortion)

Your doctor or health professional can discuss your options and give you a **Pregnancy Options booklet**.

Termination of pregnancy



Where do I go to talk about a termination of pregnancy?

You can talk about termination of pregnancy (abortion) with your doctor, healthcare centre midwife, nurse or Aboriginal Health Practitioner. If you live in Darwin or Palmerston you can also call Family Planning Welfare NT on 8948 0144 to make an appointment to talk about your options.



What if my doctor or health practitioner won't talk to me about termination of pregnancy

If you choose a termination and your doctor or health practitioner will not help you, he or she must refer you immediately to another doctor or health practitioner who can help you as soon as possible, for example no more than two working days.



Who can make the decision about my termination of pregnancy?

If you are over 18 years, and not under the care of an adult guardian because of a disability, then you are able to make the decision without anyone other than your medical team being involved.

If you are over 16 years and the doctor considers you able to make your own decisions, you do not need the consent of your partner, the father of the child or any other member of your family.

If you are under 16 years the doctor will need to consider your maturity and ability to make important decisions. If you are considered to be mature enough and to have the ability to make an important decision about medical treatment then you will be able to make the decision on your own. If you are 14 years or under, when you go to the doctor it will be necessary to have a person with parental authority available to help you or to make that decision with you.

No matter your age, but especially if you are young, you might prefer to have someone accompany you for support and to help with decision making and consent.

If an adult is coming along with you, they need to show the doctor that they support your choices, will keep your information confidential, are taking on board your wishes, and if they are going to be providing consent, they must be someone who has parental authority for you.

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An adult who does not have parental responsibility for you cannot give consent to medical treatment. If your doctor considers you can make decisions for yourself, a parent/guardian cannot force the doctor to give you medical treatment you do not want.

Your confidential information

If you do not want any other person (other than the medical team) to know about your pregnancy or the termination of pregnancy, you should inform your doctor and other health practitioners assisting you.

You should feel free to tell the medical team whether they can inform anyone else about any part of your care including any other health practitioners. It is important for you to tell the medical team if you do not want your local doctor or clinic to know about your pregnancy or termination.

If you do not inform the doctor, then your medical notes may be entered on a system accessed at your local clinic, or a discharge summary or referral will be sent to your usual doctor outlining what treatment you have received and what needs to be followed up by that doctor.

If you do not want your local doctor or clinic involved you will need to have a follow-up appointment with the doctor who performed the termination.



How many weeks pregnant am I?

Your pregnancy is calculated from the first day of your last normal menstrual period. Your pregnancy is then counted in weeks and days rather than months.

Your doctor or a nurse or health practitioner will help you work out how far along in the pregnancy you are. This will be done with an ultrasound scan.

Pregnancy has three main parts

Each part is called a trimester:

- The first trimester is from the beginning to 12 weeks.
- The second trimester is from 13 weeks to 28 weeks.
- The third trimester is from 29 to 40 weeks.



What options do I have for a termination of pregnancy in the Northern Territory?

There are two main options for termination of pregnancy up until 14 weeks gestation. You will need to see a doctor and have tests done for whether you can have a medical or a surgical termination.

An early medical termination of pregnancy

You can only have an early medical termination of pregnancy (outside of a hospital) **if you are no more than 9 weeks (63 days) pregnant.**

You will need to be assessed by a doctor to see if this option is right for you. The doctor will write a prescription for the medicines called (MS-2Step), then you will need to go to a qualified pharmacist to collect the medicines. The pharmacist will give you information about taking the medicines.



What is MS-2Step?

You will need to take two different medicines and they come together in a pack called MS-2Step. You can take the medicines at home (or at the clinic, with the doctor or other health professional).

The first medicine is called Mifepristone, this is also known as RU-486. This medicine comes in a green box and contains one tablet.

The second medicine is called Misoprostol, this is the medicine in the purple box (four tablets). You take this 36-48 hours after the first tablet.

In some cases, the doctor can direct another health practitioner (for example another doctor, a nurse or a pharmacist) to help you take the drugs you need for this termination and to check on you during and after the process.



Is an early medical termination right for me?

- you must be no more than nine weeks gestation (63 days) to have a medical termination (outside a hospital). You will need an ultrasound to confirm this.
- your doctor will check your health, as some medical conditions make medical termination unsafe. You will need to tell your doctor if you have any health problems.
- if you are healthy and the doctor considers it is suitable for you to have an early medical termination, your doctor will write a care plan for you explaining each step you need to follow.
- if you live in a remote/very remote community you will need to travel and stay in town for the whole time it takes for the medical termination. This will be around three to four days.
- during this time you must be two hours safe drive from a hospital (Royal Darwin Hospital, Alice Springs Hospital, Katherine District Hospital, Tennant Creek Hospital or Gove District Hospital).
- you need to think about all of the things that can affect travel time, like weather, road conditions and transport options. For example, roads to your community or town might be cut off in the wet season and you may no longer be able to reach a hospital within two hours drive.
- You must have 24 hour access to a phone in case you need to call for help. If you have a mobile phone, it must be charged and topped up with “credit” or on a full plan.
- you must have a reliable support person in case you need help during the three to four days after taking the medication.
- you will need a health check-up 14 to 21 days after the process to make sure the termination is complete and to discuss contraception options.

Things to consider when having an early medical termination:

- the medicines for having early medical terminations have been used around the world for a long time and have a low risk of complications.
- you do not have to go to hospital and you do not need an anaesthetic.
- only one qualified doctor is needed to assess whether or not you are eligible for a medical termination.
- if you are within a two hour drive from a hospital (Royal Darwin Hospital, Alice Springs Hospital, Katherine District Hospital, Tennant Creek or Gove District Hospital), you can stay at home or at other safe accommodation for the termination.
- after taking the medication the process can take up to three to four days. You will need to stay at home, have access to a toilet, privacy and a support person.
- you will experience some cramping and you may feel more than usual period pain. You may feel nausea and have vomiting and diarrhoea. You can use Panadol for pain relief but may need other medicines to help stop you vomiting.
- in a small number of cases there is excessive bleeding that means you must go to a hospital for medical assessment.
- if the MS-2Step medicine doesn't work, you will need to go back to the doctor or clinic.
- if you are currently breastfeeding you must stop once you have taken the MS-2Step medication. Talk to your doctor about when you can start breastfeeding again.

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Surgical termination of pregnancy

A surgical termination is an operation done in a hospital or day surgery. The process usually involves a suction curette (removal of tissue from the uterus) and in most cases is done under a general anaesthetic. You can usually leave hospital the same day after having a surgical termination but you will need someone to drive you.

Talk to your doctor who can give you more information about which type of termination might be right for you.

Things to consider when having a surgical termination:

- there is a low risk that the operation (a curette) will not remove all of the tissue forming part of the pregnancy. This can cause excessive bleeding and may mean that you need to have another operation.
- you can sometimes develop an infection that needs to be treated with antibiotics after surgical termination.
- there is a low risk that your cervix (opening of the uterus (womb)) or the uterus itself is damaged. This is rare and when it does happen, it mostly results in a small tear that heals itself.
- there is a low risk of excessive bleeding and in rare cases a blood transfusion may be needed.
- any operation that needs to use an anaesthetic has risks. These are very low for healthy women. The doctor will explain the risks to you before the operation.

Having a termination of pregnancy after 14 weeks

If you are more than 14 weeks and up to 23 weeks pregnant your doctor will have to talk with another doctor to decide on the best procedure for your termination. You may have to travel to another state for a late stage termination.

Giving consent (agreeing) to a termination of pregnancy

Your doctor will ask questions to check you understand what a termination of pregnancy is, that you are making the right decision for you, and you have made the decision yourself.



Will I be eligible for assistance from the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) for termination of pregnancy services?

If you are eligible for an early medical termination and you do not have access to safe accommodation or you are not within two hours driving time of a hospital, you and a support person may be eligible for assistance for travel and accommodation through PATS. You can talk about this with your doctor when you are discussing your options for a termination of pregnancy. Help with travel and accommodation through PATS is also available for women having a surgical termination of pregnancy.

You may also be eligible for PATS assistance if your doctor recommends travelling interstate for the treatment.



What if I need an interpreter to access a termination of pregnancy?

If you need an interpreter for any language, your doctor or health practitioner can arrange an interpreter for you, either face to face or over the phone.

Follow up doctor's visit after the termination of pregnancy

It is very important that you go back to either the doctor who performed the termination or another doctor between 14-21 days after the termination to make sure the procedure is complete and to get information and a prescription if necessary for contraception.



How will I feel after a termination of pregnancy?

Most women who have made their own decision to terminate a pregnancy and have appropriate support, feel like they have made the right decision. Some women will have mixed emotions and may feel sadness and loss. Counselling can help you deal with your feelings. There are usually no lasting physical impacts.

What about counselling?

You can ask for pregnancy options information before making a decision about termination of pregnancy (see the *“Pregnancy Options for Women in the Northern Territory”* booklet for more information). You can also get supportive counselling during a termination. Counselling may be provided by a social worker or psychologist who specialises in this field. You may be able to speak with someone over the phone.

Counselling can continue if you need it following the termination of your pregnancy.

Suggested Contacts

It is best that you speak with your local doctor (who does not have an objection to termination of pregnancy) so he or she can send you to the right place for a termination of pregnancy.

Family Planning Welfare NT

Family Planning Welfare NT can give information to women about termination of pregnancy, especially early medical termination of pregnancy.

Unit 2, The Clock Tower Centre

2 Dick Ward Dr Coconut Grove NT 0810

Hours: 9:00am to 4:00pm

T: (08) 8948 0144

W: www.fpwnt.com.au



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Northern Territory Department of Health

www.health.nt.gov.au