

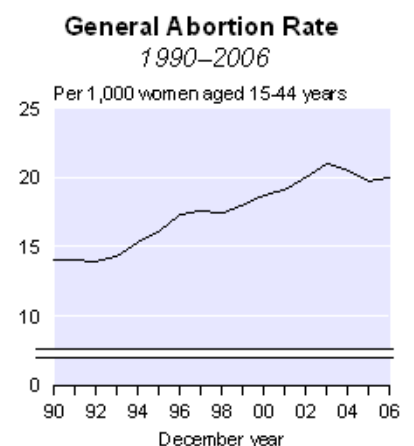
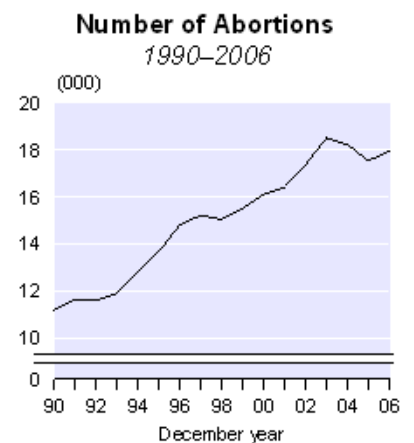
Embargoed until 10:45am – 14 June 2007

Abortions

Year ended December 2006

Key points

- There were **17,930 abortions performed in New Zealand** in 2006, compared with 17,530 in 2005 and 18,510 in 2003.
- The **general abortion rate was 20.0 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years** in 2006, up on 19.7 abortions per 1,000 in 2005, but lower than the 2003 rate of 21.0 abortions per 1,000.
- **Women aged 20–24 years had the highest abortion rate (37 abortions per 1,000 women aged 20–24 years)** in 2006.
- The **median age of women having an abortion was 24.5 years** in 2006, a slight decrease from the median age of 24.7 recorded in the previous three years.
- **Most abortions (64 percent) were first abortions** in 2006.



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There is a companion Media Release published – [Abortions: Year ended December 2006](#).

Commentary

Number of abortions

A total of 17,930 induced abortions were performed in New Zealand in the year ended December 2006, up on 17,530 in 2005, but down from the peak of 18,510 induced abortions in 2003.

Abortion rates

It is important to note that comparisons over time in abortion rates and in the number of abortions are affected by the legal environment and the provision of abortion services.

In 2006, the general abortion rate (abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) was 20.0. This is an increase on 19.7 in 2005, but lower than the 2003 rate of 21.0. The general abortion rate was 17.3 per 1,000 in 1996.

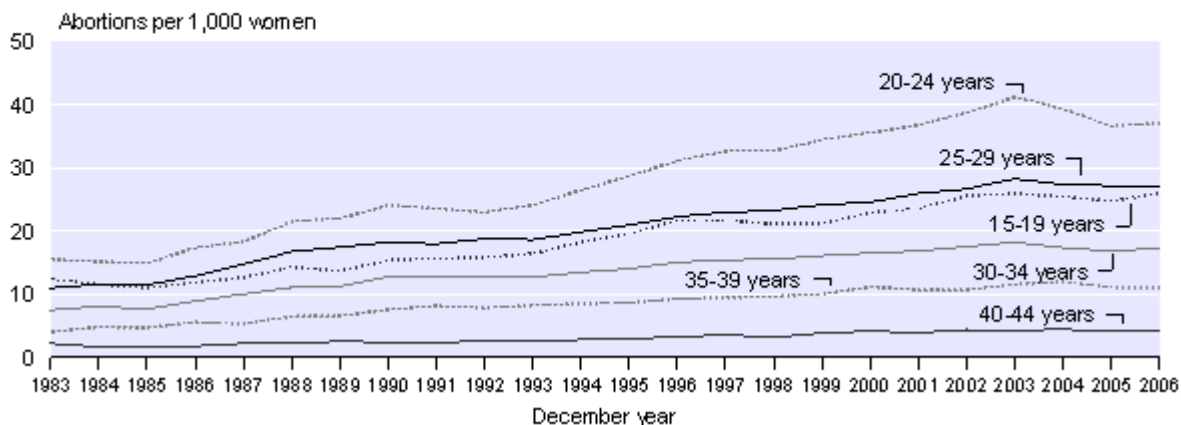
The total abortion rate measures the average number of abortions that 1,000 women would have during their life (based on current age-specific abortion rates). The total abortion rate for 2006 was 620 abortions per 1,000 women, which is 19 percent higher than the rate of 519 per 1,000 recorded a decade earlier in 1996. However, the 2006 rate is 5 percent lower than the peak rate of 654 per 1,000 in 2003.

Abortions by age of women

Women aged 20–24 years have more abortions than other age groups, accounting for approximately 3 out of 10 abortions in any year. Women in this age group also had the highest abortion rate (37 abortions per 1,000 women aged 20–24 years in 2006), significantly higher than any other age group. Beyond age 24, both the number of abortions and the abortion rate decreased with increasing age. Women aged 25–29 years had an abortion rate of 27 per 1,000 in 2006. Teenagers (15–19 years) had a slightly lower abortion rate (26 abortions per 1,000). The median age (half are younger, and half older, than this age) of women having an abortion has remained stable at around 25 years over the last twenty years.

Age-specific Abortion Rates

1983–2006



Previous abortions

In 2006, 64 percent of abortions were first abortions, unchanged from 2005 and 2004. In 1996, this figure was 71 percent. Eleven percent of women having an abortion in 2006 had had two or more previous abortions, compared with 7.2 percent in 1996.

Duration of pregnancy

More abortions were performed during the tenth week of gestation than at any other length of gestation. In 2006, about one in five abortions took place in the tenth week of gestation.

Ethnicity

Women having an abortion can state more than one ethnicity on the abortion notification form. For this reason, some abortions are counted more than once in the ethnicity figures and ethnic group totals sum to more than the total number of abortions.

In 2005, Statistics New Zealand introduced a new classification for ethnicity. This classification was used to classify ethnicity for the 2006 Census and for births, deaths and abortions registered from 1 January 2006. Before 2006, the MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African) ethnic group was included in the 'Other' ethnic group. In 2006, statistics on the MELAA group have been produced separately. In addition, the ethnic response of 'New Zealander' was coded and included in the 'Other' ethnic group for the first time. In previous years, New Zealanders were included in the European ethnic group. Ethnicity data for 2006 onwards is not strictly comparable with ethnicity data for earlier years.

In 2006, there were 9,860 abortions to women who identified with the European ethnic group (either as their only ethnic group or as one of their ethnic groups). There were 4,100 abortions to women who identified with the Māori ethnic group, 2,940 women identified with the Asian ethnic group, 2,130 women identified with the Pacific ethnic group and 210 women identified with the MELAA ethnic group. Of the 51 women in the 'Other' ethnic group, 49 identified with the New Zealander ethnic group.

International comparisons

International comparisons are affected by both statistical coverage and laws relating to induced abortion. Consequently, differences between New Zealand and other countries' abortion rates should be interpreted with care.

International data for 2006 is not available, so comparisons have generally been made using 2005 data. In 2005, the general abortion rate (abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) for New Zealand was 19.7 per 1,000. The Netherlands (8.6), Scotland (11.9), Denmark (14.3), Norway (15.2) and England and Wales (17.8) had lower rates. In Australia (19.3 in 2004), Sweden (20.2) and the United States (20.8 in 2003), the abortion rate was similar to New Zealand.

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Technical notes

Abortion statistics

Abortion is defined as foetal loss excluding stillbirths, usually during the first 20 weeks of gestation. Induced abortions are those initiated voluntarily with the intention of terminating a pregnancy. All other abortions are called spontaneous, even if an external cause is involved, such as injury or high fever.

All abortion statistics and derived abortion rates included in this release are based on legally induced abortions registered in New Zealand. No information is available on spontaneous or illegal abortions.

Grounds for abortion

In New Zealand the grounds on which an abortion is permitted are described in the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977 and in section 187A of the Crimes Act 1961. In any year, 98–99 percent of all abortions are performed because of serious danger to the mental health of the woman.

Source of abortion statistics

Abortion information is obtained from the Abortion Supervisory Committee. For every abortion carried out as approved under the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977, a 'Notification of Abortion' form (ASC Form No. 4) must be filled in by the licensed abortion institution. This is then sent to the Abortion Supervisory Committee.

Changes in the collection of abortion statistics

Changes have also been made in the collection of ethnicity data. Before 2006, the MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African) ethnic group was included in the 'Other' ethnic group. In 2006, statistics on the MELAA group have been produced separately. In addition, the ethnic response of 'New Zealander' was coded and included in the 'Other' ethnic group for the first time. In previous years, New Zealanders were included in the European ethnic group. Ethnicity data for 2006 is not strictly comparable with ethnicity data for earlier years.

In 2004, a new question asking for 'domicile code' was added to ASC Form No 4. However, due to different rates of 'not stated region' across hospitals, regional data should be interpreted with care. The New Zealand Health Information Service base their health domicile codes on the area unit pattern. They are used to represent a healthcare user's usual residential address. The code used from 1 July 2002 is based on the 2001 six-digit area unit code (as used in the Census of Population and Dwellings).

Live births

Live births refer to live births registered in New Zealand by date of registration.

Stillbirths

Stillbirth refers to the birth of a dead foetus that either weighs 400g or more when issued from its mother; or is issued from its mother after the 20th week of gestation.

Rounding

Abortion figures contained in the tables attached to this release are unrounded. All other figures have been rounded. Derived figures (for example, abortion rates and ratios) have been calculated using unrounded data.

More information

For more information, follow the [link](#) from the Technical notes of this release on the Statistics New Zealand website.

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Tables

The following tables can be downloaded from the Statistics New Zealand website in Excel 97 format. If you do not have access to Excel 97 or higher, you may use the [Excel file viewer](#) to view, print and export the contents of the file.

List of tables

1. Induced abortions, rates and ratios, 1980–2006
2. Induced abortions by previous abortions, 1991–2006
3. Induced abortions by age of woman, 1991–2006
4. Abortion rates by age of woman, 1991–2006
5. Induced abortions by previous live births, 1991–2006
6. Induced abortions by duration of pregnancy, 1991–2006
7. Induced abortions by ethnicity of woman, 2002–2006
8. General abortion rate, New Zealand and selected low fertility countries, 1996–2005