

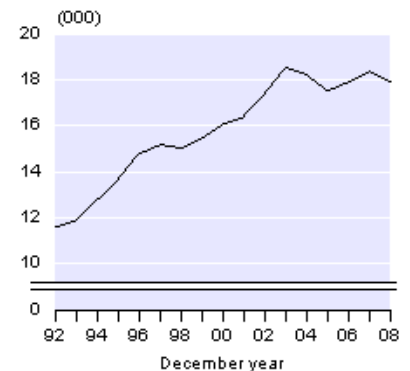
Embargoed until 10:45am – 16 June 2009

Abortions: Year ended December 2008

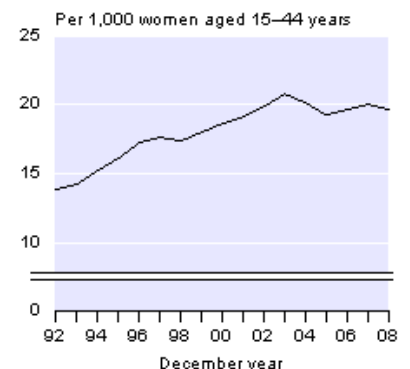
Key points

- 17,940 abortions were performed in New Zealand in 2008, down from 18,380 in 2007 and the peak of 18,510 in 2003.
- The general abortion rate was 19.7 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years in 2008, down from 20.1 per 1,000 in 2007 and lower than the peak rate of 20.8 abortions per 1,000 in 2003.
- Women aged 20–24 years had the highest abortion rate (37 abortions per 1,000 women aged 20–24 years) in 2008.
- The median age of women having an abortion was 24.3 years in 2008.
- In 2008, most abortions (63 percent) were a woman's first abortion.

Number of Abortions
1992–2008



General Abortion Rate
1992–2008



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16 June 2009
ISSN 1178-0193

See also [Abortions: Year ended December 2008 – Media release.](#)

Commentary

Number of abortions

A total of 17,940 induced abortions were performed in New Zealand in the year ended December 2008, down from 18,380 in 2007, but up from 15,030 a decade earlier in 1998. The highest number of induced abortions recorded in New Zealand was 18,510 in 2003.

Abortion rates

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

The general abortion rate (abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) decreased from 20.1 in 2007 to 19.7 in 2008. The general abortion rate was 17.4 per 1,000 in 1998.

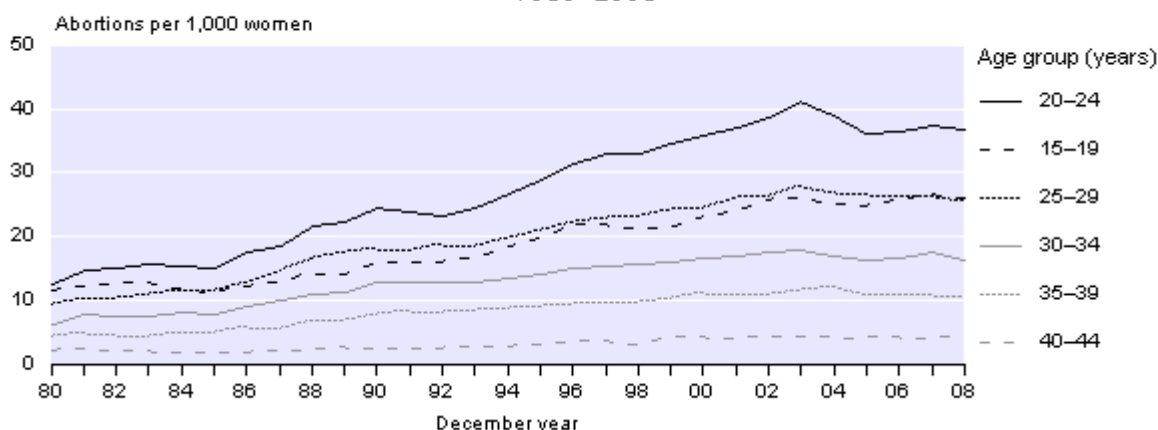
The total abortion rate measures the average number of abortions that 1,000 women would have during their life (based on current age-specific abortion rates). The total abortion rate for 2008 was 601 abortions per 1,000 women, which is 13 percent higher than the rate of 532 per 1,000 recorded a decade earlier in 1998. However, the 2008 rate is 7 percent lower than the peak rate of 648 per 1,000 in 2003.

Abortions by age of women

Women aged 20–24 years have more abortions than any other age group, 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 2008). Teenagers (15–19 years) and women aged 25–29 years both had abortion rates of 26 per 1,000 in 2008. The median age (half are younger, and half older, than this age) of women having an abortion was 24.3 years in 2008 and had been stable at around 25 years over the previous 20 years.

Age-specific Abortion Rates

1980–2008



Proportion of known pregnancies ending in an abortion

The abortion ratio averaged 220 abortions per 1,000 known pregnancies in both 2007 and 2008, down from 250 per 1,000 in 2003. Known pregnancies include live births, stillbirths and induced abortions combined.

Previous abortions

In 2008, 63 percent of abortions were a woman's first abortion, compared with 69 percent in 1998. Twelve percent of women having an abortion in 2008 had had two or more previous abortions, compared with 8 percent in 1998.

Duration of pregnancy

In 2008, 46 percent of abortions were performed in the ninth week of gestation or earlier, compared with 31 percent in 2003. About 20 percent were performed in the tenth week of gestation, a similar proportion to five years ago.

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 2008, there were 10,500 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 4,250 abortions to women who identified with the Māori ethnic group, 2,880 women identified with the Asian ethnic group, 2,230 women identified with the Pacific ethnic group and 210 women identified with the MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African) grouping. Of the 30 women in the 'Other' ethnic group, almost all identified with the New Zealander ethnic group.

International comparisons

Statistical coverage and laws relating to induced abortion affect international comparisons of abortion statistics. Consequently, differences between the abortion rate for New Zealand and other countries should be interpreted with care.

International data for 2008 is not available for many countries, so comparisons have generally been made using 2007 data. In 2007, the general abortion rate (abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) for New Zealand was 20.1 per 1,000. The following countries had lower rates: Germany (7.2), the Netherlands (8.6), Finland (10.7), Scotland (13.0), Denmark (14.3 in 2006), Norway (16.1), France (16.8 in 2006), and England and Wales (17.9). In Australia (19.3 in 2004), the United States (19.4 in 2005), and Sweden (21.0), the abortion rate was similar to New Zealand's.

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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 abortions, 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 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. From 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 2006. In previous years, New Zealanders were included in the European ethnic group. Ethnicity data from 2006 is not strictly comparable with ethnicity data for earlier years.

Regional data

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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Timing

Timed statistical releases are delivered using postal and electronic services provided by third parties. Delivery of these releases may be delayed by circumstances outside the control of Statistics NZ. Statistics NZ accepts no responsibility for any such delays.

Tables

The following tables are printed with this Hot Off The Press and can also be downloaded from the Statistics New Zealand website in Excel format. If you do not have access to Excel, you may use the [Excel file viewer](#) to view, print and export the contents of the file.

1. Induced abortions, rates and ratios, 1980–2008
2. Induced abortions by previous abortions, 1991–2008
3. Induced abortions by age of woman, 1991–2008
4. Abortion rates by age of woman, 1991–2008
5. Induced abortions by previous live births, 1991–2008
6. Induced abortions by duration of pregnancy, 1991–2008
7. Induced abortions by ethnicity of woman, 2002–2008
8. General abortion rate, New Zealand and selected low fertility countries, 1998–2007