

Embargoed until 10:45am – 17 June 2010

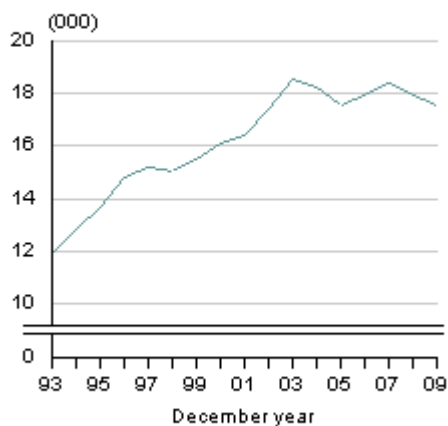
Abortion Statistics: Year ended December 2009

Key points

In the year ended December 2009:

- 17,550 abortions were performed in New Zealand, down from 17,940 in 2008.
- The general abortion rate was 19.2 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years, down from 19.7 per 1,000 in 2008, and lower than the peak rate of 20.8 per 1,000 in 2003.
- Women aged 20–24 years had the highest abortion rate (36 abortions per 1,000 women aged 20–24 years).
- The median age of women having an abortion was 24 years.
- Most abortions (63 percent) were a woman's first abortion.

Number of abortions
1993–2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

General abortion rate
1993–2009



Source: Statistics New Zealand

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17 June 2010
ISSN 1178-0193

Commentary

Number of abortions

A total of 17,550 abortions were performed in New Zealand in the year ended December 2009, down from 17,940 in 2008, but up from 15,500 a decade earlier in 1999. The highest number of induced abortions recorded in New Zealand was 18,510 in 2003.

Abortion rates

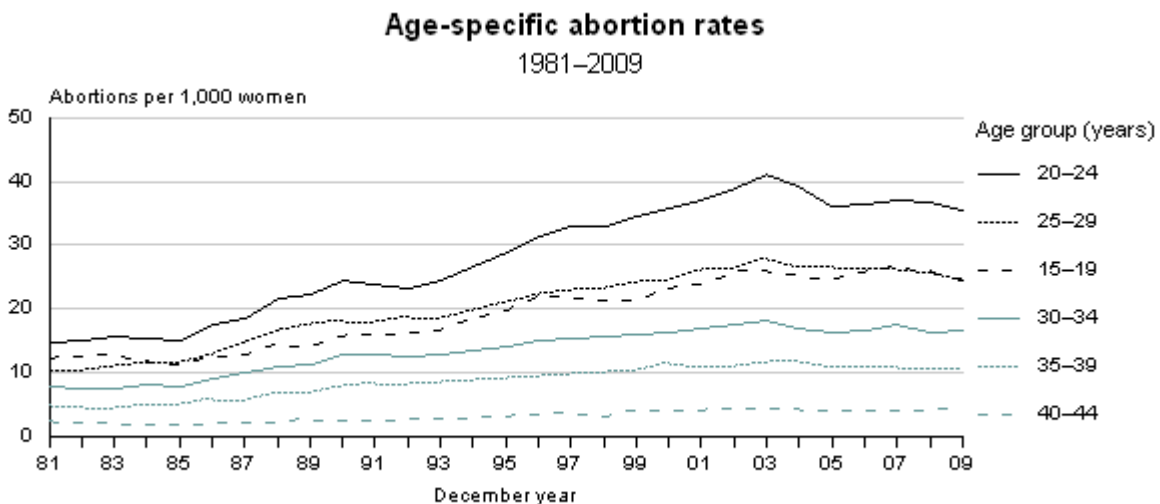
It is important to note that the legal environment and the provision of abortion services affect comparisons over time in abortion rates and in the number of abortions.

The general abortion rate (abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) decreased from 19.7 in 2008 to 19.2 in 2009. The general abortion rate was 18.0 per 1,000 in 1999.

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 2009 was 583 abortions per 1,000 women, which is 5 percent higher than the rate of 554 per 1,000 recorded a decade earlier in 1999. However, the 2009 rate is 10 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 have the highest abortion rate (36 abortions per 1,000 women aged 20–24 years in 2009). Teenagers (15–19 years) and women aged 25–29 years both had abortion rates of 25 per 1,000 in 2009. The median age (half are younger, and half older, than this age) of women having an abortion was 24 years in 2009.



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Proportion of known pregnancies ending in an abortion

In 2009, the abortion ratio was 218 abortions per 1,000 known pregnancies, similar to 2007 and 2008, but down from 247 per 1,000 in 2003. Known pregnancies include live births, stillbirths, and induced abortions combined.

Previous abortions

In 2009, 63 percent of abortions were to women who had not had any previous abortions, compared with 67 percent in 1999. Twelve percent of women having an abortion in 2009 reported two or more previous abortions, compared with 9 percent in 1999.

Duration of pregnancy

In 2009, one-half of abortions were performed in the ninth week of gestation or earlier, compared with just under one-third in 2003. Nearly one in five were performed in the 10th week of gestation.

Ethnicity

Women having an abortion can state more than one ethnicity on the abortion notification form. For this reason, the number of abortions by ethnicity sum to more than the total number of abortions.

In 2009, there were 10,110 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 4,130 abortions to women who identified with the Māori ethnic group, 2,890 women identified with the Asian ethnic group, 2,360 women identified with the Pacific ethnic group, and 220 women identified with the MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African) group. Of the 20 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 2009 is not available for many countries, so comparisons have been made using 2008 data unless otherwise stated. In 2008, the general abortion rate (number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) for New Zealand was 19.7 per 1,000. The following countries had lower rates: Germany (7.2), the Netherlands (8.7), Finland (10.6), Scotland (13.2), Denmark (14.3 in 2006), Norway (16.9), France (17.4 in 2007), and England and Wales (17.6). In Australia (19.3 in 2004), the United States (19.4 in 2005), and Sweden (21.3) 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 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 '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 onwards is not strictly comparable with ethnicity data for earlier years.

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, 1980–2009
2. Induced abortions by previous abortions, 1991–2009
3. Induced abortions by age of woman, 1991–2009
4. Abortion rates by age of woman, 1991–2009
5. Induced abortions by previous live births, 1991–2009
6. Induced abortions by duration of pregnancy, 1991–2009
7. Induced abortions by ethnicity of woman, 2002–2009
8. General abortion rate, New Zealand and selected low fertility countries, 1999–2008