



Therapeutic Abortion in NL

When an individual with the required reproductive structures is faced with an unplanned pregnancy, there are several options available to them. The common options of continuing the pregnancy (leading to parenting or adoption), as well as of terminating the pregnancy (abortion) all require careful consideration.

There are many reasons why an individual would terminate (stop) a pregnancy. These reasons may include medical complications caused by the pregnancy (ranging from mild to life-threatening), lack of resources, such as money and support, or deciding that they are not ready to be a parent.

This pamphlet provides information about the therapeutic abortion procedure in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). **Note: information on “medical abortions” is provided in alternate pamphlet.**

For the therapeutic abortion procedure in NL, the individual must be **at least 8 weeks pregnant and no further along than 15 weeks pregnant**. To calculate how far along you are, count the weeks from the first day of your last menstrual period.

Therapeutic abortions in NL are performed using the D&C (dilation and curettage) method. A D&C is a standard medical procedure, used commonly for several reasons besides abortion. Including for diagnosis of conditions like abnormal vaginal bleeding, and treatment of complications related to polycystic ovaries, fibroids, and complicated miscarriage.

Before the procedure, you will be given a mild sedative to help you relax. The sedative will leave you feeling a bit drowsy. A general anesthetic (which would put you to sleep) is NOT routinely used.

To begin, the doctor inserts a speculum in your vagina. A speculum is an instrument that is used to move apart the walls of the vagina so that the doctor can see your cervix (opening to womb/uterus). The doctor cleans your cervix using an alcohol swab, and then freezes your cervix locally. This means that you will be awake during the procedure, but your cervix will be numb. The doctor then dilates (opens) your cervix. Once your cervix is dilated, the doctor gently loosens the tissue in your uterus to make it easier to remove. Next, the doctor uses a vacuum aspirator. This instrument uses suction to remove the loosened tissue from your uterus. You will hear a humming noise that sounds like the machine that a dentist uses to remove water from your mouth. The abortion procedure itself will take approximately 10 minutes. However, expect to rest under medical observation for 4-5 hours.

There are two places in NL where therapeutic abortions are performed. The Health Sciences Centre and The Athena Health Centre (formerly called The Morgentaler Clinic) are in St. John's. The procedure at both clinics is covered under MCP and is therefore free.

Health Sciences Centre (HSC):

To make an appointment at the HSC, you must get a pregnancy confirmation and referral. This can be done with a physician at Planned Parenthood, or you may go to your family doctor.

At the HSC, the procedure is performed as a two-day outpatient procedure. You do not need to stay overnight. On the first day, you go to the clinic to meet with a counselor and fill out a medical questionnaire. You then see a doctor who performs a physical examination and inserts a laminaria into your cervix (the opening of the uterus). Laminaria is a sterile piece of seaweed that absorbs moisture from the uterus, which expands and dilates (opens) the cervix. You then leave the hospital and return the next day for your procedure. **Once the laminaria is inserted, you MUST return for your appointment the next day, even if you change your mind and decide to not go ahead with the abortion.**

The next day, you check in at the hospital, and a nurse remains with you to provide support throughout the D&C procedure.

****A patient under 19 MUST have parental consent to have the procedure at the HSC, unless they are independent of their family. There is no age limit at the Athena Health Centre (continue reading)**

Athena Health Centre (AHC):

At the Athena Health Centre (AHC) the abortion procedure is a one-day process. Expect to be at the clinic for four-five hours.

You do not need a physician's referral. Clients can book their appointments by calling the Athena Health Centre, Monday to Friday 9-4:30, at **754-3572**. If you don't get an answer, please leave a message and they will get back to you as soon as possible. It is very important that when you call to book your appointment that you know the date of your last menstrual period and have had an accurate (positive) pregnancy test. You may drop in to Planned Parenthood for a pregnancy test.

When you arrive at the AHC, you will fill out a medical questionnaire. Next, you will meet with a counselor to discuss the procedure. You will then be shown to an area to undress. A nurse will perform an ultra-sound to get the most accurate date of the pregnancy. At this time, you may choose to get tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The nurse can take a blood sample for HIV, as well as Hepatitis B and C testing. The doctor can also do swabs for bacterial STIs. Keep in mind that a lot of people who have STIs do not know that they are infected. The results of these tests are confidential and will be sent to a doctor of your choice.

Next, you go to the operating room, where a supportive nurse stays at your side during the procedure. The doctor does a routine gynecological exam and then dilates the cervix by using metal dilators, which come in different sizes. This is not painful and only takes a few moments. The doctor will proceed with the abortion using the D&C method described earlier.

If you change your mind about having the procedure, you MUST let the doctor know before s/he dilates your cervix.

****Abortions are provided to all pregnant individuals at the AHC, but if you are under 19, they strongly prefer that an adult comes with you. Patients are evaluated on a case-by-case basis by clinic staff.**



There is no difference in the quality of care provided at the HSC and AHC. You will find trained professionals who care about your health at both locations. The decision to go to either clinic is usually based on personal preference, or availability of appointments. Due to possible complications, individuals with certain medical conditions will have to go to the HSC where the abortion can be safely performed even with their medical conditions.

After the Procedure:

Bleeding usually begins within 72 hours after the procedure and you may continue to bleed up to three weeks. At times the bleeding may also be accompanied by cramping. If you are bleeding extremely heavily, contact the clinic where you had your procedure, go to your local emergency room, or call your local health line at **1-888-709-2929**.

You can become pregnant after you have an abortion. If you are sexually active, use a reliable method of birth control even if you haven't had a regular period. If you are in need of birth control, call Planned Parenthood: (709) 579-1009.

Two weeks after your abortion, you need to have an examination to ensure there are no complications. Complications are rare, but it is important that you have your check-up. If you do not want to go to your family doctor, you can make an appointment with a doctor at Planned Parenthood.



Frequently Asked Questions:

Will it hurt to have an abortion?

Most individuals say that they feel a pressure during the procedure. The feelings that they experience feel like strong period cramps.

How will I feel after I have an abortion?

The most common feeling after an abortion is relief. Individuals realize it was the best decision for them. However, it is normal to feel sad; you can grieve for something that might have been. Feeling sadness doesn't mean you made the wrong decision or that you are a bad person. If you feel bad for a long time, you can ask a doctor or Planned Parenthood for a referral for counseling.

Will an abortion make me infertile (not able to have children)?

The procedure for abortions is very safe. Research tells us that the procedure will not affect the individual's ability to have children in the future. The D&C procedure is used very commonly to treat a wide variety of gynecological conditions.

If I am not comfortable with my family doctor, where can I go for follow-up care and birth control?

If you feel that you cannot go to your family doctor, you can do your follow-up at Planned Parenthood. Appointments are 100% confidential (private), and Planned Parenthood will not contact anyone.

Will anyone be able to tell that I had an abortion?

The only people who will know that you had an abortion are those people that you choose to tell. No one needs to know that you stopped a pregnancy. After two weeks, your cervix will no longer be dilated and physically, there will be no signs that you were pregnant.

Sexual Health Questions? We have Answers!

If you need someone to talk to about your options, or if you need more information about the decision you have made, we are available to help.

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's,
NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm
Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm
Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm
Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm
Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

Phone:

579-1009
Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS
(1-877-666-9847)

Website:

www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com

Email:

pp.nlshc@gmail.com



Other Resources:

Mental Health Crisis Line
1-888-737-4668

Athena Health Centre
1-709-754-3572

Sexual Assault and Crisis Line
747-7757
1-800-726-2743

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