



Embargoed until 10:45am – 15 June 2005

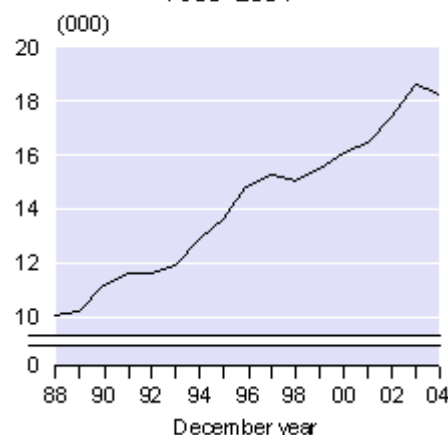
Abortions Year ended December 2004

Highlights

- There were **18,210 abortions** performed in New Zealand in **2004**, compared with 18,510 in 2003.
- The **general abortion rate was 20.5 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years in 2004**, down from 21.0 abortions per 1,000 in 2003.
- **Women aged 20–24 years had the highest abortion rate** (39 abortions per 1,000 women) in 2004.
- The **median age of women having an abortion was 24.7 years** in 2004 and 2003.

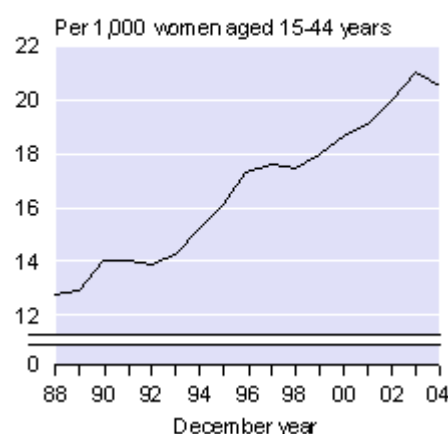
Number of Abortions

1988–2004



General Abortion Rate

1988–2004



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There is a companion Media Release published – [Abortions: Year ended December 2004](#).

Commentary

Number of abortions

The number of abortions performed in New Zealand has dropped for the first time since 1998. A total of 18,210 induced abortions were performed in New Zealand in the December 2004 year, 300 (1.6 percent) fewer than in 2003 (18,510). This drop follows increases of 6.5 percent in 2003 and 5.9 percent in 2002.

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.

The general abortion rate (abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) decreased from 21.0 in 2003 to 20.5 in 2004. The general abortion rate was 15.3 per 1,000 in 1994.

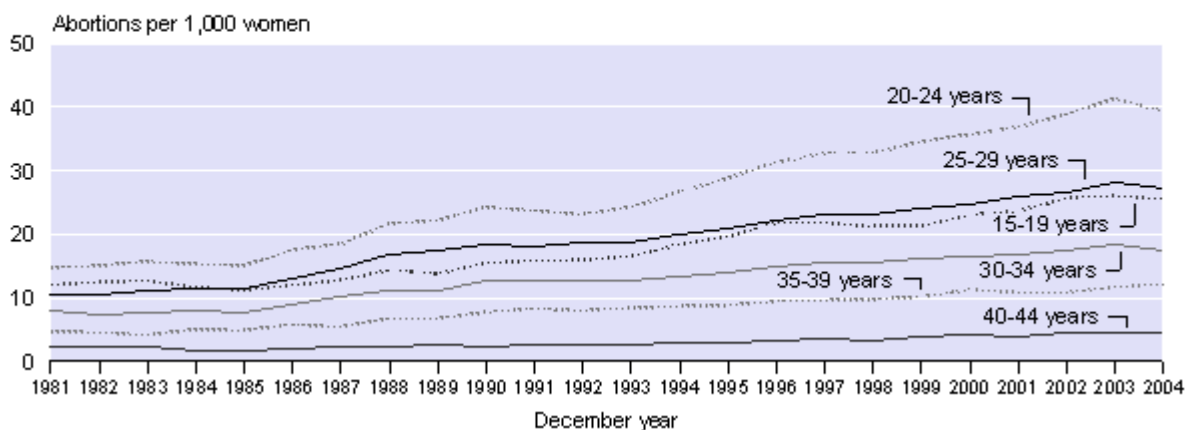
On the basis of the 2004 age-specific abortion rates, 1,000 New Zealand women could expect to have 637 induced abortions during their reproductive life (this is known as the total abortion rate). The total abortion rate for the year 2004 represents an increase of 41 percent on the rate of 451 per 1,000 recorded a decade earlier in 1994.

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 had an abortion rate of 39 abortions per 1,000 women in 2004, 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 2004. Teenagers (aged 15–19 years) had a slightly lower abortion rate (26 abortions per 1,000).

Age-specific Abortion Rates

1981–2004



Between 2003 and 2004, abortion rates by age decreased for all age groups under 35 years and rose for age groups 35 years and over. Between 1994 and 2004, age-specific abortion rates increased for all age groups. Women aged 20–24 years had the highest increase, up 48 percent from 27 per 1,000 in 1994 to 39 per 1,000 in 2004.

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 decade.

Previous abortions

Most abortions (64 percent) in 2004 were first abortions, compared with 66 percent during 2000–2003 and 73 percent in 1994. Eleven percent of women having an abortion in 2004 had had two or more previous abortions, up from 6 percent in 1994.

Duration of pregnancy

Over the decade 1994–2004 more abortions were performed during the tenth week of gestation than at any other length of gestation. In 2004, about one in five abortions took place in the tenth week of gestation.

Ethnicity

Ethnic data for 2002 onwards is based on a new question that aligns with the 2001 Census question on ethnicity. Each abortion has been included in every ethnic group specified. For this reason, some abortions are counted more than once and ethnic group totals sum to more than the New Zealand total. Ethnic data for 2002 onwards is not strictly comparable with ethnic data for earlier years.

In 2004, there were 10,360 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 3,910 abortions to women who identified with the Māori ethnic group, 3,180 were to women who identified with the Asian ethnic group, and 2,060 were to women who identified with the Pacific 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 indices should be interpreted with care.

In 2003, the general abortion rate (number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years) for New Zealand was 21.0 per 1,000. Germany (7.6), the Netherlands (8.6), Finland (10.7), Scotland (11.5), Denmark (14.7), Norway (15.1), and England and Wales (16.6) had lower rates. In Australia (19.7), Sweden (20.1) and the United States (20.9 in 2002), the abortion rate was similar to the New Zealand level.

More detailed abortion figures

Additional tables on abortions for 2004 are available from Statistics New Zealand. The figures contained in the appended tables, along with some more detailed tables, will be available in the Abortion Supervisory Committee's annual report to Parliament, and Statistics New Zealand's annual publication *Demographic Trends 2005*, due out in January 2006.

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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: to save the life of the woman; to preserve the physical health of the woman; to preserve the mental health of the woman; foetal impairment; and rape or incest. Rape in itself is not a ground for abortion, but may be taken into account under medical indications. A pregnancy occurring as a result of incest can be terminated on juridical grounds, while a pregnancy resulting from rape may be terminated under medical indications.

Despite there being nine grounds for terminating a pregnancy (these include combinations of grounds, eg mental and physical health danger), 98–99 percent of all abortions in any year are performed because of serious danger to the mental health of the woman.

Termination of pregnancy

In general, an abortion can only be performed by a registered physician in an institution licensed under the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977. Abortions can be performed in an institution with a limited license only during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Institutions with a full license can permit the performance of abortions regardless of the gestation period. The woman must obtain the approval of two certifying consultants, one of which must be an obstetrician or a gynaecologist.

Source of abortion statistics

Abortion statistics are 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

From 2002 marital status was no longer requested on the Abortion notification form.

Changes have also been made in the collection of ethnic data. The ethnic question from 2002 onwards aligns with the 2001 Census question on ethnicity. In this release, each abortion has been included in every ethnic group specified. For this reason, some abortions are counted more than once and ethnic group totals sum to more than the New Zealand total. Ethnic data for these later years is not strictly comparable with ethnic data for earlier years.

In 2004, a new question asking for 'domicile code' was added to ASC Form No 4. As a result, abortions by region are now available. However, due to different rates of not specified region across hospitals, regional data should be interpreted with care. This is the only subnational data currently available.

Live births

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

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 New Zealand. Statistics New Zealand accepts no responsibility for any such delays.

For information on the changing face of older New Zealanders, visit www.stats.govt.nz/older-people

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 abortion statistics, 1980–2004
2. Induced abortions by previous abortions, 1991-2004
3. Induced abortions by age of woman, 1991-2004
4. Abortion rates by age of woman, 1991-2004
5. Induced abortions by previous children, 1991-2004
6. Induced abortions by duration of pregnancy, 1991-2004
7. Induced abortions by ethnicity of woman, 2002-2004
8. General abortion rate, New Zealand and selected low fertility countries, 1995–2003