

# Why is abortion? access necessary?

Without safe access, unsafe abortion rates and deaths increase

## Medical Reasons

- Pregnancy threatens the person's life or health
- Severe conditions (e.g., hypertension, organ failure)
- Fetal abnormalities
- Ectopic pregnancy (life-threatening, cannot continue)

## Personal & Social Reasons

- Not ready to become a parent
- Still in school
- Financial instability
- Already have dependents
- Relationship or family changes
- Mental health considerations
- Pregnancy from sexual assault

## First, how does pregnancy work?

A fertilized egg travels to the uterus and attaches to the uterine lining. After this, the body releases hormones that stop menstruation and support the pregnancy. These hormones keep the uterine lining thick, prevent contractions, and help the embryo grow. As development continues, the placenta forms and provides oxygen and nutrients, allowing the embryo to develop into a fetus.

## vocabulary

- **Embryo:** Early stage of development up to 10 weeks
- **Fetus:** Developmental stage after 10 weeks
- **Uterus:** Organ where pregnancy develops
- **Cervix:** Opening between uterus and vagina
- **Placenta:** Organ providing oxygen and nutrients during pregnancy

## Judaism and Reproductive Rights

What our tradition teaches about bodily autonomy

**OUR BODIES. OUR TRADITION. OUR RIGHTS.**

A resource for congregants on Jewish law, abortion access, and community health equity

# What Jewish Texts Say

"Her life comes before the life of [the baby]."

— Mishnah Oholot 7:6

Rashi (11th century)

"As long as it has not gone out into the air of the world, it is not [considered] a life, and [so] it is possible to kill it and to save its mother."

— Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki

On Mental Health — Rabbi Winkler (1845–1932)

"Mental-health risk has been definitely equated with physical-health risk. This woman, in danger of losing her mental health unless the pregnancy is interrupted, would therefore accordingly qualify."

— Rabbi Mordechai Winkler

Exodus 21:22–25

This passage treats harm to the pregnant person as the gravest offense

— distinguishing it from harm to the fetus. Classical Jewish interpretation consistently holds that a fetus has a different, lesser legal status than a born person.

# The Rodef Principle

Jewish law permits stopping a rodef (pursuer) who threatens life. When a pregnancy endangers the pregnant person, this framework applies. The danger does not need to be certain — a probable threat is sufficient grounds.

Khorfani & Padela (2010), Journal of IMA, 42(3), 99–105.

# PIKUACH NEFESH

Saving a life overrides nearly every other commandment in Jewish law.

Protecting the health of the pregnant person is not just permitted — in many circumstances it is an obligation. The fetus is precious, but does not hold the same legal status as a born person.

\*Information is educational, not legal or rabbinic advice

# Abortion and How it works

There are two types of abortions  
Surgical and Medical

**Medical abortion uses medication to end a pregnancy. One pill blocks the hormone needed to continue the pregnancy, and another causes the uterus to contract and expel the pregnancy tissue.**

**Surgical abortion is a medical procedure where a doctor removes the pregnancy tissue from the uterus using suction or surgical instruments, depending on how far along the pregnancy is.**

## Safety

- **Legal, medically performed abortion is very safe, with a complication rate of less than 1%.**
- **Both medical and surgical abortions have high success rates (about 95–99%).**
- **The body typically recovers quickly, and fertility is not affected by safe abortion.**