

## Medical Abortion Trends During COVID-19 at an Independent Clinic in Detroit, Michigan

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### Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** Anticipating a desire for at-home services during COVID-19, the authors hypothesized that there would be an increase in preference for medical abortions (“pill” abortion, at-home method) over surgical abortions (vacuum aspiration, in-patient setting) for first trimester voluntary terminations. There is limited information on the effects of the pandemic on a patient’s preference between medical or surgical abortion. Such research would allow healthcare professionals and policy-makers to understand factors that patients evaluate when choosing a pregnancy termination procedure.

**METHODS:** One of nine independent abortion clinics in Southeastern Michigan took part in the study. Retrospective, deidentified data regarding the count and type of first trimester abortions was collected. Inclusion criteria included first trimester medical and surgical abortions performed January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2020. In 2019, there was 2,221 first trimester abortions, with 1,519 surgical and 702 medical cases; in 2020, there was 2,482 first trimester abortions, with 1,503 surgical and 979 medical. A negative binomial statistical model compared the number of medical abortions by calendar year. A logistic regression time-period variable assessed for chronological trends over the 24-month period. Each calendar year was divided into quartile periods of three consecutive months. Analysis focused on Quarter 1 and Quarter 2, based on a Michigan executive order issued in March of 2020.

**RESULTS:** Data showed that medical abortions increased from 702 in 2019 to 979 in 2020 (p-value=0.00499). Time-period variable analysis was statistically significant (p-value=0.00824), implying a significant chronological increase across the 24-months. There was no significant increase in medical abortions in Quarter 1 from 2019 to 2020 (185 vs 215, p-value=0.79). There were 175 medical abortions in Quarter 2 of 2019 compared to 294 in Quarter 2 of 2020 (p-value=0.00067).

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION:** Understanding medical abortion trends allows clinicians to better serve their patients - potentially prioritizing telemedicine and holistic at-home care. Expanding medical abortion access via telemedicine could assist clinics/patients in overcoming various barriers, including clinic costs and distance/transportation.