SURGICAL ABORTION

A surgical abortion takes approximately 15 minutes with a light general anaesthetic. It is important to remember that women will need to fast on the day of the procedure and have a support person available to transport them home.

All women having a surgical abortion have a pre-treatment with medication to soften the cervix to reduce the risk of bleeding and cervical damage. For early pregnancies one tablet will be required and for a later pregnancy sometimes a combination of medication and/or cervical dilators are used to ensure the procedure is safe.

What to expect?

Women having a surgical procedure can expect to be at a health facility on two separate days. On the first day you will have a consultation with a health worker and doctor to explain the procedure in detail and discuss any health or emotional concerns you may have. If needed counsellors are available on request. The doctor will perform an ultrasound scan, obtain your consent, explain any risks and give you an operation appointment, date and a time you will need to fast from.

NB: it is really important that you are fasted from the time the doctor advises you. Fasting means nothing to eat, drink suck, or chew so that a safe procedure can be completed. If adequate fasting has not occurred, this can delay or cancel your procedure.

Pre-treatment:

All women having a surgical procedure are given a pre-treatment directly to the cervix to reduce the risk of bleeding and cervical damage. Misoprostol is the medication prescribed for the pre–treatment. Depending on the stage of the pregnancy the dosage of medication to take will differ. Misoprostol is also given at the end of the surgical procedure to reduce bleeding and cramping. Misoprostol should only be taken if you are certain about your decision to have the procedure.

What to expect after the procedure:

Cramping and pain may occur after the operation and can continue for a few days. The pain is similar to a normal period pain and can be relieved with your regular period pain medication, and/or a heat pack.

Bleeding: can vary from little or no bleeding to moderate bleeding immediately after the procedure. Bleeding can continue for 2-3 weeks. Your first period can occur within 4-6 weeks and can be slightly heavier with more cramping than usual.

NB: avoid using tampons or having sexual intercourse for 7 days after the procedure to minimise the risk of infection.

Follow up care and support:

You can visit your general practitioner 2 weeks after the procedure to check that you have no concerns or complications following the surgical procedure.

24 hours telephone support is available for women having a surgical abortion.
### Medication abortion for a pregnancy less than 9 weeks

- Can be used from 4 weeks after last period
- Most effective for a pregnancy of less than 9 weeks
- Resembles a natural miscarriage.
- Abortion process lasts one to two days
- Women can expect to be at the centre for 2 hours on one day but only 10-20 minutes on return visit
- The abortion usually happens at home and support is required
- May be painful for 2-3 hours or more after using misoprostol.
- Longer period of bleeding up to several weeks
- Anaesthesia is not needed. Pain medication will be provided for you
- Severe complications are rare

### Surgical abortion

- May not be available before 6 weeks from last period.
- Most effective for a pregnancy of more than 7 weeks
- Involves inserting a tube into the uterus to remove the contents.
- The operation procedure is completed within 10–15 minutes.
- Women can expect to be having two clinic visits and be at the health facility for up to five hours on the day of operation procedure.
- The abortion operation happens in a health facility. Overnight support is advised after an anaesthetic. A support person is welcome to attend with you.
- May be mildly painful afterwards when the uterus contracts
- Shorter period of bleeding
- Pain medication, light sedation and anaesthesia are required for the procedure.
- Severe complications are rare