



Idaho's Abortion Laws Need Clarification

Save Lives and Keep Patients Safe

Idaho's current abortion laws were designed before they could be implemented and thus never underwent close scrutiny. Now that these laws are in effect, their impact on the practice of medicine for all medical professionals, including Family Physicians, is putting patients' health at risk. The 2023 Idaho Legislature has an opportunity to improve these laws so that we can protect patients from avoidable harm.

Pregnancy can be dangerous and pregnant women can experience a variety of complications that put their health and lives at risk. Carrying any pregnancy to term is 14 times more deadly for the mother than ending the pregnancy¹. In 2020, the mortality rate in Idaho was 41.8 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births within one year of pregnancy². That's compared to a national average of 23.8 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births³. Idaho's current laws will only make this worse. They are written in a way that makes it harder for physicians to treat medical conditions in pregnancy that were likely not meant to be the target of these laws.

There are many circumstances that require swift intervention to protect the health of the mother. Current laws may unintentionally impede some of these interventions, leading to infertility, permanent health issues, or even death.

For example:

- Miscarriage—A person that is miscarrying may have a fetus with a heartbeat but will not survive because the mother's body has already started to expel the pregnancy. Without medical intervention, this can become life-threatening for the mother, leading to hemorrhage, infection, and death.
- Preeclampsia/HELLP—Medical conditions can lead to multi-organ damage that, if left untreated, results in the death of the mother. Certain signs and risk factors that increase the mother's risk of developing these conditions can be identified early on.
- Ectopic Pregnancy—A pregnancy outside the uterus that is not compatible with life. An ectopic pregnancy can and should be detected early before the mother's life is immediately at risk. Depending on the intervention, a complication may also impact future fertility.
- Maternal Cancer—Pregnancy can interfere with treatments and management of cancer, such as surgical interventions, radiation, and chemotherapy which could all be harmful to the fetus and result in death. However, if left untreated, a malignancy could lead to the death of the mother.

- **Maternal Heart Conditions**—A variety of structural diseases of the heart, including the valves, chambers and blood vessels, put the mother at high risk of heart attack and death if the pregnancy is carried to term.
- **Preterm Premature Rupture of Membranes (PPROM)**—When the amniotic sac, the “bag of fluid” surrounding the fetus, breaks prematurely. There is a risk of infection and serious harm or death to the pregnant woman. If the mother becomes sick, it may be necessary to induce labor.
- **Molar Pregnancy**—Noncancerous tumor in the uterus. There may or may not be an embryo, but even if there is, the pregnancy cannot survive. Without medical management, this condition can be deadly.
- **Fetal Anomalies and Other Life-Limiting Diagnoses**—Under current laws pregnant women could be forced through a pregnancy that is high risk to their health for a fetus that cannot survive. Depending on the intervention, this complication may also impact future fertility.

Important Considerations

1. The above examples are only a handful of many scenarios that may be impacted when government restrictions are put on health care. It is impossible to provide a complete list of scenarios where ending the pregnancy would be medically indicated to protect the health, fertility, or life of the mother.
2. Fixes to Idaho’s current abortion laws are urgent, and delays put Idahoans’ lives at risk.
3. Government overreach into medicine harms patients. Physicians and patients should have the right to make their own medical decisions without government interference.

Help us protect our patients and pass legislation to reduce the harms of Idaho’s current abortion laws.

Please contact the Idaho Academy of Family Physicians for any questions or requests for resources. We believe clarifications to Idaho’s laws are an urgent matter, and we are available to assist Idaho legislators in this effort.

Contact Liz@idahoafp.org for more information and to connect with physician experts from your district.

1. Raymond EG, Grimes DA. The comparative safety of legal induced abortion and childbirth in the United States. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2012 Feb;119(2 Pt 1):215-9. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0b013e31823fe923. PMID: 22270271.

2. <https://publicdocuments.dhw.idaho.gov/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=24216&dbid=0&repo=PUBLIC-DOCUMENTS&cr=1>

3. [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2020/maternal-mortality-rates-2020.htm#:~:text=The%20maternal%20mortality%20rate%20for,20.1%20in%202019%20\(Table\).](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2020/maternal-mortality-rates-2020.htm#:~:text=The%20maternal%20mortality%20rate%20for,20.1%20in%202019%20(Table).)