August 2020



Thank you for contacting me about abortion.

I completely understand what an incredibly emotive issue this is, and I appreciate the strength of feelings on both sides. It is for this reason that, as with other matters of conscience, the Government adopts a neutral stance on abortion, allowing Conservative MPs to vote freely according to their moral, ethical, or religious beliefs. This is a convention which I support wholeheartedly.

The approach to abortion in Great Britain is set out in the Abortion Act 1967, which states that two doctors must certify that, in their opinion, a request for an abortion meets at least one and the same ground laid out in the Act. These grounds include *“risk to the life of the pregnant woman”*, and “*substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped”.*

I am encouraged that guidance for doctors on how to comply with the Act has been issued, which stipulates that registered medical practitioners should be able to show how they have considered the particular facts and circumstances of a case when forming their opinion.

Full details can be found online at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-doctors-on-compliance-with-the-abortion-act](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-doctors-on-compliance-with-the-abortion-act).

Tragically, not every pregnancy goes to plan and foetal abnormalities of varying degrees of severity can occur.  During such difficult times, families need support and information to reach an informed decision about how to proceed. Health professionals must strive to adopt a supportive and non-judgemental approach, regardless of whether the decision is to terminate or continue the pregnancy.

During this pandemic, abortion care is essential and safeguarding measures are still in place. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has offered guidance on this issue which can be found here:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-abortion/information-for-women/>

These guidelines have been issued, which enable women to take both Mifepristone and Misoprostol at home for the duration of the outbreak, so that they do not have to visit a medical practice and risk exposure to the virus, and to enable doctors to prescribe medicines from home without consulting a second practitioner, so that abortion care can be provided even in the case of staff shortages. I have been assured this alteration will last only as long as the temporary provisions enacted by the Coronavirus Act 2020 to protect women seeking care. The medicines must still be instigated prior to nine weeks and six days into the pregnancy.

I have been distressed to read news reports of cases where abortions had been sought and enacted after the 10-week legal limit for taking the medicines at home, among other examples. It is reassuring that these instances are being investigated to ensure that women are accessing safe care, and that clinicians are properly supported through the consultation process. I will continue to monitor this issue closely.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.


Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**

**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**