



States of Guernsey
Public Health Services

Guernsey Abortion Statistics 2020–22

| READER INFORMATION | |
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| Title | Guernsey Abortion Statistics 2020–22. |
| Document Purpose and key uses | <p><i>Purpose:</i> To present information relating to abortions carried out in Guernsey during the three-year period 2020 to 2022.</p> <p><i>Uses:</i> To facilitate planning and provision of services; to highlight areas of health need; to provide information to answer questions from health colleagues, politicians and other stakeholders.</p> |
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| Target audience | Public |
| Available at | www.gov.gg/publichealthinfo |
| Data sources | Notifications (to the Medical Officer of Health) made under the <i>Abortion (Guernsey) Law 1997</i> and the <i>Abortion (Guernsey) Amendment Law 2021</i> . |
| Reporting frequency | Ad hoc |
| Accuracy | Accuracy of information provided to the Health Intelligence Team resides with the consultants and staff of the MSG. |
| Completeness | Completeness of information is the responsibility of the MSG consultants and staff, although the Health Intelligence Unit has queried gaps in information and run cross-checks wherever practicable. |
| Value types | Procedure counts, percentages, crude rates and age-standardised rates. |
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Summary

This report presents information on abortions carried out in Guernsey during 2020 to 2022 alongside trends seen over a longer period. The primary sources of information for this period were notifications that were made to the Medical Officer of Health under the *Abortion (Guernsey) Law 1997* and its subsequent amendment *The Abortion (Guernsey) Amendment Law 2021* ('the Amendment') that came into force from 2nd February 2022. Where possible, comparisons are made between local data and data for Jersey and England and Wales.

Key Findings

- During the period 2020 to 2022 there were 289 abortions — an average of 96 per year — in Guernsey.
- The local age-standardised abortion rates show evidence of a gradual reduction and are lower than those of England and Wales.
- Guernsey's crude rates are very similar to Jersey's with a difference only shown for 2021 where Guernsey's rate is lower than Jersey's.
- Most abortions are carried out before the tenth week of pregnancy.
- Medical procedures became the preferred method over surgical procedures in Guernsey much earlier than in Jersey and England and Wales. However, Guernsey now carries out a lower proportion of medical procedures than the other jurisdictions.
- Complications are rare, denoting that abortion is a safe procedure in the vast majority of cases.

Introduction and Legislative Context

Under *The Abortion (Guernsey) Law 1997* and its subsequent amendment *The Abortion (Guernsey) Amendment Law 2021* ('the Amendment'), it is legal to terminate a pregnancy (also referred to as an induced abortion) in certain permitted circumstances.

The Abortion (Guernsey) Law 1997 permitted the termination of a pregnancy if two recognised medical practitioners had agreed the grounds on which the woman was seeking an abortion. This has now been changed so that the opinion of just one medical practitioner is required for onward referral, as is standard in other referral pathways.

Under *The Abortion (Guernsey) Amendment Law 2021*, the grounds for a legal abortion are now:

- A. The termination is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman; or
- B. The termination is necessary to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman; or
- C. That, at the time of diagnosis, there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from significant physical or mental impairment that would have a seriously debilitating effect on the child; or
- D. That the pregnancy has not exceeded its twenty-fourth week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family.

There is now no gestational limit for ground C and the gestational limit for ground D has been extended from twelve to twenty-four weeks, bringing Guernsey into line with England and Wales.

Additional changes from the 2021 Amendment include:

- That it is no longer a criminal offence for a woman to attempt to induce abortion
- That abortion no longer needs to be completed in the hospital

Overall, these updates modernise and enhance the law to better enable safe, timely and compassionate abortion care for women in our community who need it.

The recognised medical practitioner who terminates the pregnancy must keep an accurate medical record of the termination. When a pregnancy is terminated the Medical Officer of Health must be informed within 21 days.

Numbers of Abortions

In the three-year period 2020–22 there were 289 abortions carried out in Guernsey — an average of 96 per year. Further abortions were carried out in England and Wales to Guernsey residents although the exact number is not certain. Due to this uncertainty, the remaining figures in the report will be based on on-island procedures only. This is a consistent approach to comparative figures shown.

Yearly numbers of on- and off-island procedures for the past 10 years since 2013 are shown below in Table 1, ranges are shown where the figures are not known for certain. The number of on-island procedures fluctuates over the period with no clear evidence of any trends. The number of off-island procedures in 2021 appears to be low compared to previous years which may have been in part due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 — Numbers of on- and off-island abortions, 2013 to 2022.

| Year | Where performed | | All abortions to residents |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| | Guernsey | E&W to GSY residents | |
| 2013 | 112 | 10 | 122 |
| 2014 | 124 | 10 | 134 |
| 2015 | 98 | 8 | 106 |
| 2016 | 103 | 8 | 111 |
| 2017 | 94 | 3-10* | 97-104 |
| 2018 | 113 | 0-3* | 113-116 |
| 2019 | 113 | 4-9* | 117-122 |
| 2020 | 93 | 2-7* | 95-100 |
| 2021 | 87 | 2 | 89 |
| 2022 | 109 | N/A | N/A |
| Average number | 105 | - | - |

*Procedures in the England and Wales data¹ are noted as being ‘Channel Islands not specified’ or ‘Other Channel Islands’. For these years a range is expressed. The E&W data for 2022 was not available (N/A) at the time of producing this report.

Rates of Abortions

Age-standardised abortion rates for Guernsey are shown in Figure 1. The rates have fluctuated over the fifteen-year period showing some evidence of a downward trend. This trend is clearer when the rates are shown as three-year averages (Figure 2). A three-year rolling average rate smoothes out year-to-year fluctuations and gives the picture of a gradually reducing abortion rate since 2008. Figure 2 also includes the annual abortion rates for England and Wales for comparison. The three-

¹ [Abortion statistics for England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) [Accessed 15/03/2023]

year average abortion rates for Guernsey are consistently lower than the equivalent rates for England and Wales. The abortion rates for England and Wales show a gradual increase over the most recent six-year period which is not mirrored in the Guernsey data.

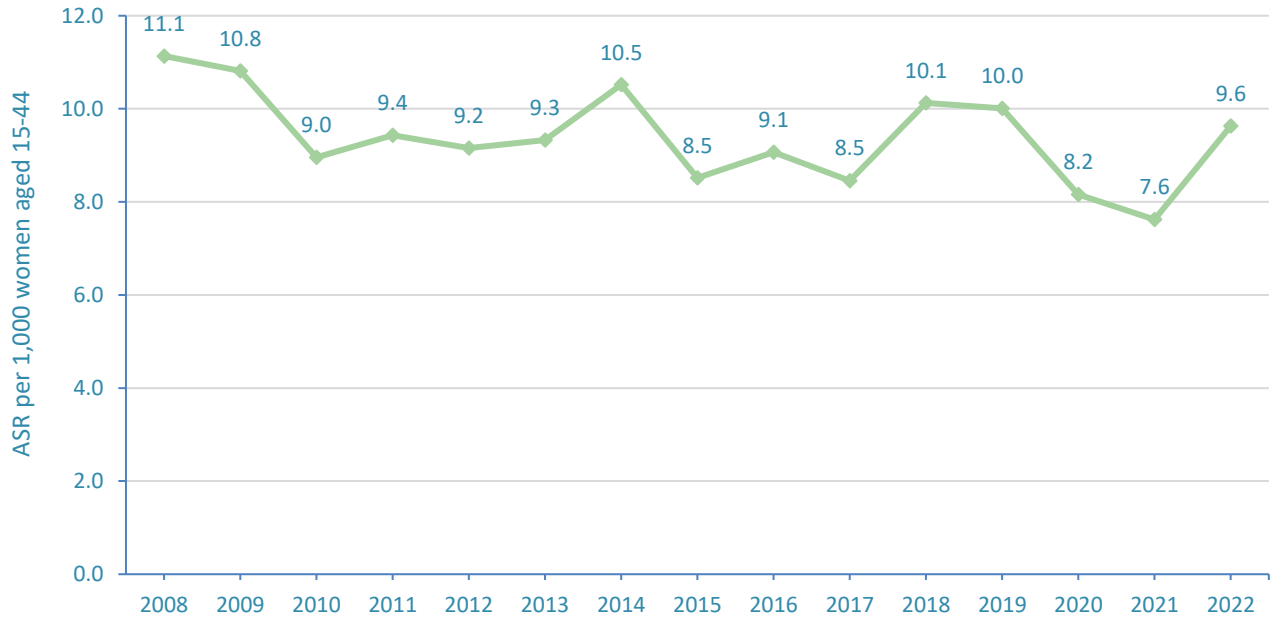
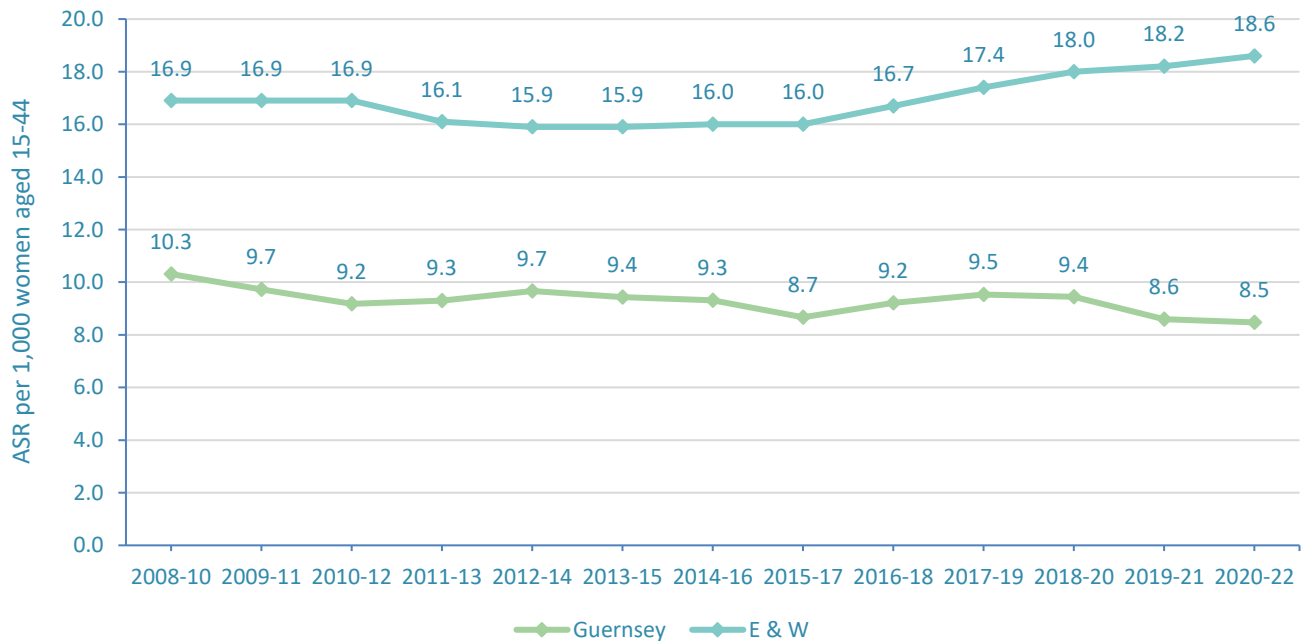


Figure 1 — Single-year age-standardised abortion rates per 1,000 for women resident in Guernsey aged 15–44, 2008–22.



Figures for England and Wales relate to the middle calendar year of the three-year average for Guernsey.

Figure 2 — Three-year average age-standardised abortion rates per 1,000 for Guernsey compared to England and Wales, 2008–10 to 2020–22.

Jersey, like Guernsey, has abortion rates that are lower than those of England and Wales (Figure 3). The Jersey and Guernsey rates remain very similar over time with the biggest difference occurring in 2021 where Guernsey’s rates are lower than Jersey’s. These rates are shown as single-year crude rates to match Jersey’s reporting style.

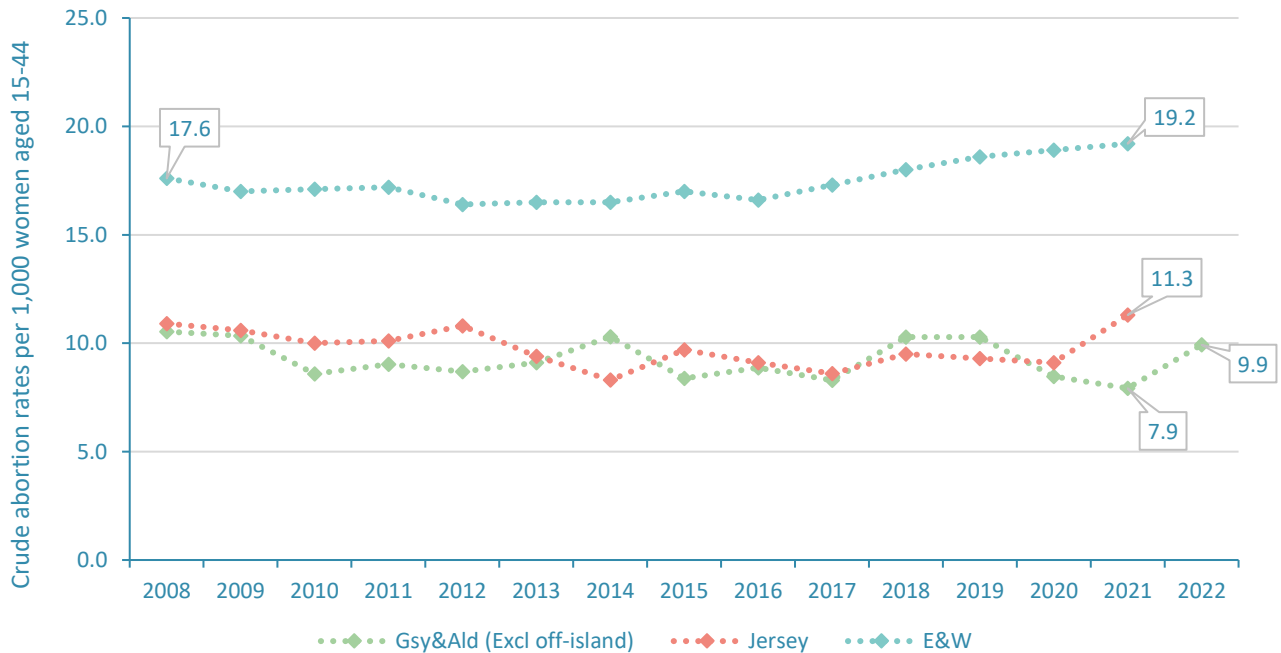


Figure 3 — Crude abortion rates for Guernsey, Jersey² and England and Wales³, 2008–2022.

Age of Women

The age distribution of women who had abortions in Guernsey over the last three-year period is shown in Figure 4. Women aged 20–29 have the highest number of abortions, accounting for 52% of procedures for the latest three years. Abortions for women aged under-16 are very rare and account for 0% for the latest three-year period.

² [Termination of pregnancy report 2021.pdf \(gov.je\)](#) [Accessed 15/03/2023]

[Births - Termination of pregnancy - Government of Jersey Open Data](#)

³ [Abortion statistics for England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) [Accessed 15/03/2023]

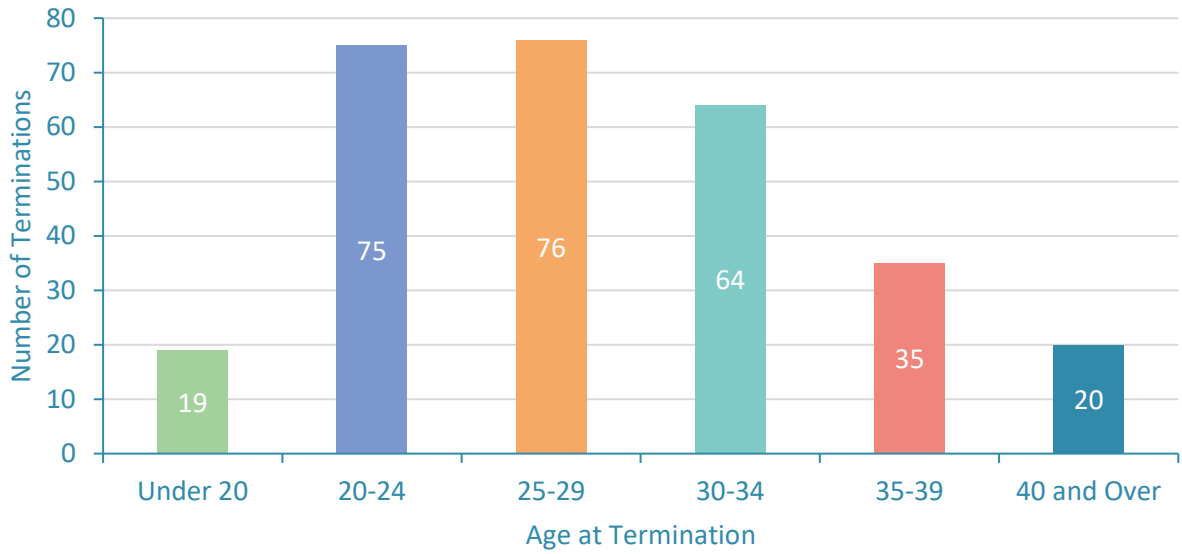


Figure 4 — Age distribution of women who had abortions in Guernsey, 2020–2022.

The graph below shows the crude abortion rates over time for the different age groups (Figure 5). The most notable trends are the reduction in crude rates over the last 15 years for the age groups ‘under 20’ (green line) and ‘20-24’ (purple line). Contraception was made available free of charge to islanders aged under-21 from December 2017. This will have contributed to the reduction in the under 20 age group from 2017–19 onwards.

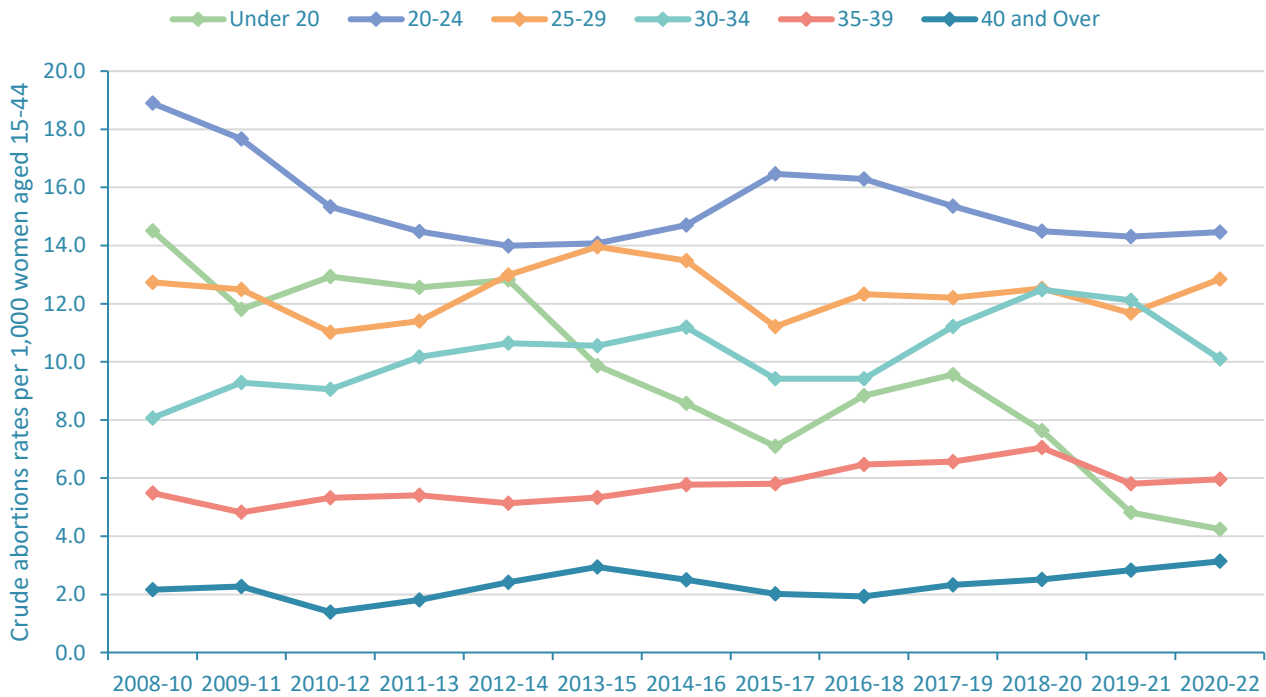


Figure 5 — Crude abortion rates for Guernsey as three-year averages over time, split by age.

Jersey has seen similar improvements in crude rates for those aged under 20 and 20–24 (shown in Figure 6 below). The Jersey rates have generally been similar to Guernsey’s although the improvements for Jersey appear to have levelled off and reversed slightly in recent years.

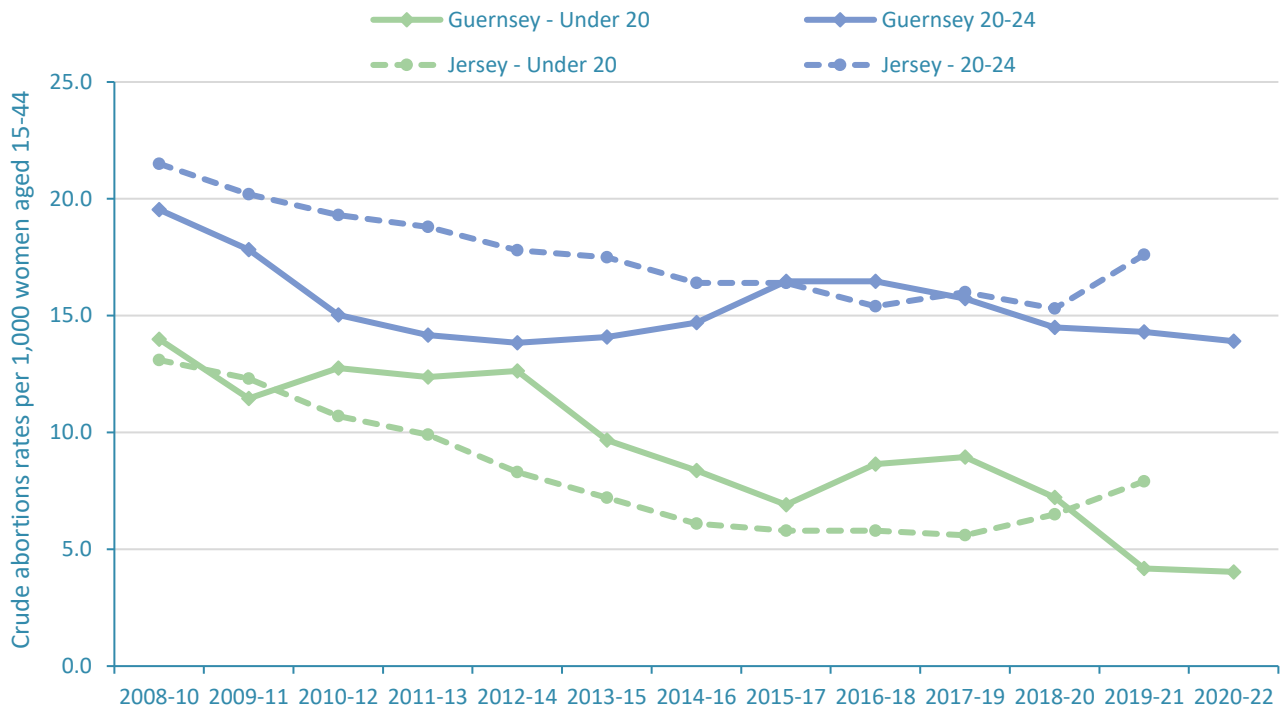


Figure 6 — Crude abortion rates for Guernsey and Jersey⁴ as three-year averages over time split for ages ‘under 20’ and ‘20-24 years’.

Statutory Grounds for Abortion

For the three-year period 2020 to 2022, 93% of abortions performed were carried out under ground D, and 6% under ground C. In England and Wales 2021, a lower proportion of 1.6%⁵ were carried out under the ground C equivalent (England and Wales ground E).

The graph below shows the three-year average for grounds C and D over time (Figure 7). This shows that the statutory grounds for abortion are relatively stable over time.

⁴ [Births - Termination of pregnancy to women under 20 and 20-24 - Government of Jersey Open Data](#) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

⁵ [Abortion statistics, England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

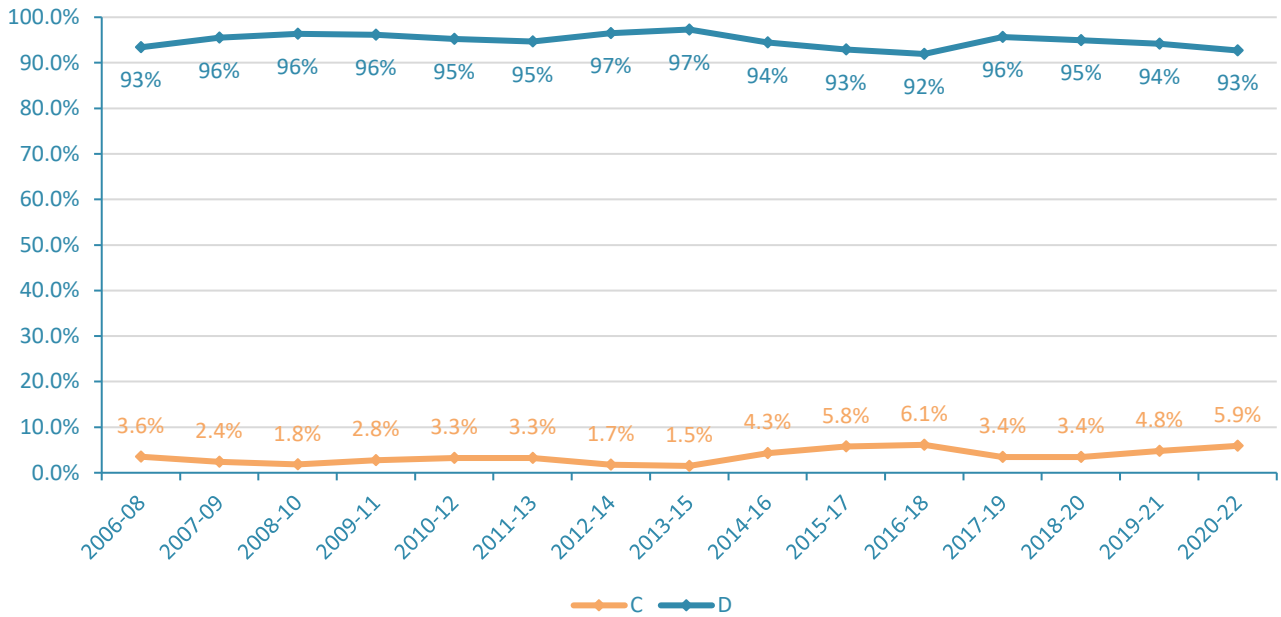


Figure 7 — Three-year average proportions of grounds C and D abortions in Guernsey, 2006–08 to 2020–22⁶.

Gestation

Most abortions performed in Guernsey are carried out before the tenth week of pregnancy. Very few occur beyond the thirteenth gestational week. The percentage of abortions taking place under 10 weeks of pregnancy has remained at a high level over the latest three years, accounting for 78% of all terminations. The proportion of legal abortions carried out before 10 weeks gestation is lower than that of England and Wales⁷ for 2021 (89%), however Guernsey carries out a higher proportion of abortions between 10–12 weeks of pregnancy (15% compared to 5%) and a similar proportion of abortions occurring at 13+ weeks (5% compared to 6%).

The graph below shows the change in proportions over time for gestation at time of abortion (Figure 8). This shows a broadly stable picture.

⁶ Ground A is omitted due to there being none for the period. Ground B is 1-2% for each year over the whole period shown and is omitted for clarity of the visual.

⁷ [Abortion statistics, England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

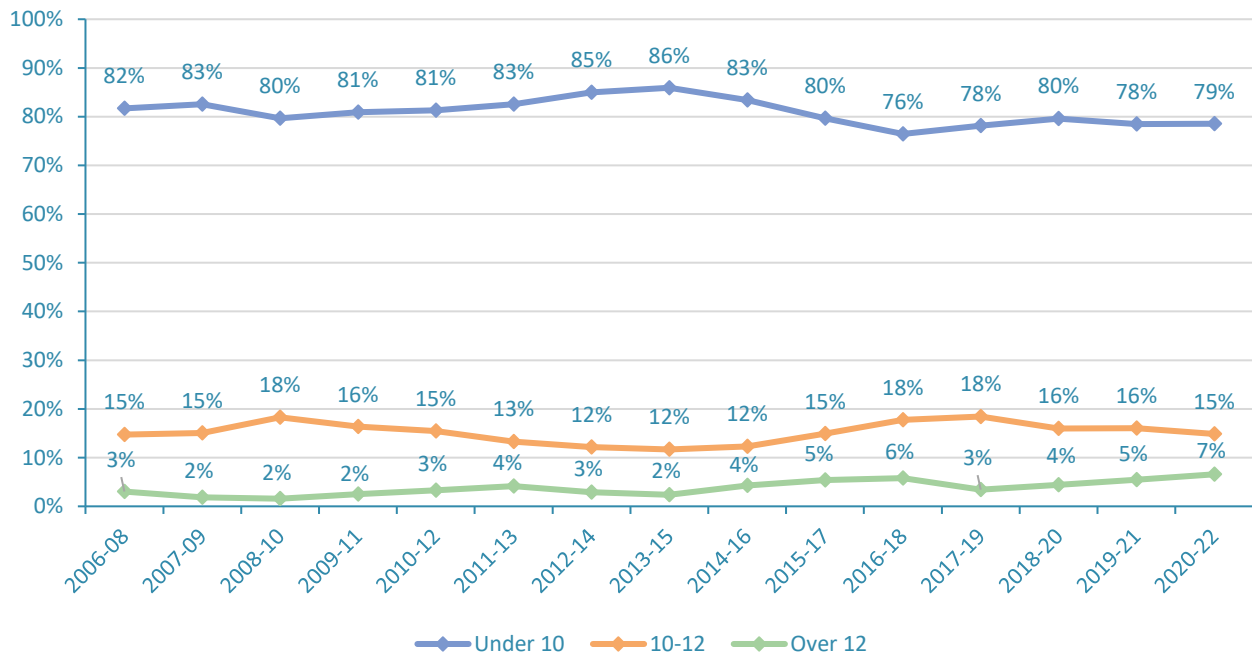


Figure 8 — Three-year average proportion of abortions by gestational age, 2006–08 to 2020–22.

Primary Termination Method

Over the three-year period 2020 to 2022 the proportion of medical terminations was 74% and surgical terminations, 26%. The proportion of medical procedures in 2021 was 87% in England and Wales⁸ and 93% in Jersey.⁹ This shows that in recent years Guernsey has had a lower proportion of medical terminations and therefore a higher proportion of surgical terminations, than comparative jurisdictions.

In England and Wales, 2014 was the year that medical abortions first overtook surgical methods as the most used primary method for abortion. In Jersey 2016 was the year where this happened. For Guernsey the proportion of medical terminations has been higher than surgical since the start of our dataset in 2001 which is much earlier than the comparative jurisdictions. This shows an early adoption of a less invasive method of abortion.

The graph below shows the proportion of medical and surgical abortions over time (Figure 9). It shows there was increased usage of medical abortions over a period from 2009–11 to 2012–14. The proportion of medical abortions has subsequently reduced to a similar level as in 2008–10, since 2016–18. Both England and Wales and Jersey have increased their use of medical abortions gradually over a longer-term period to levels that are currently higher than in Guernsey.

⁸ [Abortion statistics, England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/abortion-statistics-england-and-wales-2021) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

⁹ [Termination of pregnancy report 2021.pdf \(gov.je\)](https://www.gov.je/government/statistics/termination-of-pregnancy-report-2021.pdf) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

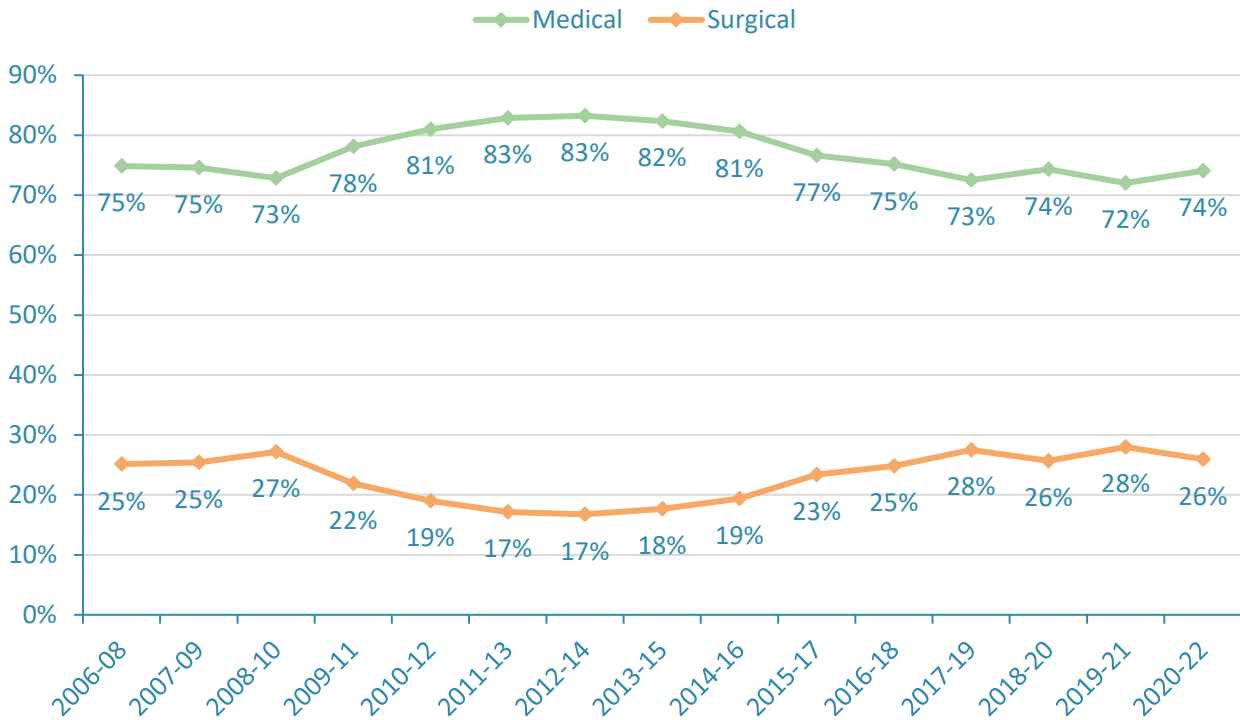


Figure 9 — Three-year average proportion of abortions by primary method, 2006–08 to 2020–22.

Previous Abortions

All ages

In the three-year period 2020–22, 72% of abortions were first procedures and 28% repeat procedures. The number and proportion of previous abortions for this period are broken down in Table 2.

Table 2 — The breakdown of previous terminations for women having an abortion in the period 2020–22.

| Number of previous abortions | Count | Proportion |
|------------------------------|-------|------------|
| 0 | 209 | 72% |
| 1 | 59 | 20% |
| 2 or more | 21 | 7% |

Similar findings are reported for Jersey (Figure 10)¹⁰. Both Guernsey and Jersey had proportionally fewer repeat procedures than in England and Wales where 43% of procedures were repeat abortions in 2021¹¹.

¹² [Termination of pregnancy report 2021.pdf \(gov.ie\)](#) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

¹³ [Abortion statistics, England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

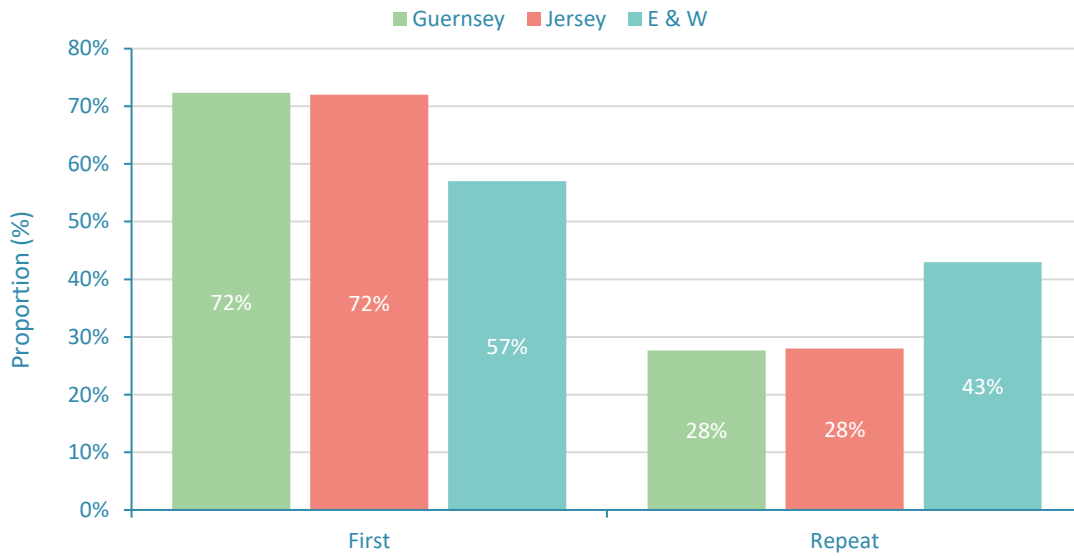


Figure 10 — The proportion of abortions occurring as first or repeat terminations for Guernsey (2020–2022), Jersey (2019–2021) and England and Wales (2021).

The graph below shows that these proportions have remained stable for Guernsey over time (Figure 11). This stable picture is similar for Jersey.

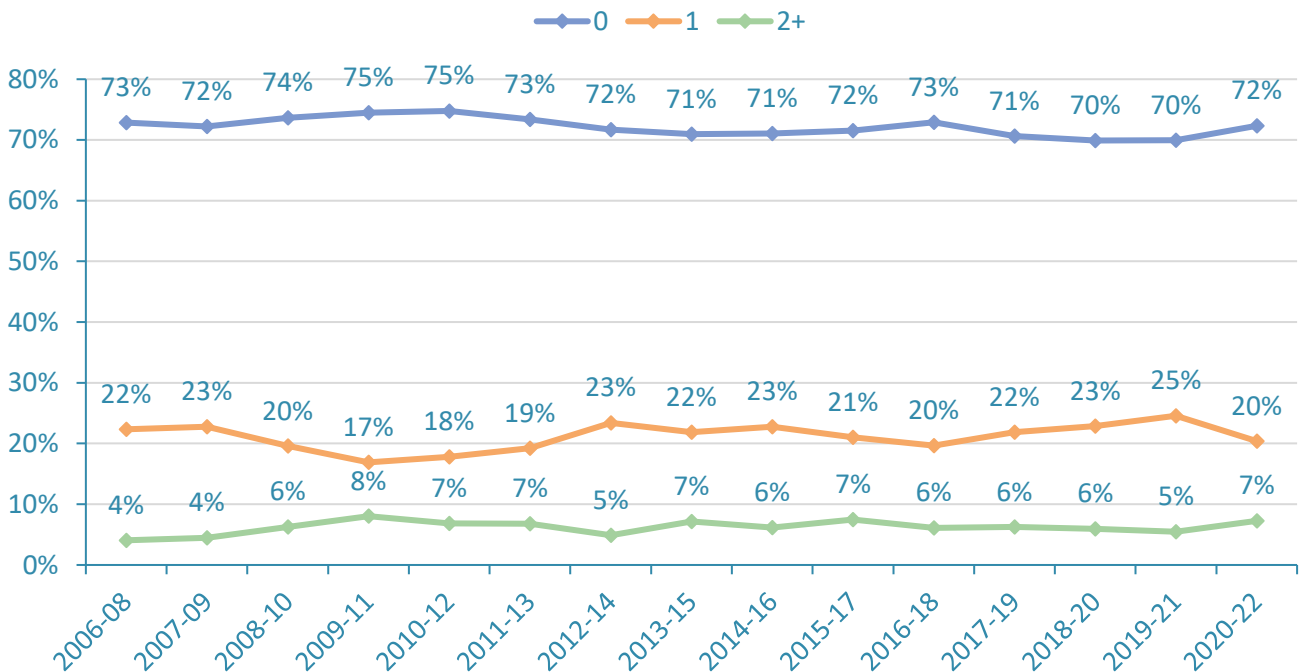


Figure 11 — Three-year average proportions of abortions by number of previous terminations, 2006–08 to 2020–22.

Age-distribution of women having first or repeat abortions

As one might expect, the proportion of women undergoing a first procedure decreases with age, while the proportion of women undergoing a repeat procedure increases with age (Figure 12). The probability of an abortion being a repeat abortion is likely to increase with age due to longer lifetime chance of becoming pregnant. The graph also shows the figures for England and Wales. This shows how the proportion having a repeat abortion in England and Wales is higher than Guernsey for all age bands. The gap widens as the age increases from 10% additional percentage points for women aged 16–19 to 18% additional percentage points for those aged 30 and over.

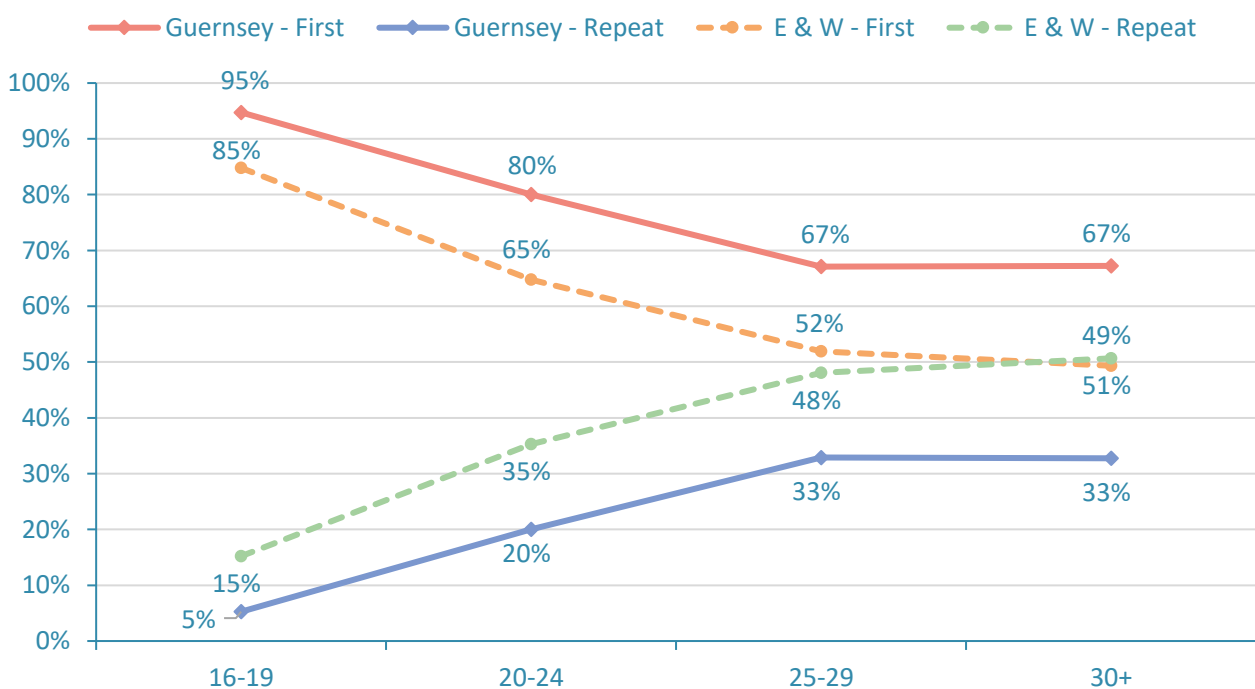


Figure 12 — The proportion of abortions that are first time or repeat by age range¹² for Guernsey (2020–2022) and England and Wales (2021)¹³

Previous Live Births or Stillbirths

The proportion of abortions where the woman had previously had no live births or stillbirths has reduced over time, shown in the graph below (Figure 13 — Three-year average proportions of abortions by number of previous live births and stillbirths, 2006–08 to 2020–22). This means the number of abortions to women who have had previous live births or stillbirths is increasing over time. This may be in part linked to the reduction in abortions for women under 29 as this means

¹² There were no under 16 abortions over the period 2020 to 2022 so this age band has been excluded.

¹³ [Abortion statistics for England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) [Accessed 17/03/2023]

more women are having an abortion later in life when they are more likely to have previously had a live birth or stillbirth.

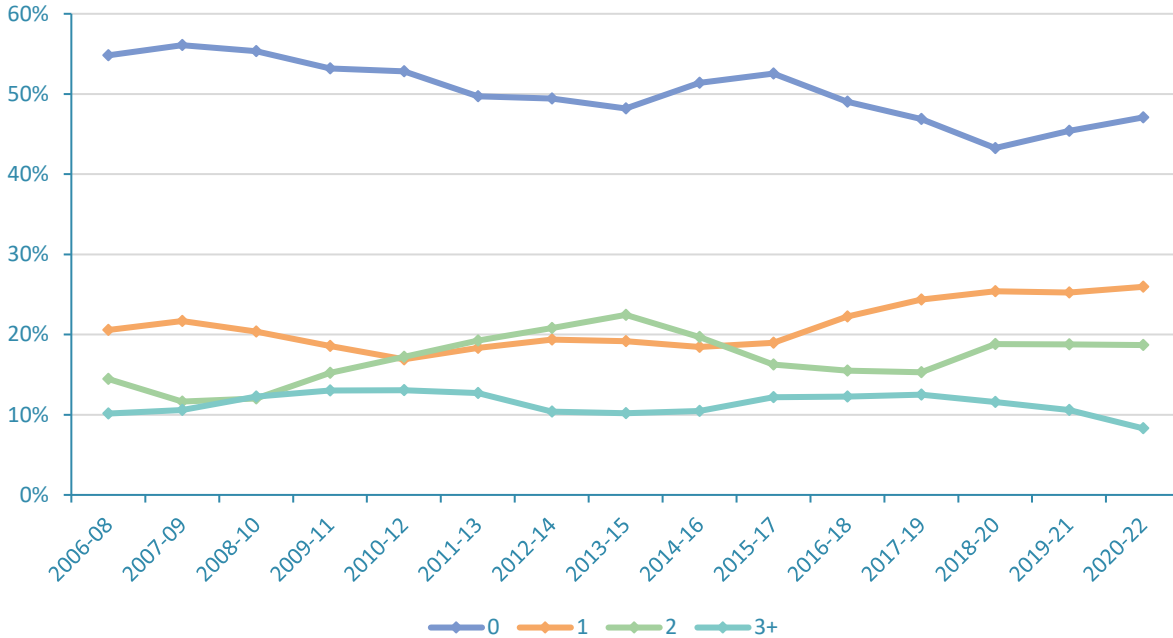


Figure 13 — Three-year average proportions of abortions by number of previous live births and stillbirths, 2006–08 to 2020–22.

Complications

Complications included are those that arise by the time of discharge for surgical terminations or by follow-up for medical terminations. When the abortion certificate was re-designed to coincide with the 2021/22 law change, it was made clear on the certificate that evacuation of retained products of conception was not to be included as a complication (i.e. from 2nd February 2022 onwards this was made clear). Earlier years will have evacuation of retained products included under ‘Other’ complications.

The presence or absence of complications was recorded for all 289 terminations performed for the three-year period 2020 to 2022. Over this period 99% of cases had no complications. This is similar to the percentage for England and Wales for 2021 where >99% of abortions had no complications¹⁴. Guernsey has maintained a consistently low level of complications (Figure 14) with an average of 95% of abortions carried out in Guernsey over the period 2008 to 2022 having no complications. This indicates that abortions are highly safe procedures in Guernsey. Where complications are reported they are most often classified as ‘other’ with very few cases of ‘haemorrhage’ or ‘sepsis’. We might

¹⁴ [Abortion statistics for England and Wales: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) [Accessed 22/03/2023]

expect fewer complications recorded in the coming years now that it is clearer on the new certificates that evacuation of retained products is not to be considered a complication.

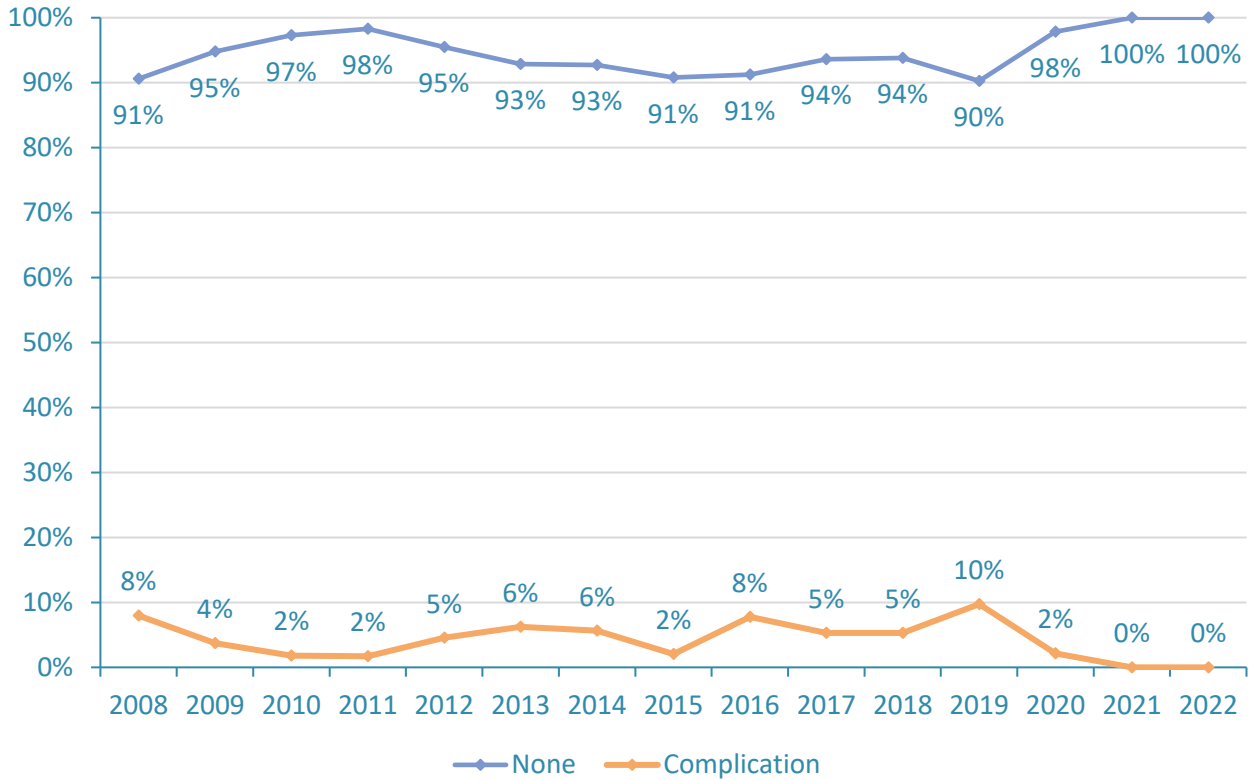


Figure 14 — Proportion of abortions that recorded any or no complications, 2008 to 2022.

Glossary

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|-----|---|
| ASR | Age-standardised rate |
| E&W | England & Wales |
| GSY | Guernsey |
| HIU | Health Intelligence Unit (Public Health Services) |
| HSC | Committee <i>for</i> Health and Social Care, Guernsey |
| MSG | Medical Specialist Group |

Methodology Notes

Notifications of abortions are now submitted electronically instead of on paper, with all information now contained on a single form. Health Intelligence Unit (HIU) staff review the forms received for completeness, querying any gaps, then collate this into a dataset¹⁵. To ensure that the final datasets used for analysis and reporting are as complete and accurate as possible the HIU perform crosschecks against data from the Princess Elizabeth Hospital (PHE) system.

Summary figures for abortions performed in England and Wales to Guernsey-resident women are sourced from online reports published by the Department of Health & Social Care which are available annually in June for the previous calendar year. These figures have not been reported consistently and it is not always clear the exact figure relating to the Bailiwick of Guernsey. These figures have been excluded from all calculations within this report unless otherwise stated.

All percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest integer and as such totals may not always add up exactly to 100%. Unless otherwise stated, any sections on the abortion forms where data is omitted or recorded as “unknown” are not shown in the statistics of this report.

The word ‘termination’ is used interchangeably with ‘abortion’ in this report.

¹⁵ This data includes all abortions performed in Guernsey, which includes abortions to Guernsey, Alderney and Herm residents and will occasionally also include abortions to residents of Sark. For simplicity, these local abortions are referred to in this report as “Guernsey” abortions.