

New research calls for relaxation of abortion care laws in Britain and the USA

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Experts from The University of Manchester and The University of Bristol are calling for permanent laws allowing so-called 'pills by post' abortion services to be enacted in Great Britain and the U.S., in order to address barriers to care highlighted by the coronavirus crisis.

Measures taken in response to the pandemic have had an unprecedented impact on people's daily lives, and their access to healthcare—the lockdown has caused clinics to close due to a lack of staff, childcare and [public transport](#) to be less available, and has made people more reluctant to visit healthcare settings.

Prior to coronavirus, the law in England, Wales and Scotland required people to attend a clinic in order to receive [abortion care](#)—they had to take the first abortion pill there, and were given the second to take later at home. This has been temporarily relaxed to allow people to be consulted about care over the phone, and receive abortion pills in the post. However, several states in the US have labelled abortion 'non-essential care', and forced clinics to close.

The researchers say that unwanted pregnancy has serious physical and mental effects on individuals—and if care is delayed because people struggle to access clinics, this means that the care they receive involves more risks than it should, and also involves significant additional stress and anxiety for the individual.

They argue that restricting the availability of abortion in the US is unconstitutional, and violates the right to privacy of people needing access to care during the pandemic. They also argue that it was necessary for abortion regulations to be relaxed in Great Britain, in order for it to meet its obligations to 'respect the right to private life' and to 'freedom from inhumane and degrading treatment' under the European Convention on Human Rights.

"Remote abortion care has consistently been shown to be safe and acceptable to service users. Now that providers in Great Britain have had the opportunity to set up a 'pills by post' service to help people needing care during the pandemic, lawmakers should consider making this permanent whenever the provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 cease to be in effect, says Elizabeth Chloe Romanis, the University of Manchester.

"The different responses to the question of abortion provision during the pandemic show how far we still are from [abortion](#) being rightly recognised as essential healthcare," said Jordan Parsons from the University of Bristol. "It can only be hoped that the actions of Great Britain are viewed more favourably as we emerge from these unprecedented times."

Provided by University of Manchester

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