

# Making a decision about your pregnancy

State of Alaska > Health & Social Services > Informed Consent

## Glossary

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### ***Glossary of Terms Used in this Website***

**Abortion** —The termination of a pregnancy at any time after implantation in the uterus and before viability (ability to survive outside the uterus) of the fetus. For the purposes of this website, abortion refers to a medical procedure performed by a licensed physician, intended to terminate an intrauterine pregnancy, producing a non-viable fetus at any gestational age.

**Cervix** —The opening of the uterus (womb) that can be seen and felt at the upper end of the vagina. Menstrual flow escapes from the uterus through the cervix into the vagina. During labor, the cervix opens to allow birth of the fetus.

**Conception** —The union of the female ovum (egg) with the male sperm; often used synonymously with "fertilization".

**Counselor** —A person who gives advice or guidance in a specific area of expertise or knowledge. Such guidance is intended to result in a problem solved and plan of action for the person seeking assistance. Counseling is more than simple education. It is based on a discussion of ideas, opinions, and beliefs in an exchange that is non-judgmental and non-directive. A counselor may be a social worker, spiritual advisor, licensed professional such as a psychologist, or other person with specialized knowledge or training on a topic.

**Crown-rump length** — A measurement of the distance from the top of the fetus' head, also called the crown, to its rump at the end of the spine. This is abbreviated as CRL.

**Eclampsia** — (See also, [hypertension](#) and [preeclampsia](#)) Eclampsia is a result of unchecked preeclampsia. High blood pressure continues to rise, damaging the woman's bodily organs, and reducing blood flow to the placenta. Convulsions (seizures) appear as labor approaches and continue through labor and delivery. This condition puts the mother and her fetus in a life-threatening situation.

**Embryo** —The medical term used to describe the stage of prenatal development between 2 weeks and 8 weeks after conception.

**Fetus** — The medical term used to describe the stage of prenatal development from 8 weeks after conception until delivery. Other commonly used terms include: unborn baby, unborn child, offspring.

**Fertilization** —The union of the female ovum (egg) with the male sperm; often used synonymously with "conception".

**HELLP Syndrome** — (See also, [hypertension](#), [preeclampsia](#), [eclampsia](#)) An extension of the severe organ damage from preeclampsia and eclampsia has been named the HELLP syndrome. Liver and kidney damage, brain and nervous system involvement, and blood clotting problems become evident; symptoms may sometimes be noticed as early as the beginning of the third trimester of pregnancy. HELLP syndrome can lead to preterm labor and delivery, liver and kidney failure, and fetal and maternal death. HELLP is an acronym made up from several medical terms, and stands for: Hemolysis (blood cells break apart), ELevated liver enzymes, and Low Platelets (blood does not clot effectively).

**Hypertension** — As used in this website, hypertension is discussed in reference to health risks to pregnancy and during delivery. Hypertension is defined as a rise in blood pressure to a value of 140/90 mmHg or greater. When high blood pressure complicates a pregnancy, it can be high blood pressure that develops because of the pregnancy and goes away after delivery, or high blood pressure that was already present before pregnancy and does not go away after delivery.

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**Paternity** — The fact or condition of being a father.

**Preeclampsia** — (See also, [hypertension](#)) Hypertension (high blood pressure) in pregnancy, accompanied by generalized edema ("water retention" & swelling, especially of hands and face), and protein found in the urine, is called preeclampsia. The presence of these three signs occurring after the 20th week of pregnancy can lead to serious complications for the woman and fetus if not treated effectively. Uncontrolled hypertension in pregnancy is one of the leading causes of fetal and maternal deaths.

**Pregnancy** — The condition of carrying a developing embryo in the uterus.

**Preterm labor** — Labor beginning before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy (35 weeks after conception) is considered premature, or preterm labor. If labor cannot be stopped, a preterm birth may result. Preterm birth is the biggest single cause of infant morbidity (disease and disability) and death in the United States.

**Toxic shock syndrome (TSS)** — A rare but serious illness caused by poisons (toxins) released by some types of *Staphylococcus aureus*, a common bacteria. Most TSS occurs in association with vaginal tampon use during menses. Non-menstrual TSS risk is increased for women who use vaginal barrier contraceptives such as the cervical cap. The risk of death from TSS among barrier methods is extremely low, less than 1 in 100,000 users (0.18 actual rate).

**Unborn child** — A common term used to refer to any stage of human prenatal development.

**Uterine contents of pregnancy** — This is a general term used to describe the entire products of conception present inside the uterus, including the embryo or fetus, placenta, amniotic fluid, and membranes surrounding the fetus.

**Uterine rupture** — A rare but very serious complication of pregnancy. The stress of labor contractions can cause the uterine wall to tear apart, expelling the fetus and placenta into the woman's abdomen. A weakened uterine wall, from previous scarring for example, or a blockage of the cervix (the uterine opening), are contributors to this complication.