

Don't let religion undermine abortion access, NSS urges

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The National Secular Society has warned the government that access to safe abortions should not be subject to a "religious veto".

The NSS has sought assurances from the secretary of state for health and social care that the decision over extending provisions to allow early medical abortions at home will not be "unduly influenced by those who ideologically oppose abortion and seek to make it harder for women to access abortion services".

In a letter to Sajid Javid, the NSS said religious ideology should not influence healthcare policies, "especially when appeasing 'pro-life' religious interest groups will undermine the health, safety and well-being of women".

In light of the pandemic, in 2020 the government enabled women to receive medication by post for abortions before 10 weeks' gestation, following a telephone consultation.

Last year the NSS [backed proposals](#) to make the 'pills by post' provisions permanent.

The NSS's letter follows an [intervention](#) from the Church of England calling for the provisions to be scrapped.

Mark Sheard, chairman of the Church's Mission and Public Affairs Council, said: "We shall expect the temporary provision to be removed by the end of March, if not sooner, and the bishop of Carlisle (the lead bishop for healthcare issues) has written accordingly to the Secretary of State for Health."

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare have concluded that any risks associated with the procedure are likely outweighed by the benefits of earlier, and therefore safer, abortions, in addition to more accessibility and patient choice as to the location of treatment.

According to the British Pregnancy Advice Service (BPAS), a [record](#) 86% of terminations were performed before 10 weeks' gestation in the first six months of 2020, which "minimises the risk of complications and ensures that no woman has to remain pregnant longer than necessary".

A [study published last year](#), analysing the outcomes of more than 50,000 early medical abortions in England, Scotland and Wales between January and June 2020, found that 80 per cent of women said telemedicine was their preferred option and they would choose it in the future.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "Women's ability to safely access abortion should not subject to a religious veto.

"We therefore urge the government to ensure that the decision about whether to continue 'pills by post' for early medical abortion is not unduly influenced by those who opposes abortion in principle."

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