

# CORE BRIEF

## How does contraception work? Not through inducing abortion

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### What does the science say?

According to the [American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology](#) (ACOG), the preeminent professional organization for obstetricians and gynecologists in the US:

- **Pregnancy** is defined as the period of time from implantation of a fertilized egg to delivery. In other words, pregnancy begins when implantation is complete.
- **Contraception** works by preventing ovulation, preventing the fertilization of an egg by sperm, and/or preventing the implantation of a fertilized egg.
- To be considered a contraceptive, a method must work **before** a pregnancy is established at the completion of implantation.
- In contrast, **abortion** is defined as the termination of pregnancy **after** implantation of a fertilized egg.



These definitions are held by all major U.S. medical organizations and federal government agencies (example [here](#)).

### Contraceptive methods work by preventing, not disrupting, pregnancy

A 2020 [CORE Brief](#) describes how various contraceptive methods prevent pregnancy. None of them, including emergency contraception pills and intrauterine devices (IUDs), act to disrupt an existing pregnancy. Some [activists](#), [policymakers](#), and even members of the [judiciary](#) have incorrectly labeled these as abortifacients, or causing abortion. But science says otherwise: these methods—indeed *all* contraceptives—*prevent* pregnancy by interfering with ovulation, fertilization, and/or implantation.

Some activists and policymakers have proposed to redefine pregnancy as starting at fertilization, despite consensus in the scientific and medical community. Doing so could lead some states to ban some contraceptive methods, creating additional barriers to people seeking to prevent pregnancy. These risks are significant given the possibility that the US Supreme Court will overturn the right to abortion established in *Roe v Wade*. States that define some contraceptive methods as abortifacients could then [apply abortion restrictions](#) to such methods, making them inaccessible if not illegal.

### Impact

Misinformation about the basic science of contraception and abortion spreads misconceptions and confusion. These misperceptions threaten the health and autonomy of people in Wisconsin and beyond, as legislation informed by misinformation could obstruct access to the full range of FDA-approved contraceptive methods.

#### Suggested citation

Cannon L, Higgins JA, Williamson A. How does contraception work? Not through inducing abortion. CORE Brief. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Collaborative for Reproductive Equity. 2022.