

Foreign visitors could be charged for an abortion

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Foreign women could be charged up to £640 for an abortion in Britain under proposals being considered by the Department of Health. The Government may also introduce charges for contraception for visitors and migrants.

Current rules state that unless an abortion is considered immediately necessary on medical grounds, then women not resident in Britain are expected to fund a termination themselves. In practice, while foreign women must pay for a surgical termination, many obtain a medical termination — the abortion pill — free of charge.

The pill, which is appropriate for women less than nine weeks pregnant, costs the NHS £420, and consultations an additional £200. Proposals to charge for abortions were revealed this week in

a document on recovering NHS costs from migrants.

The move would mainly hit women from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, where abortion is tightly restricted. They account for more than 80 per cent of the 5,850 terminations administered in England to non-residents in 2012.

The Department of Health is also considering charging foreigners for contraception. At the moment tourists and migrants may use walk-in services such as sexual health clinics to get contraception free of charge.

Abigail Fitzgibbon, a spokeswoman for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, criticised the Department of Health for singling out health tourism in women's healthcare, when the cost of foreigners using the NHS for such services is comparatively low.

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