

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION PREVENTION

Youth Healthcare



This leaflet is intended for parents who originate from countries in which female circumcision is practised.



This leaflet provides information on female circumcision (also known as female genital mutilation).

Youth Healthcare (health centres and school doctors) focus on the health and safety of all children aged up to 19 in the Netherlands. We monitor your child's growth and provide vaccinations. We discuss progress at school, the situation at home and how your child is developing. This also includes talking about female circumcision. This is because female circumcision involves a number of risks to health. This leaflet provides you with more information about it.

Statement opposing female circumcision

Some parents do not wish their daughter to be circumcised, but their family does. This can make it difficult for parents to say 'no' to their family. In order to support parents in this, the government has compiled a special document. This is the 'Statement opposing female circumcision'. It explains that female circumcision is damaging to health. It also points out that it is forbidden in the Netherlands and that parents can face problems if their daughter is circumcised. It is a piece of useful evidence to show to the family. The 'Statement opposing female circumcision' is available in seven languages: Dutch, English, French, Arabic, Somali, Amharic and Tigrinya. You can obtain a free copy from Youth Healthcare (the health centre or the GGD municipal health service)

Where can you go to discuss the issue?

If you want to talk to someone about female circumcision, you can contact the following:

- Youth Healthcare (the health centre or the GGD municipal health service)
- FSAN (Federation of Somali Associations in the Netherlands), which can be contacted on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 11.00-16.00 on +31 (0)20-486 16 28 or by e-mail: info@tegenvrouwenbesnijdenis.nl
- the Pharos information and advice hotline. This is open from 10.00-14.00 on +31 (0)30-234 98 00. Ask for the information and advice hotline. You can also send an e-mail to: focalpointmeisjesbesnijdenis@pharos.nl
- a key person (*sleutelpersoon* in Dutch) in your region. More information is available from FSAN.

Where is further information available?

You can also find information on the following websites:
www.tegenvrouwenbesnijdenis.nl
www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl (including the fatwa in various languages)

What the law says

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, all forms of female circumcision are prohibited by law. It carries a maximum prison sentence of 12 years and a fine of up to €76,000. An even higher sentence can be applied if a parent carries out the circumcision themselves or arranges for it to be done. Parents who arrange for their daughter to be circumcised abroad can be punished for it in the Netherlands.

This applies to everyone who is living in the Netherlands, even people who do not have a residence permit. Parents who allow their daughter to be circumcised and who do not hold a Dutch passport may lose their right to residence in the Netherlands.

A woman can report the circumcision to the police up to the age of 38.

Africa

The Maputo Protocol, which took effect in 2005, describes the rights of women in Africa.

It was drafted by the African Union and confirms the equality of men and women. It condemns violence against women and all practices that are damaging to their health, explicitly including female circumcision. The protocol has been accepted by many countries, although not yet all.

Protocol to the African charter on human and peoples' rights on the rights of women in Africa

Article 5b of the elimination of harmful practices

States parties shall prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices which negatively effect the human rights of women and which are contrary to recognized international standards. States parties shall take all legislative and other measures to eliminate such practice, including:

b) prohibition, through legislative measures backed by sanctions, of all forms of female genital mutilation, scarification, medicalization, and para-medicalization of female genital mutilation and all other practices in order to eradicate them.

What is female circumcision?

Female circumcision (also known as female genital mutilation) involves a procedure carried out on the girl's genitals without it being medically necessary. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises several different types of female genital mutilation:

- Type 1 The removal of part or all of the fold of skin around the clitoris (prepuce) or the whole clitoris. This is called clitoridectomy.
- Type 2 The full or partial removal of the clitoris and the labia minora (the labia are the 'lips' that surround the vagina). This sometimes also involves the removal of the labia majora. This is called excision.
- Type 3 The removal of the labia minora and sometimes also the labia majora. In many cases, the clitoris is also removed. The skin is then stitched together, leaving a small opening. This is called infibulation or pharaonic circumcision.
- Type 4 This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons. For example: pricking, piercing, scraping and cauterising (burning).

The type that is applied depends on the different traditions. The age at which the procedure is carried out also varies in different countries but is usually before the first menstruation.



Statistics and religion

Where does it happen?

Worldwide, 100-140 million girls and women have been circumcised. This amounts to 3.5% of all the world's women. In other words, the vast majority of women in the world are not circumcised (96.5%).

Female circumcision takes place in 28 African countries and in Yemen and Kurdish Iraq. It also occurs in other countries, including in Europe, America and Australia. This usually involves refugees and migrant groups who continue to follow their traditions.

Female circumcision and religion

Female circumcision occurs among Muslims, Christians and tribes who worship several gods. Despite this, there are many Christian and Islamic countries that do not practise it, including Morocco and Iran (Islamic) and Namibia and Angola (Christian). There is no mention of female circumcision in the Bible or in the Koran.

In 2006, leading Islamic scholars issued a fatwa forbidding female circumcision. An important reason for this was that Muslims must respect the integrity of the human body and should therefore not inflict damage on women's bodies.

People say ...

... that circumcising girls makes them more fertile.

... that the baby can die if the clitoris comes into contact with its head during childbirth.

... that customs and traditions must be respected.

In fact ...

... female circumcision does not increase fertility. Circumcision can cause infections that actually lead to infertility. Childbirth can be more difficult, which can even lead to the death of the baby or the mother.

... there are millions of uncircumcised women who give birth and whose babies are certainly no less healthy.

... some traditions are healthier than others. Healthy traditions include breast-feeding and carrying nursing babies on the back. Female circumcision is an unhealthy tradition. People have a choice to preserve healthy traditions and to reject traditions that are unhealthy.

The truth

Facts and myths about female circumcision

A lot of things are said about female circumcision that are simply not true. You will find a number of examples below. These are followed by the actual facts.

People say ...

... that female circumcision is necessary because of religion.

... that circumcision for girls is the same as it is for boys.

... that circumcision protects the girl's purity and virginity and ensures that a wife is faithful to her husband.

... that the clitoris would grow if it were not circumcised.

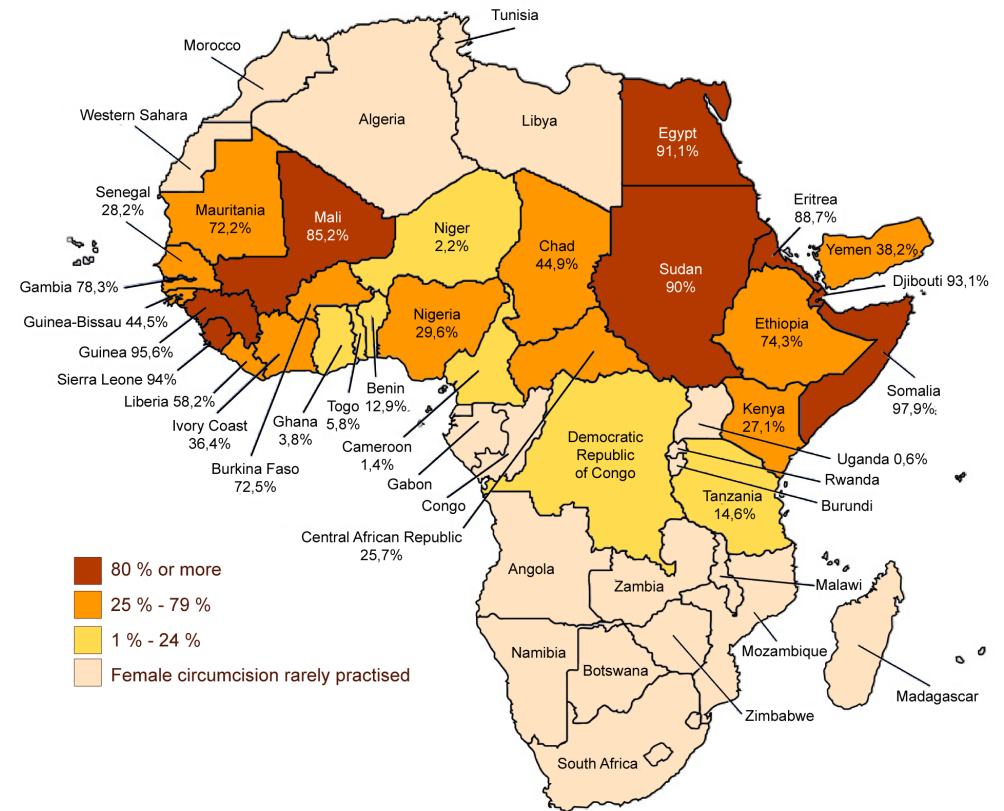
In fact ...

... not one single religion makes it compulsory to circumcise girls. Female circumcision actually originated before religions started. The Koran and the Bible make no mention of female circumcision. It is an age-old cultural tradition.

... circumcision on a girl cannot be compared anatomically to the circumcision of a boy.
 ... the circumcision of girls is done for completely different reasons. Girls are circumcised as a way of controlling female sexuality; boys are circumcised because it is thought to be more hygienic.

... a girl's behaviour is determined by her upbringing and her spiritual and personal qualities and not by circumcision or mutilation.

... the clitoris is a normal organ that will not grow out of proportion.



Source: Pharos, www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl



Why does it happen?

Parents allow their daughter to submit to this procedure because it is customary within their culture. As everyone does it, it is considered strange if a girl is not circumcised.

Parents worry that their daughter will be unable to find a marriage partner and will be rejected by the community. Some communities think that female circumcision is part of their religion. This makes it difficult to change the tradition.

Health risks

However, there are some important reasons why it is better not to allow a girl to be circumcised. The World Health Organisation (WHO) opposes all forms of what it calls female genital mutilation because of the dangers involved.

Possible physical effects include:

- extreme pain;
- major loss of blood;
- chance of infection;
- risk to the girl's life.

Possible long-term physical effects include:

- problems with menstruation because the blood is unable to flow away freely;
- problems urinating;
- increased likelihood of infections in the urinary tract (bladder infection) and the genitals;
- pain in the abdomen;
- infertility and incontinence as a result of infections;
- scarring;
- increased loss of blood during childbirth;
- the process of childbirth often lasts longer than for women who are not circumcised.

Possible effects on sexuality:

- loss or reduced sensation during sex;
- pain during sex;
- this can lead to problems in the relationship with the man.

Possible psychological effects include:

- unpleasant memories of the circumcision, sometimes even trauma;
- depression.