



# FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)



# Female Genital Mutilation

## What is it?

- Female genital mutilation (FGM), sometimes called “female cutting” or “female circumcision”, is described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as comprising “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitals, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”.
- The United States also uses this definition in its efforts to end the practice.

# FGM

FGM is sometimes called "female circumcision." FGM is not the same as male circumcision.

The practice has no health benefits and can lead to a range of physical and mental health problems.

The reasons given for performing FGM encompass beliefs about health, women's sexuality, and community and adulthood initiation rites.

# Is FGM against the law?

- FGM is against the law in the United States
- The United States and many other countries consider FGM a violation of women's rights and a form of child abuse
- Federal law makes it a crime to perform FGM on a girl younger than 18 or to take or attempt to take a girl out of the United States for FGM
- Female Genital Mutilation is added as a definition of abuse under the Child Maltreatment Act, Arkansas Code § 12-18-103(3)(A) (6)
- In Arkansas, Act 556 of 2019 was enacted to prohibit unlawful female genital mutilation of a minor and to provide for civil cause of action

**Girls and women who have experienced FGM are not at fault and have not broken any U.S. laws**

# Criminal Penalties

- The criminal offense of unlawful female genital mutilation of a minor is a Class C felony--See Ark. Code Ann. § 5-14-135(c) (6)
- The criminal penalties for committing this offense include serving a prison sentence of not less than three (3) years nor more than ten (10) years, and paying a fine up to \$10,000 and any restitution

# World Health Organization (WHO) Classification of FGM

- Type I – Clitoridectomy  
Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce
- Type II – Excision  
Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the inner labia, with or without excision of the outer labia
- Type III – Infibulation  
Narrowing of the vaginal opening by creating a covering seal
- Type IV – Other  
All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g.: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing (burning) the genital area

# Who is at risk?

- FGM is most often carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15, and occasionally on adult women
- Although these procedures are more commonly performed in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, it is estimated that more than 513,000 girls and women in the U.S. have experienced or are at risk of FGM (1, 2)
- Women may arrive in the U.S. having already had the procedure performed, but there are reports of these procedures being performed in immigrant populations by traditional practitioners, or girls being sent to the family's home country to have the procedures performed
- Girls and women most at risk of FGM in the United States are those born to families that have emigrated from countries where FGM is practiced (3)

# What are the Health Effects of FGM?

Immediate health problems may include:

- Blood loss, hemorrhage
- Severe pain and shock
- Injury to adjacent tissue
- Urine retention
- Death
- Infection



# What are the Health Effects of FGM?

Long-term health problems may include:

- Urinary infections
- Difficulty urinating
- Incontinence
- Fistula
- Infertility
- Painful menstruation or sexual intercourse
- Negative psychological effects: fear, embarrassment, trauma
- Chronic pelvic infections
- Sexual dysfunction
- Cysts and abscesses
- Potential increase in the risk of HIV/ AIDS infection, tetanus or other infectious disease
- Complications during childbirth
- Death

# How does FGM affect pregnancy?

FGM does not usually cause problems for a woman during pregnancy, but women who have been cut face unique health risks during childbirth. These include:

- Prolonged labor
- Excessive bleeding after childbirth
- Higher risk for episiotomy during childbirth. There is also a higher risk that this flesh will tear on its own during birth. These risks are especially high for women who have had type 3 FGM
- Higher risk for cesarean section (C-section)
- Risks to the infant include low birth weight (smaller than 5½ pounds at birth), breathing problems at birth, and stillbirth or early death

# What are some signs one may notice?

- Spend more time in bathroom or toilet
- Difficulty walking, standing or sitting
- Appear withdrawn, anxious or depressed
- Particularly reluctant to undergo normal medical examinations
- Ask for help but may not be explicit about problem due to embarrassment or fear
- Unusual behavior after an absence from school or college
- A family arranging a long break abroad during summer holidays
- Unexpected, repeated or prolonged absence from school
- Academic work suffering

# ACOG Statement

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists condemns the practice of FGM and supports all efforts to eliminate the practice of FGM in the U.S. as well as internationally. This position is aligned with those of the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, and the American Academy of Family Physicians (4).

# What should I do?

- Cases of suspected maltreatment must be reported to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline at 1- 800-482-5964 for investigation
- You may also contact the Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section of the Department of Justice at 1-800-813-5863 or [hrsptips@usdoj.gov](mailto:hrsptips@usdoj.gov) or the Human Rights Violator and War Crimes Unit of the Department of Homeland Security at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE (866-347-2423) or [HRV.ICE@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:HRV.ICE@ice.dhs.gov) (5)

# Sources:

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