Circumcision Prevents Spread of HIV, HPV, and Possibly Herpes

By Alex Berezow, PhD — October 18, 2016

In recent years, circumcision has become a prickly issue. Protesters smear fake blood on their pants*, decrying "genital mutilation." They declare that a man should make the choice for himself when he comes of age.

As with most politicized topics, science gets quickly drowned out by activists' hyperbole and exaggeration. The American Academy of Pediatrics, for instance, says that the benefits of circumcision outweigh the risks [2], though it falls short of giving the procedure a blanket endorsement. Never mind the scientific consensus, activists retort. This is merely evidence of systemic bias among American medical doctors.

A more evidence-based opinion would help the activists' cause. Reasonable people can disagree whether or not baby boys should be circumcised. However, as a new review in the journal *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* details, the medical benefits for some men are undeniable. And, perhaps surprisingly, women may indirectly reap the rewards, as well.

The reviewers concluded that circumcision:

- Decreases incidence of HIV in heterosexual men and possibly some homosexual men.
- Decreases incidence of HPV (human papillomavirus) among heterosexual men and their female partners. (This is particularly important for women because certain strains of HPV cause cervical cancer. HPV also can cause head/throat/neck cancer.)
- Decreases incidence of genital ulcer disease among heterosexual men.
- Possibly decreases incidence of syphilis, herpes, and infection with *Mycoplasma genitalium* in heterosexual men.
Additionally, the reviewers concluded that circumcision was not likely to cause complications (especially if performed on infants) and was not associated with decreased sexual satisfaction. (In fact, some men reported enhanced sensitivity and satisfaction following circumcision.)

Similar to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the authors do not give a full endorsement to the procedure. However, they indicate that men who live in areas with high endemicity of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (e.g., Africa) would probably benefit from circumcision.


*For some mildly disturbing images of anti-circumcision protests, click [here](https://www.google.com/search?q=circumcision+protest&biw=1280&bih=583&source=lnms&tbm=isch) [5].

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[5] [https://www.google.com/search?q=circumcision+protest&biw=1280&bih=583&source=lnms&tbm=isch]