

# Reducing HIV and genital herpes via circumcision

*By ACSH Staff — March 9, 2012*

We've previously reported on studies indicating that circumcision results in reduced rates of HIV transmission in Africa, but now a new study [finds](#) <sup>[1]</sup> that the procedure may also lower the risk of contracting genital herpes (HSV-2) as well. Presented at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, the latest study collected data on men in Orange Farm, South Africa, both before and after a pro-circumcision public health initiative gained popularity in the city. Researchers from the University of Versailles in France conducted two surveys involving over 3,300 men; the first was taken in 2007 (prior to the circumcision initiative), and the second was administered from 2010 to 2011.

Circumcision rates increased from 15.6 percent to 49.4 percent between the two survey periods among men aged 15 to 49. More importantly, HSV-2 rates among circumcised men were significantly lower than rates in those who were not circumcised: 17 percent versus 30 percent, respectively.

In a second study presented at the same conference, researchers from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health [provided further support](#) <sup>[2]</sup> for the benefit of circumcision in reducing the rate of HIV infection: An increase in the rate of the procedure among Ugandan men resulted in a marked drop in HIV incidence. Circumcision rates climbed from 5.6 percent between 2000 and 2003 to 25 percent in 2009 among non-Muslim men, which researchers determined was associated with a decrease in HIV cases during the same time period. (Muslims were excluded from this analysis as they are traditionally circumcised as newborns.)

This is an intervention that can be done one time and can provide years of benefits that are sustained, said Dr. Sharon Hillier, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Pittsburgh, who moderated the conference press briefing. We don't hear enough about the long-term benefits at the population level from circumcision. This is really important news that confirms what we have learned in the past about [circumcision's] effect in reducing HIV infection, but also [shows] that it is a multipurpose technology that is preventing HSV-2.

We already know that circumcision dramatically reduces the rate of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases, adds ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross, which includes life-threatening infections like HIV, so it's important to be aware of the benefits of this simple, straightforward procedure. In our country, some object to the procedure as a form of child abuse. We respectfully disagree.

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[1] <http://www.medpagetoday.com/MeetingCoverage/CROIMeeting/31507>

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