

FACT SHEET

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 practice has no health benefits and can lead to a range of physical and mental health problems. The reasons given for conducting FGM encompass beliefs about health, women’s sexuality, and community and adulthood initiation rites.

What are the health effects?

Immediate effects may include:

- Blood loss
- Severe pain
- Death

Long-term health problems may include:

- Urinary infections
- Difficulty urinating or incontinence
- Fistula
- Infertility
- Painful menstruation or intercourse
- Cysts and abscesses
- Potential increase in risk of HIV/AIDS infection
- Complications during childbirth
- Negative psychological effects: fear, embarrassment, trauma

Report cases of suspected maltreatment to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-482-5964

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

Who is at risk?

FGM is carried out on young girls sometime 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 some signs one may notice?

- Increased time in the bathroom or using 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- Appear withdrawn, anxious or depressed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 behaviour 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

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).

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.

¹ Goldberg H, Stupp P, Okoroh E, Besera G, Goodman D, Danel I. Female genital mutilation/cutting in the United States: updated estimates of women and girls at risk, 2012. Public Health Rep 2016;131:340-7. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4765983/pdf/phr131000340.pdf>. Retrieved March 29, 2019.

²Office on Women’s Health. Female genital mutilation or cutting. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018. Available at: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/female-genital-cutting>. Retrieved March 29, 2019

³Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting United States Government’s Response; Available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/osh/female-genital-mutilation-factsheet.html>. Retrieved May 13, 2019

⁴ACOG College Statement of Policy FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION. Available at: <https://www.acog.org/-/media/Statements-of-Policy/Public/98FemaleGenitalMutilation-March2019.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20190513T1624461655>. Retrieved May 13, 2019

⁵<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/signs-symptoms-and-effects/> Retrieved May 13, 2019