

## The Bronx Health Link

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# The Bronx Health Link

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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **Frequently Asked Questions**
- **Questions to Ask the Doctor about Circumcision**
- **Up-to-date Info on the Debate over circumcision**
- **Circumcision Checklist**
- **Reasons to and Reasons NOT to Circumcise**

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- FAQ's: 1, 2  
Circumcision
- Medical 1, 3  
Considerations
- Circumcision 2, 4  
Checklist
- To Circumcise 3  
or To Not
- The Debate: 4  
Circumcision
- Spotlight on: 4  
The AAP

## Circumcision FAQ's

Some parents wonder whether circumcision is a necessary procedure for their child. While scientific studies show some medical benefits, they are not sufficient for the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to recommend that all infant boys be circumcised. However, parents may want their sons circumcised for religious, social or cultural reasons. Parents considering circumcision often have similar questions about this procedure. Here are a few common concerns parents may have.

### What is circumcision?

In the male human, circumcision is a surgical procedure where the penile foreskin (or prepuce) is removed from the penis.

The belief that circumcisions could reduce penile cancer, urinary tract infection and sexually transmitted diseases has been the basis of many people's decision to circumcise. The following is a summary of where the research stands on these topics today:

**Urinary Tract Infections** — Urinary tract infections seem to be slightly less common in circumcised boys. However, rates of

### What is the foreskin?

The foreskin is a piece of body tissue that covers the glands of the penis.



### What does the foreskin do?

The functions of the foreskin can be summarized as:

- Protecting the glands, keeping it soft, healthy, and sensitive, and maintains optimal temperature and pH balance.

- Immunity; the foreskin secretes antibodies that guard against infection.
- Greater concentration of nerve endings than any other part of the penis, and enables greater build-up of sexual arousal.

### My son isn't circumcised. How do I look after his penis? What should I teach him to do?

**Foreskin Hygiene:** The foreskin is easy to care for. The infant should be bathed or sponged frequently, and all parts should be washed including the genitals. The uncircumcised penis is easy to keep clean. No special care is required! No attempt should be made to forcibly retract the foreskin. No manipulation is necessary.

*Continued on pg. 2*

## Medical Considerations: Circumcision

urinary tract infection are low in both groups and are easily treated.

**Penile Cancer** — Penile cancer is extremely rare, affecting 0.9 to 1 in every 100,000 males in the U.S. There appears to be a slightly lower rate of penile cancer in circumcised males. However, risk factors such as genital warts, HPV, multiple sex partners and cigarette smoking seem to play a much larger role in causing penile cancer

than circumcision status.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases** — Behavior has been found to be much more important than circumcision status when it comes to the risk of STDs.

### Questions to Ask if You Decide to Circumcise Your Son:

*Who'll be performing the procedure? Do you use anesthesia? If not, why? If so, what kind? What are the potential*

*Continued on pg. 3*

# FAQ's: Circumcision



**The AAP recommends that pain medicine be used to reduce pain from circumcision.**

There is no need for special cleansing (cotton buds, irrigation, or antiseptics); soap and water is fine.

Penile hygiene should become a part of a child's total body hygiene, including hair shampooing, cleansing the folds of the ear, and brushing teeth. At puberty, the male should be taught the importance of retracting the foreskin and cleaning under during his daily bath.

### Is Circumcision Painful?

When done without pain medicine, circumcision is painful. There are pain medicines available that are safe and effective. The AAP recommends that they be used to reduce pain from circumcision. Local anesthetics can be injected into the penis to lower pain and stress in infants. There are also topical creams that can help. Talk to your pediatrician about which pain medicine is best for your son. Problems with using pain medicine are rare and usually not serious.

### What should I expect for my son after circumcision?

After the circumcision, the tip of the penis may seem raw or

yellowish. If there is a bandage, it should be changed with each diapering to lessen the risk of infection, Petroleum jelly should be used to keep the bandage from sticking. It takes about 7– 10 days for the penis to fully heal after circumcision.

### Are there any problems that can happen after?

Problems after a circumcision are very rare. However, call your pediatrician right away if:

- your baby does not urinate normally within 6-8 hours after the circumcision.
- there is persistent bleeding.
- redness around the tip of the penis gets worse after three to five days.

It's normal to have a little yellow discharge or coating around the head of the penis, but this shouldn't last longer than a week. See your pediatrician if you notice any signs of infection, i.e. redness, swelling or foul-smelling drainage.

### What if I choose not to have my son circumcised?

If you choose not to have your son circumcised, talk to your

pediatrician about how to keep your son's penis clean. When your son is old enough, he can learn how to keep his penis clean just as he will learn to keep other parts of his body clean.

The foreskin usually does not fully retract for several years and should never be forced. The uncircumcised penis is easy to keep clean by gently washing the genital area while bathing. You do not need to do any special cleansing, such as with cotton swabs or antiseptics.

Later, when the foreskin fully retracts, boys should be taught how to wash underneath the foreskin every day. Teach your son to clean his foreskin by:

- Gently pulling it back away from the head of the penis
- Rinsing the head of the penis and inside fold of the foreskin with soap and warm water
- Pulling the foreskin back over the head of the penis

Before you make any decision, make sure to get enough info and support from your doctor.

Info from: AAP Medical Journal Online, [www.medem.com](http://www.medem.com)

## Circumcision Checklist

Talk about whether or not you want to circumcise your son before you deliver. Make your wishes clear to your doctor.

- ✓ Understand the risks. As with any surgical procedure, there are possible risks. The most common are pain, bleeding, infection and cosmetic issues (appearance of

circumcised penis is irregular, or too much or too little foreskin is taken). Although uncommon, the risk of major complications also exists, i.e., blood loss, serious infection, amputation of the tip of the penis, and hospitalization.

- ✓ Determine what type of pain relief will be provided. Be

sure some form of pain medication will be used during the procedure.

- ✓ If you decide to have your child circumcised, you will have to sign a consent form. Look for this at check-in. Make sure you understand what you are signing and that all of your

*Continued on pg. 4*



# To Circumcise or Not to Circumcise?

Circumcision has become a hot topic for expecting parents in the United States. What was once considered a routine medical procedure for all infant boys in this country is being questioned. Over the last five decades, recommendations from the medical community, as well as practice trends, have been all over the map. Sentiments have been on both ends of the extreme, swinging from a push for all boys to be circumcised to an outcry against what was perceived as an unnatural procedure and an emphasis on good hygiene rather than a surgical procedure.

## Reasons Parents Choose to Circumcise

- ✓ Religious ritual
- ✓ Potential health benefits
- ✓ Belief that circumcision makes hygiene easier
- ✓ Because other men in the family are circumcised

## Reasons Parents Choose NOT to Circumcise

- ✓ Absence of medical reason
- ✓ Risks of surgical procedure/Pain
- ✓ Want for the child to be intact as he was born
- ✓ Personal belief that procedure is a form of genital mutilation

Until the last 50 years, there wasn't really any scientific evidence to defend or end the practice. In the past few decades, a good deal of research has been done, and many earlier studies have been changed. The result: There may be some health benefits from circumcision, but there are also known risks. *Do the potential benefits outweigh the risks?* Not necessarily. Research is not conclusive enough to make routine circumcision a recommendation of any medical society in the U.S.

The bottom line: Circumcision is an elective procedure. While there are religious and social reasons that parents may decide to have their child circumcised, there are very few overwhelming medical reasons that would indicate a circumcision should be done. Approximately 60% of newborns are circumcised in this country, while circumcision is uncommon in Asia, South America, Central America and most of Europe.

## Medical Considerations

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side effects of the anesthesia?

*How many circumcisions have you performed? What's the complication rate?*

Many parents want to know how much pain it causes. It certainly would take more than a shot of whiskey for a grown man to make it through, so as you can imagine, without pain medication, circumcision does hurt.

The pain causes temporary physiological changes such as an increased heart rate and raised blood pressure. The AAP recommends some form of pain medication be used for all circumcisions. A local anesthetic can be injected into the penis or a topical cream can be applied.

Complications with pain medicines are usually rare and not serious, but be sure you discuss possible side effects with the doctor before the procedure.

## SPOTLIGHT ON:

The American Academy of Pediatrics

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a statement saying the benefits are not major enough to recommend circumcision as a routine procedure:

*"Circumcision is not essential to a child's well-being at birth, even though it does have some potential medical benefits. These benefits are not compelling enough to warrant the AAP to recommend routine newborn circumcision. Instead, we encourage parents to discuss the benefits and risks of circumcision with their pediatrician, and then make an informed decision about what is in the best interest of their child."*

The AAP recommends that if parents decide to circumcise their infant, pain relief be provided.

Parents should take in cultural, religious and ethnic traditions, and medical factors, when making a decision.

To make an informed choice, parents should discuss the decision with their doctor.

## THE BRONX HEALTH LINK, INC.



### *Our Mission*

The Bronx Health Link, Inc. (TBHL) is a Bronx-wide network of diverse service providers, organizations, coalitions, agencies, community stakeholders, residents, and students. We serve the Bronx and NYC in various ways, including as a clearinghouse for information and referral, providing technical assistance as needed, and broadcasting information through the TBHL Email Communication Network, which has over

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500 subscribers. The daily E-Comm provides e-mail messages on a wide scope of information, including grant and job opportunities (Mon.), public health and medical access news (Tues.), community and provider events and resources (Wed.), medical research and safety alerts (Thurs.), and news on maternal, infant, child, adolescent, and women's reproductive health research, news, and resources (Fri.).

Our mission is to improve community health by:

- identifying emerging community health issues;
- increasing communication to better serve the community;
- providing information to providers and community residents on services and resources; and
- increasing access to available services and programs.

... Continued from pg. 2

- ✓ questions have been answered before your name appears on the dotted line.
- ✓ Some insurance companies don't pay for circumcision because it is considered an elective procedure. Check with your insurance plan about specific coverage.

Whatever your decision, the importance lies in just that ... that it is your decision. There is no hospital policy or law that requires boys to be circumcised. Having access to unbiased information, which does not over-represent the benefits or the risks, is important. Do research, examine your beliefs, discuss them with the other parent, and be ready with a decision if the stork happens to bring you a bundle wrapped in blue.



## The Debate on Circumcision

Circumcising infants as a public health measure is controversial. Circumcision advocates assert that circumcision is a significant public health measure, preventing infections, and possibly slowing down the spread of HIV/AIDS, while the genital integrity movement asserts that infant circumcision is a human rights violation and a sexual assault, and that the practice of circumcising infants or children should be discouraged or banned.

Debate often focuses on what limits, if any, should be placed on a caregiver's ability to have a child circumcised. The procedure is irreversible, the immediate medical value is disputed and the result may not be in accordance with the child's wishes when he is an adult.

Some assert that circumcision causes sexual harm and emotional scarring later in life, or urge that the procedure should be left until the boy is mature enough to make the choice for himself. Others assert that circumcision is less traumatic when performed in infancy and point out that it may disturb some religious communities and interfere with the traditional right of parents to make this decision on behalf of their child. Most major worldwide medical associations accept that the parents should determine what is in the best interest of the infant or child.

The direct medical benefits of neonatal circumcision are still under debate, with various studies reaching different opinions. There is significant disagreement about whether circumcision is overall a beneficial, neutral or harmful procedure.