

## Fact Sheet

# Female Circumcision – Female genital cutting

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Female genital cutting (FC) is the name used to describe the cultural practice of cutting, or removal of, part or the whole external female genitalia (those parts around the entrance to the vagina) for non-medical reasons.

The medical term (name) for female genital cutting is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Female genital cutting is a practice going back several hundreds of years and is performed in many countries in Africa, South East Asia and the Middle East.

In Northern Africa there are 29 countries where the practice occurs. It is also practised, though less frequently, in Yemen, Kurdistan and in parts of Indonesia and Malaysia. Occasional cases occur in a range of other countries.

Due to patterns of migration to Australia it is estimated that there are now more than 80,000 women living in Australia who have undergone FC.

**There are no health benefits associated with FC and it can cause serious medical problems.**

**The World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child consider FC to be a violation of the human rights of women and girls.**



### Are there different types of Genital Cutting?

Yes, there are several different types of genital cutting including:

- type 1: Part or total removal of the clitoris and/or the skin over the clitoris
- type 2: Part or total removal of the clitoris and the small genital lips (labia minora) with or without removal of the large genital lips (labia majora)
- type 3: Narrowing or closing over the vaginal opening by cutting and stitching together the small and/or large genital lips, with or without removal of the clitoris
- type 4: Other harmful cuts or burns to the female genitalia.

### What are the dangers and harms from Genital Cutting?

#### Harms that can occur at time of cutting

Genital cutting is often done by women with basic instruments which are not sterile (not properly cleaned) like razor blades.

Female genital cutting can cause:

- very heavy bleeding
- serious infections
- large swelling or bruising
- problems passing urine with damage to the bladder and kidneys
- some young girls die from these complications.

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### Harms that happen later because of the cutting

Most of the later problems happen because the opening to the vagina is very narrow, in some cases thinner than a pencil, after genital cutting. These are:

- lumpy scars and pain in the area of the cutting
- bladder infections or difficulty passing urine because of scars
- pain with periods and problems because the monthly period blood cannot escape. This can cause vaginal infections
- difficulty with sex, which can be painful, or sometimes the woman may be unable to have sex
- difficulty getting pregnant
- difficulty giving birth
- difficulty with gynaecology check-ups like Pap smears, these tests are very important to protect the woman from getting cancer
- these issues can cause anxiety and depression.

### **What can the hospital do to help?**

Westmead and Auburn hospitals have staff who are knowledgeable and skilled in looking after women with problems resulting from genital cutting.

In particular, you can be reassured that opening up the entrance to the vagina to allow safe childbirth can generally be done by a simple and short operation, often using just local anaesthetic to numb the area so you don't need to be put to sleep (general anaesthetic). This can be done during pregnancy or sometimes even in labour (during birth).

**It is important to remember that in Australia it is illegal to perform any type of Female Circumcision. If a child lives in Australia it is also illegal to take her overseas to have this procedure performed. It is also not legal to assist or help arrange Female Circumcision for somebody else, or their child. If you break the law you can be charged by the police and you could be sent to prison.**

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**

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