### What is Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C)?

FGM/C refers to procedures that injure female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It may be called “female circumcision” in certain parts of the world. The practice has no health benefits and can lead to a range of physical and mental health problems. The U.S. and many other countries consider FGM/C a violation of women’s rights and child abuse.

### Who is affected by FGM/C?

Even though it is almost globally condemned, approximately 200 million women have been affected by the practice and 3 million are at-risk annually. It is most common in the western, eastern, and north-eastern regions of Africa, in some countries in the Middle East and Asia, as well as among migrants from these areas. In the U.S., it is estimated that 513,000 girls under the age of 18 have experienced or are at risk of FGM/C in the U.S.

### How does FGM/C affect health?

Women and girls who have undergone FGM/C may experience a variety of health challenges, including:

- Immediate medical problems such as severe pain, serious bleeding, infection, trauma, urinary and menstrual problems
- Long-term health problems such as infections, problems having sex, depression and anxiety, problems during pregnancy and childbirth

### Why is FGM/C done?

Different communities and cultures have different reasons for practicing FGM/C. Social acceptability is the most common reason. Families often feel pressure to have their daughter cut so she is accepted by their community. Other reasons may include:

- Cultural tradition. It is a social convention and considered the proper way to raise a girl
- Marriageability. In some countries, a girl or woman is cut in order to be considered suitable for marriage, or to help ensure a woman remains a virgin until marriage
- Hygiene. Some communities believe that the external female genitals that are cut are unclean
- Rite of passage. In some countries, it is a part of the ritual that a girl goes through to be considered a woman
- Belief that FGM/C reduces female libido and/or increases pleasure for men
- Religious duty. However, no religion’s holy texts require FGM/C

### Is FGM/C illegal in the United States?

Federal law makes it a crime to perform FGM/C on a girl younger than 18 or to attempt to take a girl out of the U.S. for a procedure. However, not all states have criminal laws against it.
FGM/C IN UTAH

Does FGM/C happen in Utah?
It is estimated that 1,769 women and girls are at risk for FGM/C in Utah⁴, and our population continues to diversify with people arriving from cultures and countries where it is common.

What is being done to end FGM/C in Utah?
A law was passed in Utah in the 2019 General Legislative Session that provides penalties for participating in FGM/C⁵. This law:

- Makes performing or permitting FGM/C on a female minor a second degree felony with imprisonment from 1-15 years and a fine up to $10,000
- Does not allow exceptions for religious, customary, or ritual reasons
- Provides that a medical professional who performs FGM/C shall lose the ability to practice permanently
- Allows a person subject to FGM/C to bring civil action
- Requires the Utah Department of Health⁶ to create an education program to alert the community to the health risks and emotional trauma of FGM/C

What to do if you suspect FGM/C
If you are a health care provider, child welfare professional, educator, or work at a refugee resettlement agency, you can access further resources on how to approach the topic in a culturally sensitive way².

It is important to remember that girls and women who have experienced FGM/C are not at fault and have not broken any U.S. laws. Many girls have not had a choice about whether it happened. It is also important to consider the social mindset and cultural norms that prompt families to continue practicing FGM/C.

However, if you suspect a minor has recently undergone FGM/C, mandatory reporting laws must be followed. Contact law enforcement, Utah Child Protective Services, or call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at:
1-800-4-A-Child

Find more information at:
1 World Health Organization who.int/health-topics/female-genital-mutilation
2 Bridging Refugee Youth & Children’s Services brycs.org/blog/female-genital-cutting-fgc/
3 DHHS Office on Women’s Health womenshealth.gov/female-genital-cutting
4 Population Reference Bureau prb.org/us-fgmc/
5 Utah House Bill 430 le.utah.gov/~2019/bills/static/HB0430.html
6 Utah Department of Health health.utah.gov/epi/healthypeople/refugee/