

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 problems¹. 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 areas¹. 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.².

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 childbirth³

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 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/C³

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 experienced FGM/C

If you experienced FGM/C in the U.S. or were sent overseas to have it performed on you, you can reach out to law enforcement, welfare services, and/or your doctor. You may also access resources on how to talk to family members and peers and learn more about the topic at: <https://brycs.org/raising-a-girl/>

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/

