

PLANNED PARENTHOOD OFFICIAL POSITION:

I will be giving birth to a boy next month. Should I get him circumcised?

We can't advise you what to do. This is a very personal decision for parents to make. Circumcision today is most often performed for religious or cultural reasons or to make the boy's penis resemble his father's. For many years in the U.S., it was considered important for good sexual hygiene. Today, routine circumcision is considered elective surgery without medical benefits. Although recent studies in Africa have suggested that circumcision may offer protection against HIV, other studies need to be done to confirm those results.

Like all surgery, circumcision is not without risks. Although rare, complications include excessive bleeding, infection, scarring, and damage to the penis. Many parents and authorities are also concerned that the procedure is quite painful for the child. In any case, the rate of circumcision in the U.S. has dropped from 95 percent in the 1960s to 65 percent today.

Penises with foreskins require a little extra care. After a boy is three to five years old his foreskin will most likely become retractable, and he must be taught to pull back and wash under the foreskin. Until he can do this for himself, you can gently pull back the foreskin for him and wash under it during bathing. Never try to pull back the foreskin of an infant or boys for whom the foreskin remains too tight to be pulled back. For some boys it takes much longer for the foreskin to become retractable. And for a few, circumcision may become necessary.

RECOMMENDED REVISION:

I will be giving birth to a boy next month. Should I get him circumcised?

We will not tell you what to do, but offer these facts: According to statements published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, there is generally no need to circumcise a newborn boy's penis; however, it remains a critical option for parents to consider. Circumcision today is most often performed for religious or cultural reasons that have no scientific basis. For many years in the U.S., it was thought to be important for good sexual hygiene. Today, routine circumcision is considered elective cosmetic surgery. Although recent studies in Africa have suggested that circumcision may offer some protection against HIV transmission, the advantage is slight, compared to regular condom use.

Like all surgery, circumcision is not without risks. Although rare, complications include scarring, infection, excessive bleeding, and sometimes death. Many parents and authorities are also concerned that the procedure is quite painful for the child even when anaesthetics are used. In any case, the rate of circumcision in the U.S. has dropped from 95 percent in the 1960s to less than 65 percent today.

Penises with foreskins require no extra care, while circumcision surgery leaves a wound to heal. The foreskin will naturally loosen and separate from the tip of his penis, incrementally, as the boy approaches puberty. A normal boy's foreskin may remain partially or completely fused to the tip of his penis until after he is 10 years old; therefore, to guard against injury, retraction should not be initiated by anyone but the boy himself. Never try to forcefully pull back the foreskin of an infant, or an older boy whose foreskin is still developing this way. Each boy should be taught to pull back his foreskin, only to the degree that it is comfortable, and wash underneath it when bathing. Until he can do this for himself, a parent may elect to gently slide back the foreskin for their son in the bath. In the rare case that a boy's foreskin remains fused to the tip of his penis after he is mature enough to make informed health decisions for himself, he may choose to have a circumcision, or elect to undergo non-surgical correction.

