

Female genital mutilation (FGM) and pregnancy

This leaflet is designed for women that have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) and provides information and support on what to expect during pregnancy to ensure the safety of you and your baby.

What is female genital mutilation (FGM)?

Also called circumcision or cutting, FGM is the intentional alteration or injury to a female's external genital organs (private parts) for non-medical reasons.

You may hear professionals refer to 'types' of FGM, depending on the extent of the damage.

These types are as follows:

- Type 1: Damaging or removing the clitoris and / or clitoral hood.
- Type 2: Damaging or removing the clitoris and the inner / outer labia lips.
- Type 3: Damaging or removing the clitoris and the inner / outer labia lips and joining the skin together to sew closed.
- Type 4: Any damage done to the genitalia, including scraping / pricking / cutting / stretching / **piercing** or burning.

If you would like to know more about what type of FGM you have, please ask your obstetrician (doctor specialising in pregnancy and birth).

Why is FGM carried out?

There are several reasons why FGM is carried out, but it is not due to belonging to a particular religion or race. The most common reasons given are as a preparation for adulthood, social and peer pressure, fear of social exclusion, to discourage sex outside marriage and to maintain family honour. The procedure is usually carried out on young girls and sometimes women.

What risks are involved?

FGM can have a lasting effect on the girl / woman when it is performed, which could affect her physically and mentally. The immediate physical effects can include severe bleeding, infection or even death. Longer term problems can occur with passing urine, periods, cysts, pain or difficulty during vaginal examination or cervical smear, pain during sex and lack of pleasurable sensation, infertility, problems in childbirth and a higher rate of neonatal death. It can also have effects on a woman's emotional state, leading to depression.

FGM and the law

Girls and women who are British nationals or are residents of the UK are protected from FGM by the laws in the UK. The law states that it is illegal to:

- Perform FGM on a girl (up to the age of 18).

- Take a girl abroad to have FGM done, even if it is lawful in the receiving country.
- Have FGM done on a girl in the UK.
- Help arrange for a girl to have FGM.
- Pressure a girl to have FGM.

If you are found guilty of performing or arranging for a girl to have FGM, you can be liable to 14 years in prison.

Parents have a duty to protect their daughter from FGM. If it is found that parent(s) did not protect their daughter(s), they can face 7 years in prison.

Any type of FGM is considered a form of child abuse in the UK.

If you would like more information on the law and FGM you can ask your midwife or visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

What happens next?

Your midwife will refer you to the hospital to be seen by an obstetrician who specialises in caring for women with FGM. She / he will talk to you about the FGM you have had and, with your permission, will carry out an examination. The examination is to assess if there will be any impact on the progression of your labour or giving birth. If there is do not have other reasons to require hospital appointment, you will continue regular follow up with your midwife or GP.

Depending on the severity of the FGM, the obstetrician may recommend re-opening the area which has been narrowed to allow enough room for you to give birth to your baby and to prevent further damage. This is usually done before labour begins but if required, this can be carried out during the early stages of labour. The procedure is carried out by a doctor who is experienced in this procedure and who will use local or regional anaesthetic (you will be awake but will not experience any pain). The doctor will not perform another procedure to close back the area after your baby is born – this is also illegal in the UK.

During labour

You will be encouraged and supported to give birth. You may feel that you need more support at times, especially during examinations. We want you to receive the care and support you need, so please talk to your midwife about the help you feel you need.

After giving birth

The midwives will advise you on cleanliness after your baby is born, especially if you have had stitches.

What help can you get?

If you have had FGM you can get medical help and support from your GP or any other healthcare professional, even if you are not pregnant. You can also find details of specialist FGM clinics and services at www.nhs.uk/fgm.

How can I protect my daughter?

There are lots of options and professionals who are there to help you protect your daughter(s). If you are concerned about your daughter or any girl who may be at risk of FGM:

- Tell the health professional treating you, or
- Contact the *National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)*, Helpline 0800 028 3550, 24 hours a day. They can be contacted anonymously or email: fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk. Or:
- Contact *Childline* www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111 (Freephone).
- Contact the Police: 999 (Emergency) 101 (non-emergency)
- Contact the Foreign and Commonwealth office (if abroad): 0044 20 7008 1500.
- Get a FGM Protection Order <https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-protection-order>. This order can stop your daughter being taken out of the country (if you are worried that someone may take her) or to ensure that a person can only see your daughter(s) when supervised. These orders are there to help protect your daughter(s) from FGM in whatever way necessary.
- Health Passport: You can ask for / print copies of 'A statement opposing Female Genital Mutilation.' This is a pocket-sized printed statement, available in 11 languages that you can take with you when you go abroad. You can show it to your family. It makes clear that FGM is a serious criminal offence in the UK. This can be obtained from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-opposing-female-genital-mutilation>
- Children's Social Care: Social workers can help you develop a safety plan to keep you and your daughter(s) safe. Being told a referral is being made to social care may be frightening but our aim is to protect girls from FGM. We know many families are against FGM and do not intend to continue the practice.
If you have a baby girl, social care will get in touch to see if you need any extra support and to make sure you feel confident to protect your daughter from FGM.
- Talk to someone safe!: If you are worried that you may be pressured by your family or community to have FGM performed on your daughter(s), ask your GP, health visitor or any other healthcare professional for help.

Legal responsibilities of healthcare professionals

The law in Britain states that every child has the right to enjoy a healthy and safe childhood. Midwives and doctors have a legal responsibility towards children who may be at risk of FGM. Children (daughters) of the mother who have undergone FGM; are at risk, of undergoing FGM, therefore:

- You will be referred to Children's Social Care Services for extra support. Please do not be alarmed by this. The support is put in place to ensure your children get the best opportunities from an early age.
- The fact that your daughter is at risk of FGM will be kept on her medical record. This record will be kept on a system that will enable all healthcare professionals throughout the country to see that she is at risk of FGM. The record will be kept until 18years of age.

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent

- If you are under 18 years of age, we are required by law to report your case to the Police, who have a dedicated team specialising in supporting women who have undergone FGM.

Collecting and using information from patients with FGM

To improve the care and support we provide to women and girls who have experienced FGM, as well as protecting those at risk, the Department of Health (DoH) is collecting information about FGM within the female population as treated for any condition by the NHS in England. This is a mandatory requirement for all NHS organisations. Therefore, your personal (name, date of birth, NHS number, and home address) and FGM information will be reported to the DoH. This will help the government to understand the number of women and girls living with FGM in the UK and their medical requirements. However, your personal information will remain confidential within the UK government and will not be used for any other purpose.

We DO NOT have to seek your permission for reporting this information. However, If you have any objection to your FGM information being used, please let us know or you can make enquiry to: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/clinical-audits-and-registries/female-genital-mutilation-datasets/patients-your-fgm-information-and-how-we-use-it#objecting-to-how-your-information-is-used>

This will automatically remove your information from the data collection.

To find out more about what information we are collecting, why, and how we will use it or to object to your information being used in this way please go to <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/clinical-audits-and-registries/female-genital-mutilation-datasets/patients-your-fgm-information-and-how-we-use-it> for further details.

Further support and information

- NHS.UK - www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/
- GOV.UK – Female Genital Mutilation: The Facts: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-leaflet> which is part of a larger collection of information at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/female-genital-mutilation>
- GOV.UK – Multi-agency Statutory Guidance on Female Genital Mutilation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>
- GOV.UK – Statement Opposing Female Genital Mutilation ('health passport'): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-opposing-female-genital-mutilation>
- GOV.UK – Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Mandatory Reporting Duty: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fgm-mandatory-reporting-in-healthcare>
- Royal College of Nursing – Female Genital Mutilation: An RCN Resource for Nursing and Midwifery Practice: www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-005447
- Daughters of Eve – What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)? www.dofeve.org/about-fgm.html
- Brook – Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): www.brook.org.uk/your-life/female-genital-mutilation-fgm

- Forward – FGM: <http://forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm/>
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC): The NSPCC (www.nspcc.org.uk) has a dedicated FGM helpline that provides information and advice for families and frontline professionals at 0800 028 3550 (free to call).

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

L Rushamba, Consultant O&G, October 2014

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