

Rebuttal: Should newborns be circumcised?

YES

Edgar J. Schoen MD

Dr Andres agrees that circumcision is a potent preventive measure against infant kidney infections and HIV, but downplays the significance. Infant kidney infections cannot be dismissed; they occur when the kidney is still developing and often result in renal damage with scarring. As for HIV protection, HIV is a serious plague of our times, resulting in more than 20 million deaths over the past 2 decades, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. Even in developed countries such as the United States and Canada, with a lower prevalence than Africa, there is public health concern. In April 2007 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention convened a conference of experts to take up the question of adult circumcision for high-risk men in the United States.

The protective effects of circumcision against other serious disorders have been well documented in major medical journals in recent years.¹⁻⁴ These include lowering the risks of human papillomavirus, penile cancer, cervical cancer in female sexual partners, *Chlamydia* infection, syphilis and chancroid, phimosis, local infection, and genital dermatoses. Circumcised men have easier lifetime genital hygiene. Depending on how you lump these, there are 7 to 11 proven preventive health benefits of circumcision versus the single risk of surgical complications, which the American Academy of Pediatrics lists as occurring in 0.3% to 0.5% of cases and as usually minor. That is at least a 7:1 benefit-to-risk ratio. How can Dr Andres conclude that the risks outweigh the benefits?

In bringing up the issues of masturbation, female genital surgery, and human rights, Dr Andres is echoing

the mantra of the lay anticircumcision groups that dominate the media and the Internet. The masturbation myth is ancient history that no one takes seriously today. The ritual of "female circumcision" consists of removal of the clitoris and labia, comparable to removing the entire male penis and part of the scrotum.

Parents have the right, if not the duty, to agree to a proven preventive health measure for their infants. The proven medical benefits of circumcision far outweigh the risks, and a circumcised newborn boy has a lifetime health advantage. ❁

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Competing interests


None declared

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These rebuttals are responses from the authors who were asked to discuss whether newborns should be circumcised in the Debates section of the December issue (*Can Fam Physician* 2007;53:2096-9 [Eng], 2100-3 [Fr]).