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## Female genital cutting or circumcision (FGC)

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### Summary

- Female genital cutting or circumcision is the partial or complete removal of the external female genital organs. It is done for cultural rather than medical reasons.
  - Female genital circumcision (FGC) is illegal in all Australian states and territories.
  - Health problems after FGC include infections, abscesses, blocked urinary flow and painful sexual intercourse.
  - Services and support are available for pregnant and non-pregnant women who have experienced FGC.
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Female genital cutting or circumcision (FGC) involves the cutting or altering of the external female genital organs. FGC is a traditional cultural practice rather than a religious practice, and its origins are unknown.

The practice can be found in communities and certain ethnic groups in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America.

According to the World Health Organization, around 200 million women across the globe are affected, with around three million girls undergoing the procedure every year. Estimates suggest that there are around 120,000 migrant women in Australia who experienced FGC in their country of birth.

In Victoria, you may hear the term female genital mutilation (FGM). It is important that you inform your health professional about your preferred term to describe your particular situation or experience.

### Different types of female genital cutting

The different types of FGC are classified by the extent of the practice involved. They include:

- **Type I** – clitoridectomy, or ‘sunna’. The hood of skin that sits over the clitoris (prepuce) is removed. The clitoris may or may not be removed in part or in total.
- **Type II** – clitoridectomy, ‘sunna’ or excision and circumcision. The entire clitoris is removed. The inner lips (labia minora) are either partially or totally removed.
- **Type III** – infibulation or ‘Pharaonic’ circumcision. The removal of all or part of the labia minora and labia majora, with the stitching of a seal across the vagina, leaving a small opening for the passage of urine and menstrual blood.
- **Type IV** – other practices including piercing, cauterising, scraping or using corrosive substances designed to scar and narrow the vagina.

### Health impacts of female genital cutting

FGC has no health benefit to women and girls, and it can have negative impacts on sexual and reproductive health.

There may be immediate and long-term negative health impacts including:

- severe pain
  - bleeding
  - shock
  - infection
  - death
  - scarring and cysts
  - blocked flow of urine
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- urinary incontinence
- recurring urinary tract infections
- infections of the pelvis
- increased risk of infertility
- painful sexual intercourse
- reduced sexual enjoyment
- post-traumatic stress syndrome, including nightmares and flashbacks
- depression
- social isolation
- childbirth difficulties, such as severe tearing and haemorrhage
- chronic anxiety.

### What the law says about Female genital cutting in Victoria

Female genital cutting is illegal in Victoria and across Australia, in all circumstances. Taking a person outside Victoria to another state or territory or overseas for this procedure is also illegal. The maximum penalty in Victoria is 15 years imprisonment.

It's also against the law to perform re-infibulation after childbirth to narrow or close the vaginal opening. Restitching immediately after childbirth by a doctor or midwife is only performed for tearing.

### De-infibulation after FGC

The operation to reopen the vagina is called de-infibulation. In Australia, de-infibulation is considered to be a form of corrective surgery, and is performed by a gynecologist (specialist in women's reproductive system), a nurse or midwife.

In Victoria, the **African Women's Clinic** at the Royal Women's Hospital offers the de-infibulation procedure for pregnant and non-pregnant women. Other public and private hospitals may also offer these services. If you have a Medicare card, you can access a public hospital for de-infibulation free of charge.

### Where to get help

The Victorian Government provides funding for clinical and non-clinical services for women and communities. There is a range of support services for women, girls and families in Victoria.

Name of the service	Address	Contact details	Services offered
<p><b>Multicultural Centre for Women's Health</b></p> <p>Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program (FARREP) worker</p>	<p>134 Cambridge Street, Carringbush Building, Collingwood, VIC, 3066</p>	<p>Tel. <b>(03) 9418 0999</b> or <b>1800 656 421</b> (toll free)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health promotion</li> <li>• Community education</li> <li>• Referral to services</li> <li>• Multilingual information and resources</li> <li>• Support for women and communities</li> </ul>

<p><b>Royal Women's Hospital – African Women's Clinic</b></p>	<p>Women's Welcome Centre Corner of Grattan Street and Flemington Road, Parkville, VIC, 3052</p>	<p>Tel. <b><u>(03) 8345 3058</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For women of all ages who have been circumcised</li> <li>• Support for pregnant and non pregnant women to think about options for reversing their circumcision</li> <li>• De-infibulation</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Women's Health in the North</u></b></p>	<p>680 High Street, Thornbury, VIC, 3071</p>	<p>Tel. <b><u>(03) 9484 1666</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community education on FGC and sexual and reproductive health in educational and community settings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Darebin Council Youth Services</b></p>	<p>274 Gower Street, Preston, VIC, 3072</p>	<p>Tel. <b><u>(03) 8470 8001</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community education with secondary school in Darebin local government area</li> <li>• Annual teacher information sessions about FGC</li> <li>• Weekly homework club</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>cohealth:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collingwood</li> <li>• Kensington</li> <li>• Werribee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 365 Hoddle Street, Collingwood, VIC, 3066</li> <li>• 12 Gower Street, Kensington, VIC, 3031</li> <li>• 12/Gate12, 235 Hoppers Lane, Werribee, VIC, 3030</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tel. <b><u>(03) 9448 5528</u></b></li> <li>• Tel. <b><u>(03) 9448 5537</u></b></li> <li>• Tel. <b><u>(03) 9448 5540</u></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community education/information/event sessions on FGC and reproductive health</li> <li>• Working/co-design with men/boys in the communities</li> </ul>

<p><b><u>Mercy Hospital for Women</u></b></p>	<p>163 Studley Road, Heidelberg, VIC, 3084</p>	<p>Tel. <b><u>(03) 8458 4150</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• De-infibulation for pregnant and non pregnant women</li> <li>• Healthcare support for women who have experienced FGC</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Monash Health – Dandenong</u></b></p>	<p>122 Thomas Street, Dandenong, VIC, 3175</p>	<p><b><u>wudad.salim@monashhealth.org</u></b>  <b><u>faduma.salah@monashhealth.org</u></b>          FARREP Team Leader          Tel. <b><u>(03) 9792 7945</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sessions for community members, including on FGC law in Victoria</li> <li>• Information sessions for students in schools, including where to access support</li> <li>• Support for pregnant women</li> <li>• Referrals for de-infibulation</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Banyule Community Health</u></b></p>		<p>Tel. <b><u>(03) 9450 2063</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care support for women who have experienced FGC</li> <li>• Health education impacts and options for women who have experienced FGC</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Women’s Health West – Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program</u></b></p>	<p>317-319 Barkly Street, Footscray, VIC, 3011</p>	<p>Tel. <b><u>(03) 9689 9588</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FARREP workers use culturally appropriate resources to facilitate women’s health and wellbeing session with women and girls from communities that are known to practise FGC.</li> </ul>

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

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