

Circumcising newborn males is a cost effective strategy for HIV prevention in Rwanda

January 19 2010

Circumcising newborn boys as a way to prevent HIV infection in later life is more cost-effective than circumcising adult males, finds a new Rwandan study in this week's *PLoS Medicine*.

It has already been conclusively shown, from three randomized clinical trials in Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa, that adult male [circumcision](#) (MC) roughly halves the [HIV transmission](#) rate from women to men. Many African countries hit hard by HIV are therefore offering men the procedure as way to control the epidemic. Rwanda is one such country—about 3% of adults in Rwanda are infected with HIV but only 15% of men are currently circumcised.

But performing the operation in adolescents and adults is linked with a higher risk of complications than circumcising newborns. And the operation is quicker and simpler to perform in newborns. The new study, by Agnes Binagwaho (Rwanda Ministry of Health) and colleagues, therefore set out to compare three different strategies as applied to Rwanda: circumcising [newborns](#) (neonates), adolescents, or adults.

The researchers used a technique called "cost-effective analysis," which looks at the balance between the costs of a medical intervention and its benefits. They estimated that each neonatal MC would cost just US\$15 whereas each adolescent or adult MC would cost US\$59. They found that neonatal MC would in fact save more money than it costs, because

the operation is cheap to perform and would prevent HIV infections that are expensive to treat.

The study findings, say the authors, "suggest that Rwanda should be simultaneously scaling up circumcision across a broad range of age groups, with high priority to the very young."

In an expert commentary on the new study, Seth Kalichman (University of Connecticut) says: "The cost-savings of neonatal MC are compelling and suggest that implementation is economically feasible in developing countries hit hardest by [HIV/AIDS](#). Neonatal MC should therefore be considered a priority in comprehensive [HIV prevention](#) plans for southern Africa."

More information: Binagwaho A, Pegurri E, Muita J, Bertozzi S (2010) Male Circumcision at Different Ages in Rwanda: A Cost-Effectiveness Study. PLoS Med 7(1): e1000211.
[doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000211](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000211)

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<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-01-circumcising-newborn-males-effective-strategy.html>

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