

ORR State Letter

#15-08

Date: July 24, 2015

TO: STATE REFUGEE COORDINATORS
STATE REFUGEE HEALTH COORDINATORS
NATIONAL VOLUNTARY AGENCIES
OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: Robert Carey
Director
Office of Refugee Resettlement

SUBJECT: Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C)

This State Letter provides resources and updated information about the law related to Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C), also known as female circumcision. This State Letter supersedes State Letter #7-11.

What is FGM/C and Where Does it Occur?

The practice of FGM/C is most common in the western, eastern, and north-eastern regions of Africa, as well as some countries in the Middle East and Asia. FGM/C refers to cutting and other procedures that injure the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. One form of cutting, called infibulation, involves sealing up the vagina, leaving only a small opening for urination and passage of menstrual flow. FGM/C is typically performed on young girls who may not understand what is being done to them or why.

Is FGM/C Required by Religion Practices?

Although practitioners often believe FGM/C is a religious requirement, the causes of FGM/C include a mix of cultural, religious and social factors within families and communities.

What are the Health Consequences of FGM/C?

FGM/C has no health benefits and can lead to a range of physical and mental health problems.

Immediate effects of FGM/C may include severe pain, blood loss, and sometimes death. Long-term health risks can include recurrent urinary tract infections, fistula, infertility, painful menstruation or sexual intercourse, and a potential increase in the risk of HIV/AIDS infection. In addition, women who have had FGM/C are significantly more likely to experience difficulties during childbirth, and their babies are more likely to die as a result of the practice. In addition,

the practice of FGM/C often leaves girls and women feeling scared, psychologically scarred, embarrassed, and distressed.

Is FGM/C Legal in the United States?

Federal law prohibits anyone in the United States knowingly circumcising, excising or infibulating the genitals of any child under 18 years of age. In addition, 23 States have laws prohibiting FGM/C.

U.S. law does not prohibit a woman or girl whose genitals have been cut from entering the country.

Is it Legal to Send a Child Abroad to Have FGM/C Performed?

Federal law makes it a crime to send, or attempt to send, a girl under 18 from the United States to have FGM/C performed in another country.

How Can I Report a Suspected Crime of FGM/C?

If you have information about someone who is performing FGM/C in the U.S., or if someone you know may be at risk of having the procedure done here or at risk of being taken abroad to have FGM/C performed, please contact the U.S. Department of Justice at 1-800-813-5863;

HRSPTIPS@usdoj.gov

How Can the Practice of FGM/C be addressed within Refugee and Immigrant Populations?

Refugees and immigrants should be informed of the adverse health consequences of FGM/C, in addition to the legal consequences. The following are some suggested mechanisms of disseminating this information to refugee and immigrant communities:

- Establish community-led campaigns to inform refugees of the adverse consequences of FGM/C, and
- Establish educational campaigns to inform refugee service providers and mainstream providers of the potential health problems that may emerge as a result of FGM/C, in particular pertaining to reproductive health.

How can I get additional information about FGM/C?

If you believe you are at risk of FGM/C or have undergone FGM/C, have questions about FGM/C, have information about someone who is performing FGM/C in the United States, or know of someone who may be at risk of having the procedure done here or outside the United States, please contact this number for additional information about available resources: **1-800-994-9662**.

Additionally, the following resources are available:

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services fact sheet, available at:
<http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/criminal-hrsp/legacy/2015/02/05/01-22-15fgm-notice.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Justice brochure, available at:
[http://www.justice.gov/criminal/hrsp/additional-resources/2015/hrsp-brochure-\(fgm\)-rev215.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/criminal/hrsp/additional-resources/2015/hrsp-brochure-(fgm)-rev215.pdf).
- U.S. Departments of Education and Justice webinar on the prevention and prosecution of FGM/C, which can be viewed here:
<https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=trainingCenter.traininginfo&eventID=1206&from=training&dtab=1>.
- Ethnic community-based organizations have also developed resources that address FGM/C in culturally appropriate ways.
 - Sauti Yetu: **www.sautiyetu.org**
 - Women Watch Afrika: **<http://womenwatchafrika.org/>**
 - African Family Health Organization: **<http://www.afaho.net/>**
 - Iraqi American Society for Peace and Friendship: **<http://iaspf.org/>**