

'Stop torturing boys now!': Anti-circumcision group protests in MN

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(Photo: Intact Voices, [Twitter](#))

There are only a few of them, but they're hard to miss.

Donned in all-white clothing with a large blood-red splotch under the waistline, the demonstrators are standing on the streets of Rochester protesting – yep, just what their signs say – circumcision, [ABC 6 reports](#).

"Stop torturing boys now!" one reads.

"Bloodstained men. Circumcision horror" says another.

The rally – attended by only a handful of people, based on photos, and with just 13 people interested [on Facebook](#) – is one of 15 scheduled across the Midwest this month.

It started in St. Louis last week, and supporters were in [St. Paul Sunday](#) before heading down to the Mayo Clinic Monday.

The responses from onlookers usually involve a lot of befuddlement and question marks. "Weird Penis Cutting Protest" is how one YouTuber put it.

But the protests aren't a joke.

The group behind it is very serious about informing the public of the dangers associated with circumcision.

Why circumcision is done

Circumcision is the practice of cutting off the foreskin that occurs naturally around the tip of the penis.

It's a religious tradition for many, the Mayo Clinic says, including Jewish and Muslim families, and aboriginal tribes in Africa and Australia.

But a number of health experts say there are simply some health benefits:

- Cleaning a circumcised penis is easier.
- There's a decreased risk of urinary tract infections and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- It can prevent medical problems, including if the foreskin is too tight.
- And penile cancer rates are lower in circumcised men, than uncircumcised men.

Circumcision is not believed to affect fertility, or change sexual pleasure for men or their partners.

'Unnecessary, elective, cosmetic'

The anti-circumcision protesters say those benefits are overstated, and the foreskin is more important than it's portrayed.

The Bloodstained Men & Their Friends group, which is organizing the rallies, calls it an "unnecessary, elective, cosmetic procedure that removes healthy erogenous tissue from the penis."

The nonprofit believes every child "has the right to their intact genitals."

It claims the procedure comes with a number of potential complications.

Those aren't ignored by most of the medical community.

The U.S. National Library of Medicine lists the risks as bleeding, infection, redness around the surgery site, and possible injury to the penis. The agency also says some people believe keeping the foreskin intact allows for a "more natural sexual response" once they're an adult.

An anti-circumcision advocate, Dan Bollinger, estimated the number of deaths per year due to circumcision at 117, the [New York Times reports](#). But the paper also points out the Centers for Disease Control does not keep track of such deaths, calling them “exceedingly rare.”

Benefits outweigh the risks

Still, most medical groups don't appear to be in favor of outlawing the practice.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2012 [issued a statement](#) saying the benefits of circumcision outweigh the risks – but not so heavily that it recommends universal circumcision, and says the decision should be left up to parents.

Late in 2014, the CDC put forth [a proposal](#) that would recommend health care providers talk about the procedure with uncircumcised men (or their parents/guardians). They would be the first ever federal guidelines on circumcision in the U.S.

The CDC received [more than 3,200 comments](#) during the 45-day public input period – many of them against circumcision, noting the pain it can cause children. (The [National Institute of Health says](#) doctors will almost always provide local or general anesthesia, depending on the patient's age.)

On Monday, researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health [published a paper](#) saying widespread male circumcision could help prevent more than 1 million HIV infections in Sub-Saharan Africa.



(Photo: Bloodstained Men & Friends, [Flickr](#))

