



# What's Behind Declining Circumcision Rates?

Signs portraying anti-circumcision messages have been popping up along roads around the state. Is circumcision on the way out?

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By Joy Diaz | April 18, 2016 11:04 am  
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David Brown/Texas Standard

Anti-circumcision protesters gathered in Austin earlier this month.

In Keller, Texas, pediatrician Jason Terk is going over some graphs analyzing 30 years of circumcision data. If you were to trace that graph with your finger, you'd notice something.

“There's been a slight drop in the rates of circumcisions – it's not dramatic,” Terk says.

It's only a 10 percent [decline overall in the United States](#). But if you were to break that data into regions, you'd notice the decline in the western states was huge – 37 percent. Not the south, though. Here, rates have remained almost steady.

At a February rally of the [Intactivist](#) movement – a group that advocates for intact penises – both male and female protestors wore white pants. They had red stains on their crotches to simulate bleeding.

Circumcision truly is something we don't talk much about.

[Nicole Villalpando](#) recently caught a lot of heat when she did. Villalpando is the [Parenting columnist and blogger](#) for the Austin American-Statesman.

“What got me is that everyday I pass these signs that feel like – well they kind of feel like bullying quite frankly,” she says.

The signs are popping up on Texas highways.

“I have seen ‘Genesis 17 is a criminal act – Do not circumcise’ and then the latest one is ‘Don't you dare circumcise’ and it's all in red letters – capital letters,” she says.

For Villalpando, circumcision is a tradition – a cherished legacy of her Jewish faith.

For me? Well, it was something we never thought to discuss before I gave birth to my son.

But soon after he was born, I was faced with the decision – and I heard opinions from both sides. A doctor friend called circumcision a mutilation. She said if you wouldn't do it to your daughter why would you consider it for your son? Now, my friend is not a pediatrician. So I asked one – Dr. Jason Terk – about the medical benefits.

“We now understand that circumcision does lower the risk of acquiring certain sexually transmitted infections that include HIV, Syphilis, Human Papilloma Virus – which is a very common infection that can cause cancer and Genital Herpes,” Terk says.

If we know all that, why are circumcisions declining? It's certainly not just from a protest here and there. Terk says part of the decline has to do with money.

“Over the last couple of decades some state Medicaid programs have stopped paying for the procedure and therefore circumcisions were not done in those circumstances,” Terk says

You know what else is happening? We are becoming a more diverse society. That's another prong contributing to the decline in circumcisions – Texas' fastest growing ethnic groups, Asians and Hispanics, are groups that traditionally do not circumcise.

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