

NEWS

## Protest against male circumcision hits Duluth

Brett Johnson said he left his job in Kansas City to hit the road this summer on a 17-city tour to protest against male circumcision as part of the group Bloodstained Men and Their Friends.

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Anastasia Van Buskirk (from left), of Chicago, Kayla Nygren of the Twin Cities, and David Atkinson, of Boston, with Bloodstained Men and Their Friends, protest the practice of circumcision on the corner of Trinity Road and Miller Trunk Highway in Duluth Wednesday. (Clint Austin / caustin@duluthnews.com)

Brett Johnson said he left his job in Kansas City to hit the road this summer on a 17-city tour to protest against male circumcision as part of the group Bloodstained Men and Their Friends.

Five members of the group were in Duluth on Wednesday, holding signs and waving at passing motorists at the corner of Trinity Road and Miller Trunk Highway near the Miller Hill Mall.

Some members of the group have devoted much of their lives to “protecting children and future generations from genital cutting.”

Dressed all in white, including white cowboy hats, with red stains splotched on their crotches, the

protesters Wednesday drew some waves, honks and puzzled looks from Duluth drivers.

Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin, the tissue covering the head of the penis, usually conducted shortly after birth.

“This is all volunteer. None of us get paid. We just think this is something that needs to be talked about,” Johnson. “We get a lot of feedback, positive and negative. People honking ... but it gets people talking about something no one wants to talk about.”

“We think this needs to stop,” said Dave Atkinson of Boston, between waves at passing vehicles Wednesday. “And we’re willing to work for it. Someone has to start.”

The Davis, Calif.-based group was formed five years ago by a man named Brother K who was in Duluth on Wednesday.

The group says it uses protests at highly visible locations so “passersby are confronted with the basic, undeniable human-rights argument that genital autonomy activists are making against the routine genital cutting of children: The foreskin is a healthy, valuable body part that belongs to the child. It is unnecessary, cruel, damaging and morally wrong to remove it from a healthy person who is incapable of consent.”

The group’s summer tour started in Minneapolis, traveled through Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas and Minnesota and will end in Apple Valley, Minn, today. The group notes that while female circumcision or genital mutilation has been widely disparaged globally, including criminal prosecution in the U.S., male circumcision has not received as much attention in the U.S.

Male circumcision dates back at least to ancient Egypt but has been practiced in many cultures for centuries, including most modern western cultures; some recent studies found about 77 percent of men are circumcised globally. The overall rate among U.S. males age 14 to 59 is 81 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some European medical groups now formally oppose male circumcision. But the American Academy of Pediatrics says that the “health benefits of newborn male circumcision outweigh the risks” although the benefits “are not great enough to recommend universal circumcision.” The benefits include decreased risk of urinary tract infections, reduced risk of some sexually transmitted diseases and some protection against penile cancer. The Academy said risks of the procedure include pain at the time it is performed, irritation of the glans, inflammation and risk of injury to the penis.

## **Online**

The group that protested in Duluth on Wednesday has [a Facebook page](#) and a website at [bloodstainedmen.org](http://bloodstainedmen.org).



David Atkinson, of Boston with Bloodstained Men and Their Friends, protests the practice of circumcision. (Clint Austin / DNT)