

Safe Male Circumcision Fact Sheet For Political Leaders

Introduction

This fact sheet is meant for political leaders at the national, district, municipal, and sub county levels. It provides basic information about Safe Male Circumcision (SMC) for HIV Prevention in Uganda. Leaders can use this information to guide the public on the importance of SMC and how to access services. The Ministry of Health recommends safe male circumcision as an additional HIV prevention strategy. The National Safe Male circumcision policy calls for voluntary circumcision for all men.

What is safe male circumcision (SMC)?

Safe Male Circumcision (SMC) is the removal of the skin that covers the tip of the penis. The process of SMC is carried out by a properly trained health worker, using tools that are approved by Ministry of Health. SMC is recommended as one of the ways to reduce the risk of HIV infection in men.

Why should a political leader support SMC?

- HIV prevalence is still high in Uganda, at 6.4% in spite of a lot of prevention efforts over the years.
- About 130,000 Ugandans get infected with HIV every year, according to Uganda AIDS Commission. Currently an estimated 47% of Ugandans who need ARV treatment do not have them.
- In 5 years, Uganda needs \$20.3 million for treatment of HIV related illnesses if new infections are not prevented in the population.
- Only 25% of Ugandan men are circumcised according to Uganda Demographic Health Survey 2006.
- About 400,000 infections would be prevented in 5 years if (80%) are circumcised, benefiting men women and children.
- If new infections continue, Uganda will be unable to treat them causing a great burden on the health systems and communities.

How does SMC help protect a man against HIV?

- SMC removes the foreskin where the virus can hide for long and enter a man's bloodstream.
- SMC minimises a man's chance of suffering from ulcers and sexually transmitted infections which may occur within the foreskin and allow HIV infection.
- SMC removes the wet, delicate part of the penis that can break during sex and enable HIV to enter the body.
- SMC makes the skin on the head of the penis thicker so it cannot easily allow HIV to penetrate a man's bloodstream.
- A circumcised man is about three times less likely to get HIV than an uncircumcised man.

What shows that Ugandan circumcised men have a lower risk of HIV infection?

Among all Ugandan men, HIV prevalence stands at 5%. HIV prevalence stands at 3.7% among circumcised men, when considered separately (MOH 2006). This means that male circumcision does not eliminate the risk of HIV infection but it greatly reduces it. Since SMC does not eliminate the risk of infection, a circumcised man still needs to abstain from sex, stick to one sexual partner, or use protection during sex and test for HIV.

What is the view of national and international institutions about SMC?

- In 2007, the World Health Organisation (WHO) approved SMC as a useful method of preventing HIV in men.
- Countries with high HIV prevalence but low circumcision rates were thus advised to embrace SMC.
- Uganda AIDS Commission includes SMC in the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan as one of the ways to reduce HIV infections in Uganda.
- The Ministry of Health has made a Safe Male Circumcision Policy (2010) to guide leaders and Health Workers about how SMC services should be supported and utilised.

Who can go for safe male circumcision?

- All men and boys can go for SMC regardless of their age. For HIV prevention, however, priority should be given to sexually active men (14 – 49 years of age).
- Both married and unmarried men can go for SMC.

- A married man should discuss with his sexual partner before seeking SMC.
- A man / boy going for SMC should get full medical examination to determine if he is fit for circumcision. Some people cannot be circumcised. That is why SMC is done in health facilities.

Where can SMC be provided?

SMC services can only be provided in a place where well-trained health workers can be found, with high level of cleanliness and general hygiene, with surgical tools that are adequately sterilised. Each client should be circumcised using a separate set of instruments.

What makes circumcision by a health worker safe?

- Ministry of Health approved health facilities have trained health care workers.
- A man seeking SMC is counselled before they are circumcised.
- He is informed about the benefits of SMC, possible threats and the desired behaviour after SMC.
- Every man seeking SMC is examined to decide if he is healthy and fit for the surgery.
- The health workers perform SMC using surgical tools which have been sterilised.

What are the other benefits of safe male circumcision?

- SMC reduces risks of ulcers that can easily form inside the foreskin and attract sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- SMC reduces the risk of a man getting cancer of the penis.
- SMC protects women from cancer of the cervix. A circumcised man cannot easily transmit the virus that causes the cancer.
- Sexual partners of circumcised men face lower risks of other sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and genital herpes.
- SMC serves as treatment when a man's foreskin cannot be easily moved on and off the head of the penis.
- SMC improves a man's hygiene.

Does safe male circumcision affect a person's religion?

Safe Male Circumcision is recommended for health reasons. Research conducted in Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa showed that SMC protects men from HIV infection by about 60%. This means that new HIV infections among sexually active men can be reduced by more than half if most of them are circumcised. Whereas some religions promote male circumcision as part of their faith, SMC is a scientific intervention to promote public health. However, men and boys seeking circumcision for religious or cultural reasons are also recommended to get SMC.

Why should political leaders actively educate the public about SMC?

- Most political leaders are elected by the people, so they are trusted as people's representatives.
- Political leaders are involved in promoting delivery of social services, including health. They have a responsibility towards the development of a healthy and productive nation.
- Political leaders have access to the target population for SMC. They have several available opportunities for relaying information on SMC.

What is the role of a political leader in SMC for HIV prevention?

- Inform your constituents that SMC reduces the risk of HIV infection in men.
- Find out where SMC services are available in your area and refer people for SMC services.
- Advise your constituents to go for HIV counselling and testing.
- Invite health workers into the community to tell people about how to avoid HIV infection, and how SMC partly contributes.
- Familiarise yourself with the national SMC policy and guide the people in your area about it.
- Advocate for health facilities in your area to offer SMC services to the community.
- Advise the health workers and partners about the best way to promote SMC within your constituency.

In this way, you will have helped your people to learn about the available new HIV prevention strategies, such as SMC, that they can adopt to reduce their risks.

