

## Information on the ritual circumcision of boys

### To parents considering having/wishing to have a male child of theirs ritually circumcised

The ritual circumcision of boys is an operation where the foreskin which covers the head of the penis is removed completely or partially for religious reasons. In Norway, such operations are not considered to have any health benefits for the child. Circumcision that is performed for medical reasons, such as in the case of a tight foreskin, infection or injury, is not ritual circumcision.

Ritual circumcision is only permitted on boys and is regulated in [Act No. 40 on ritual circumcision of boys of 20 June 2014](#).

### Who should the parents contact in order to have their child ritually circumcised?

All regional health authorities are required to offer a service for the ritual circumcision of boys<sup>1</sup>. Some hospitals have entered into agreements with other public sector hospitals or with private clinics which perform the circumcision. Contact your nearest hospital to find out more about the service in your health region. You do not need a referral. You can also obtain information from your general practitioner or health centre.

Ritual circumcision is not considered to be medical assistance even if it is available at a hospital. This means that other patients who are entitled to medical assistance will be given priority. For example, sick children must be treated before boys who are to be ritually circumcised.

### Who can lawfully ritually circumcise boys?

The ritual circumcision of boys must generally be performed by a doctor.

Ritual circumcisions may also be carried out by other people, such as a mohel (a person trained in the practice of ritual circumcision), provided a doctor is present and is responsible for the operation. It is not sufficient for a doctor to have given instructions in advance or for him or her to be available if required.

**It is prohibited to perform ritual circumcision without a doctor present.**

### Information and consent

The parents must obtain information about how the operation is performed and the pain relief that must be given to the boy. The parents must be informed that the boy may experience discomfort during the actual operation even if the necessary pain relief is given. They must also be informed that the boy may also experience pain after the wound has healed. In addition, they must be informed of

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<sup>1</sup> Norway is divided into four health regions. In each of these regions, a regional health authority is responsible for ensuring that the population is offered specialist health services.

the possible complications linked to the operation, as well as complications which can arise after the operation has been performed. If the parents have a limited knowledge of Norwegian, a qualified interpreter in the preferred language of the parents must be requested.

Most ritual circumcisions in Norway are performed on boys less than one year old, often soon after birth. If a boy who is to be circumcised has reached an age and level of maturity which enables them to understand the information about the operation, the boy himself must be given the information. The doctor must ensure that information concerning the operation is provided and that those who have parental responsibility have consented to the operation. The doctor must not perform the operation if the boy does not wish to be circumcised.

The ritual circumcision of boys under 18 may only be performed with the consent of the person or persons who have parental responsibility<sup>2</sup> for the boy. Because it is an operation which has permanent consequences which are not medically justified and which are also associated with some risk, both parents, if they have joint parental responsibility, must give their consent to the ritual circumcision being performed. It is prohibited to perform a ritual circumcision against the boy's will.

Boys who are able to express their own views must be given the opportunity to give their opinion, and this opinion must be given weight according to the boy's age and maturity. Medical personnel must ensure that the boy is consulted.

Boys aged 18 or over can decide for themselves whether or not they wish to be circumcised.

## How is the operation carried out?

There are several ways of performing ritual circumcision on boys. Information on the method which will be used must be provided in advance.

The ritual circumcision of boys may only be performed if the necessary pain relief is given before, during and after the operation. The doctor will decide what pain relief is necessary based on the method that is to be used and the boy's age. Some hospitals offer the operation to children under 12 months of age, while others require the children to be aged 1 year or more.

## Risks of complications

All operations entail some risk of complications. However, the risk of complications linked to the ritual circumcision of boys is low if the operation is carried out appropriately. The most commonly occurring complications are bleeding and infection as a result of the operation. If these complications arise, the parents must immediately contact the hospital or clinic that performed the operation. Information must be provided on possible complications by the doctor who performed the operation. Information must also be given concerning possible complications which can arise after

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<sup>2</sup> Married parents have joint parental responsibility for the children they have together. Since 1 January 2006, cohabiting parents have automatically had joint parental responsibility for children born after this date. When the parents are not married, or do not live together at the time the paternity is established, the mother will have sole parental responsibility. The parents may agree either to have joint responsibility or for the father to have sole parental responsibility. The agreement must be sent to the tax office in order to be valid.

the operation has been carried out. Pain relief treatments for children aged under 12 months can lead to complications in the form of side effects from the medication. Information on this will be provided by the doctor who performed the operation.

### **Patient charges**

A fee of NOK 4,000 (November 2016) is payable in order to have ritual circumcision performed at a regional health authority hospital or a private clinic which has an agreement with the health authority. The ritual circumcision of boys is not covered by HELFO's exemption card scheme.

### **Travel expenses**

The ritual circumcision of boys does not give entitlement to reimbursement for travel expenses.

Find out more about expenses linked to the ritual circumcision of boys at [helsenorge.no](http://helsenorge.no).