



## **Safeguarding Children From Female Genital Mutilation**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Other terms used include sunna, circumcision, initiation or cut.

FGM is prevalent in at least 30 countries, from the Atlantic coast to the Horn of Africa, areas of the Middle East and some Asian countries. In many of these cultures, it is a deeply embedded social norm, practiced by families for a variety of complex reasons. For instance, it is often thought to be essential for a girl to experience FGM if she is to become a marriageable woman albeit the practice is not seen as essential to the beliefs of any faith.

The cultural background of FGM is one of the reasons that inhibit women from seeking help. Some of the reasons given for FGM being carried out are that it:

- brings status and respect, giving a social acceptance, especially for marriage.
- preserves a girl's virginity/chastity.
- is a rite of passage.
- upholds the family honour.
- cleanses and purifies.
- gives the girl and her family a sense of belonging to the community.
- rids the family of bad luck or evil spirits.
- is (incorrectly) believed to make childbirth safer for an infant.
- is aesthetically desirable.
- perpetuates a custom/tradition.

Globally, The World Health Organisation estimates that over 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM; every year an estimated 3 million girls, the majority of whom are cut before they turn 15 years old, are at risk.

In June 2015 the Government issued 'A Statement Opposing Female Genital Mutilation' in which this practice was identified as child abuse that can have 'devastating health consequences for girls and women'. However, despite FGM being illegal in the UK, the NHS reports that since April 2015, 34,450 individual women and girls had an attendance where it was identified. Indeed, within the very short reporting period of April – June 2023, 1,745 individuals attended at 83 NHS trusts and 19 GP practices where FGM was identified.

FGM has significant health connotations both in the short and longer term. Immediate complications of FGM can include:

- severe pain
- excessive bleeding (haemorrhage)
- genital tissue swelling

- fever
- infections e.g., tetanus
- urinary problems
- wound healing problems
- injury to surrounding genital tissue
- shock and even death

Long-term complications can include:

- Difficulty urinating
- Incontinence
- Frequent or chronic vaginal, pelvic or urinary infections
- Menstrual problems
- sexual problems including pain during intercourse
- need for later surgeries
- Kidney damage and possible failure
- Cysts and abscesses
- Infertility
- Increased complications during pregnancy and childbirth
- Psychological health problems
- Shock due to loss of blood

### Action to be Taken

It is mandatory to report FGM and AFA staff must, as soon as they are aware of a disclosure, or a concern that such may have taken place or is being arranged, contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead or other member of the Management Team and refer to Safeguarding procedures. In an emergency, the Police and Ambulance Service should be contacted directly.

FGM is a serious criminal offence which carries a penalty of up to 14 years in prison for anyone committing or helping someone to commit it. If FGM is committed, each person who has been responsible for a child whilst it has been carried out is considered guilty of an offence.

### For further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>

<https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-help-advice>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>

<https://www.endfgm.eu/female-genital-mutilation/what-is-fgm/>

Also refer to: [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children)

### Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Foster Parent Handbook	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Children from Honour-Based Violence	All staff and Foster Parents