Infant Circumcision Grows to Global Debate

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The health benefits of circumcising baby boys outweigh the risks, the American Academy of Pediatrics says in an updated policy statement. But it stopped short of recommending the procedure, which can lower the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The topic continues to make headlines:

- In Germany, a court ruled that circumcising a child amounts to bodily harm. The ruling applied to one specific case, but it put Jewish and Muslim leaders on the defensive.

- In San Francisco, anti-circumcision advocates (or “intactivists” as in “having intact genitalia”) gathered enough signatures to put a child circumcision ban on the ballot. A judge nixed it, saying that regulating medical procedures is a matter for the state, not cities.

- In the United States, circumcision rates for male newborns have plummeted from 79 percent in the 1980s to 55 percent in 2010 (partially because more health insurers, including some Medicaid programs, no longer cover the cost). This alarms Johns Hopkins researchers who estimate that if rates drop to 10 percent—similar to Europe—health care costs will climb $4 billion and we’ll see a 12 percent increase in HIV among men.

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