

Protecting girls against female genital mutilation in Massachusetts and helping victims of FGM

Female genital mutilation or FGM is a traditional practice that involves removing parts of the external genitalia of girls. It is very painful and has many long-term harmful effects on the health and well-being of girls and women. Some girls die from being cut. All girls suffer trauma and excruciating pain during the procedure. Recurrent urinary and vaginal infections, painful menstruation and intercourse, an increased risk of death to the mother or baby during childbirth, the spread of AIDS and tetanus and many other problems result from FGM.

It is practiced in about 30 countries, mostly in Africa and Indonesia, but also in the Middle East and South Asia.

Sometimes girls living in the US or other countries where FGM is not normally practiced are taken back to an FGM-practicing country to have the procedure done. This is known as “vacation cutting.” Sometimes girls are cut in this country. Either way, it is against the law (18 U.S.C. & 116). People can be put in jail for up to 5 years for performing FGM or arranging for it to be done to someone else.

If you have been cut, you have not done anything wrong. It is the people who did it to you who have committed a crime. Even though the people who carry on this tradition believe they are doing something important and right, it is still considered a crime by the US government and most people here. It is a human rights violation, a form of gender-based violence and child abuse.

If you are worried that you or someone you know is in danger of being genitally mutilated, here are some suggestions of how to prevent it.

- Call the Massachusetts child abuse hotline: **(800) 792-5200**.
- Contact the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families?
- Contact US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE): **866-DHS-2-ICE, (866-347-2423)** or <https://www.ice.gov/webform/hsi-tip-form>.
- Write: FBI: <https://tips.fbi.gov/>.
- Contact Department of Justice, Human Rights & Special Prosecutions Section (DOJ HRSP): **800-813-5863** or HRSPTips@usdoj.gov. Messages can be left in any language.
- Contact the Human Rights Violators & War Crimes Unit of Homeland Security: **(802) 872-6199** or ICE.gov/tips.
- Contact the Office on Women’s Health in the US Department of Health & Human Services: **(800) 994-9662**.
- Look at Homeland Security’s US Citizenship & Immigration Services website on FGM which has information on FGM and legal consequences in 7 languages: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/female-genital-mutilation-or-cutting-fgmc>.
- If you want a person to talk to the parents, we’ll get you someone, hopefully from an FGM-practicing community.

If you use this list of resources, please give us feedback on how it worked out for you.

If you have been genitally mutilated and need assistance, one resource is the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights at 617-414-4794, 771 Albany St, Boston, MA 02118. Another is the African Women’s Health Center at Brigham and Women’s Hospital at (617) 732-4740. Their website is: [www.brighamandwomens.org/Departments and Services/obgyn/services/africanwomenscenter/default.aspx](http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Departments_and_Services/obgyn/services/africanwomenscenter/default.aspx).

Women’s Bar Association Task Force on FGM

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