



STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

# Female Genital Mutilation

Under Review: Yes  
Issued By: Council: TBD

The **Standards of Practice** of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (“CPSA”) are the **minimum** standards of professional behavior and ethical conduct expected of all regulated members registered in Alberta. Standards of Practice are enforceable under the *Health Professions Act* and will be referenced in the management of complaints and in discipline hearings. CPSA also provides **Advice to the Profession** to support the implementation of the Standards of Practice.

**Note:** a glossary of terms can be found at the end of this document. Glossary terms are indicated in teal with a “G” throughout this document.

#### PREAMBLE

Female genital mutilation<sup>G</sup>, also referred to as female genital cutting or female circumcision, is internationally recognized as a harmful practice and violation of women’s and girls’ rights to life, physical integrity and health. The immediate and long-term health risks and complications of female genital mutilation can be serious and life-threatening.<sup>1</sup>

**Commented [CD1]:** Added to ensure female circumcision is included as mutilation.

Female genital mutilation is classified as aggravated assault under section 268(3) of the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Under the *Criminal Code*, any person who commits an aggravated assault is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years, including medical professionals and family members. Involvement in female genital mutilation also contravenes the Canadian Medical Association’s *Code of Ethics & Professionalism*.

The *Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022* requires that regulatory colleges have standards of practice to address female genital mutilation by their members. These standards must advise that, if convicted, regulated health professionals who perform or facilitate female genital mutilation will be removed from practice. In addition, those convicted of this crime in other jurisdictions will not be permitted to practice in Alberta.

This standard has been developed to provide support for better physical and mental health care by regulated members of women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation.

<sup>1</sup> From the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Canada’s “[Guideline No. 395, Female Genital Cutting](#)” (June 2019).

#### Terms used in the Standards of Practice:

- 1. “Regulated member” means any person who is registered or who is required to be registered as a member of this College. CPSA regulates physicians, surgeons, naturopaths and physician assistants.
- 2. “Must” refers to a mandatory requirement.
- 3. “May” means that the physician or physician assistant may exercise reasonable discretion.
- 4. “Patient” includes, where applicable, the patient’s legal guardian or substitute decision maker.

For additional guidance, please refer to the “[Companion Resources](#)” at the end of this document.

## STANDARD

1. A regulated member **must not** perform, assist in or refer a patient for female genital mutilation.
2. A regulated member **must** decline requests to perform, assist or refer a patient for female genital mutilation, including [reinfibulation](#)<sup>6</sup>.
3. A regulated member **must** report to a law enforcement agency (e.g., appropriate child welfare protection service) when a child has recently been subjected to or is [at risk](#)<sup>6</sup> of being subjected to female genital mutilation.
4. A regulated member who learns of a regulated health professional performing, assisting or referring a patient for female genital mutilation **must** report the regulated health professional in accordance with the [Duty to Report a Colleague](#) standard.
5. A regulated member whose practice may include treating patients who have undergone female genital mutilation **must** educate themselves on:
  - a. how female genital mutilation presents;
  - b. possible complications of female genital mutilation;
  - c. how to properly manage these complications or, if outside the regulated member’s scope, refer to an appropriate healthcare provider (e.g., gynecologist, urologist) in accordance with the [Referral Consultation](#) standard of practice;
  - d. resources to support the mental health of patients who have undergone female genital mutilation; and
  - e. community resources to support the patient and their family with the aftercare required following female genital mutilation.
6. A regulated member **must** support patients and families who are at risk of or have undergone female genital mutilation by:
  - a. providing culturally sensitive counselling about the dangers of the practice;
  - b. connecting patients to mental health supports; and

**Commented [CD2]:** From [CPSM's SoP](#).

**Commented [CD3]:** Reworded for simplicity based on [CPSM's SoP](#).

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- c. connecting patients to community resources.

## GLOSSARY

**At risk:** women and girls [from countries where female genital mutilation is practiced most often](#) <sup>2</sup> have the highest risk.

Risk factors include age, region, religion, urban vs. rural, economic status, education level of mother and female genital mutilation in mother.<sup>3</sup>

**Deinfibulated:** refers to the practice of cutting open the sealed vaginal opening of a woman who has been infibulated, which is often necessary for improving health and well-being as well as to allow intercourse or to facilitate childbirth.<sup>4</sup>

**Excision:** the external part of clitoris and labia minora are partially or totally removed, with or without excision of the labia majora.<sup>5</sup>

**Female genital mutilation/cutting:** means the [excision](#)<sup>6</sup>, [infibulation](#)<sup>6</sup> or [mutilation](#)<sup>6</sup>, in whole or in part, of the labia majora, labia minora, clitoral hood or clitoris of a person<sup>6</sup>, **except** where valid consent is given in accordance with the [Informed Consent](#) standard of practice **and** the procedure is performed for the benefit of the physical health of the person or for that person to have normal reproductive functions or normal sexual appearance or function **or** the person is at least 18 years of age **and** there is no resulting bodily harm.<sup>7</sup>

**Infibulation:** consists of narrowing the vaginal orifice with the creation of a covering seal by mutilation and apposition the labia minora and/or labia majora, with or without removal of the external part of clitoris.<sup>2</sup>

**Mutilation:** comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From the Office on Women's Health "[Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting](#)" (Feb. 2021).

<sup>3</sup> From Kids New to Canada's "[Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Screening](#)" (Jan. 2016).

<sup>4</sup> From the World Health Organization's "[Female Genital Mutilation](#)" fact sheet (Jan. 2022).

<sup>5</sup> From End FGM European Network's "[Types of FGM.](#)"

<sup>6</sup> While evidence is currently available about female-identified individuals, the intent of this standard is to address practices that have been done to any individual who was born with or transitioned to have labia majora, labia minora, clitoral hood or clitoris.

<sup>7</sup> From [Health Professions \(Protecting Women and Girls\) Amendment Act, 2022.](#)

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- <sup>3</sup> "May" means that the physician or physician assistant may exercise reasonable discretion.
- <sup>4</sup> "Patient" includes, where applicable, the patient's legal guardian or substitute decision maker.

**Reinfibulation:** the restitching together of the two sides of the vulva, labia minora, or labia majora on a person who was previously infibulated and subsequently deinfibulated, such as after the birth of a child.<sup>8</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## RELATED STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

- [Boundary Violations: Personal](#)
- [Disclosure of Harm](#)
- [Duty to Report a Colleague](#)
- [Informed Consent](#)

## COMPANION RESOURCES

- Advice to the Profession documents:
  - Female Genital Mutilation (TBD)
  - [Boundary Violations: Personal](#)
  - [Duty to Report a Colleague/Self](#)
  - [Informed Consent for Adults](#)
  - [Informed Consent for Minors](#)
  - [Legislated Reporting and Release of Medical Information](#)
- Advice to Albertans: Female Genital Mutilation (TBD)
- The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Canada's [Guideline No. 395 – Female Genital Cutting \(Feb. 2020\)](#)
- The World Health Organization's "[Female Genital Mutilation](#)" (May 2022)

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<sup>8</sup> From Law Insider's "[Reinfibulation Definition.](#)"

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