

Edmonton agency calls on parents to circumcise

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An Edmonton organization that helps people with HIV and AIDS is urging parents to have their children circumcised following a recommendation from the United Nations.

Deborah Jakubec, the executive director of HIV Edmonton, said unless there are cultural objections, it is a good addition to safe sex education.

"In today's world people are not wearing condoms and we know that because currently we are having a syphilis epidemic in the city," she said.

"If we are not going to be comfortable speaking with our children about sex and sexuality then circumcision is another way to prevent [HIV]."
'Compelling evidence'

UN health agencies recommended Wednesday that heterosexual men undergo circumcision because of "compelling" evidence that it can reduce their chances of contracting HIV by up to 60 per cent.

But World Health Organization and UNAIDS experts said men need to be aware that circumcision is only partial protection against the virus and must be used with other measures, such as male and female condoms, abstinence, delaying the start of sexual activity and reducing the number of sexual partners.

Studies suggest 5.7 million new cases of HIV infection and three million deaths over 20 years could be prevented by circumcision in sub-Saharan Africa, the agencies said.
'We'd rather not'

For Edmonton resident Neill Walker and his wife, the decision not to circumcise their two-week-old son was easy.

"We'd rather not put our baby through that painful procedure," he said.

Walker said because people can take precautions to protect themselves against HIV, he isn't concerned about the higher risk.

Dr. James Metcalfe, a urologist in Edmonton, said there is no longer an interest in widespread circumcision as there was in the past.

"It's such a cultural thing. I think it would be very difficult to just implement, like a vaccination or something like that," he said.

Metcalfe says the decision of whether to circumcise is often divisive and he has no doubt this latest advice will add even more heat to arguments between mothers and fathers.