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Male Circumcision for HR-HPV Prevention

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In a Comment, Dr. Monson states “circumcision and condom use have not been shown to fully protect against either human papillomavirus (HPV) acquisition or clearance in male genital sites, which questions their value in preventing infection in men and transmission to female partners.” The statement is based on older observational studies, but ignores evidence from recent observational studies and two randomized trials of male circumcision that circumcision reduces penile HR-HPV prevalence.¹ In addition, observational studies and one randomized trial showed that male circumcision reduces female partner HR-HPV prevalence.^{1–2} In both men and their female partners, male circumcision reduces HR-HPV prevalence by reducing acquisition and increasing clearance of the virus.^{2–3} Dr. Giuliano and colleagues have previously shown that male circumcision reduces penile HR-HPV prevalence.⁴ Unfortunately, little data are presented in her current study on the impact of male circumcision on HR-HPV acquisition or clearance.⁴

Currently there are no fully protective measures for HR-HPV prevention in men. The quadrivalent HPV vaccine only reduces external genital lesions in men by 60.2% and persistent infection with any HPV genotype by 27.1%.⁵ Therefore, multiple interventions may be required to significantly reduce HR-HPV infection in men and women, and the potential, albeit incomplete, protection afforded by male circumcision cannot be ignored.

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