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## Cruellest cut may be kind after all

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Australia needed to rethink its opposition to male circumcision amid growing evidence it offered significant health benefits for men and women, a medical conference was told yesterday.

Recent studies showed circumcision protected men against HIV and lowered the risk of cervical cancer in their partners, Roger Short, of Melbourne University, told a Fertility Society of Australia meeting in Perth.

The reason was simple, he said. "The main site by which HIV enters the penis is through the inner aspect of the foreskin, where there's no keratin covering which normally keeps the virus out, and there's a very high concentration of cells with receptors for the virus that internalise it. If you take the foreskin away you remove most of the receptor sites for HIV so you drastically reduce risk."

The most recent research, from a study of Indian men starting in 1993, showed an eightfold reduced risk of HIV in those who had been circumcised. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, analysing existing literature, found a man's HIV risk was halved. Circumcised men were also less likely to be infected with the human papilloma virus, responsible for 99 per cent of cervical cancer when passed on to women.

Circumcision has fallen to about 10 per cent of male Australian babies. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians says there is no evidence of benefit outweighing the potential harm of circumcision.

But the Australian College of Pediatrics softened its opposition in 1996 as research showed uncircumcised boys were significant more likely to suffer urinary tract infections.

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/11/03/1067708140106.html>*