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Circumcision helps prevent STD in men

CIRCUMCISION not only protects against HIV in heterosexual men, but it also helps prevent two other sexually transmitted infections, a large new study found.

Circumcised males reduced their risk of infection with HPV, or human papillomavirus, by 35 per cent and herpes by 28 per cent. However, researchers found circumcision had no effect on the transmission of syphilis.

Landmark studies from three African countries including Uganda previously found circumcision lowered men's chance of catching the AIDS virus by up to 60 per cent. The new study stems from the Uganda research and looked at protection against three other sexually transmitted diseases. The findings were reported recently in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"Evidence now strongly suggests that circumcision offers an important prevention opportunity and should be widely available," Drs Matthew Golden and Judith Wasserheit of the University of Washington wrote in an accompanying editorial.

Worldwide, only about 30 per cent of men are circumcised. The figure is higher in the United States, where about 79 per cent of men are circumcised.

An international team of researchers who conducted the study said circumcision,

the surgical removal of the foreskin from the penis, should be an accepted method to reduce sexually transmitted infections among heterosexuals.

"It must be emphasised that protection was only partial, and it is critical to promote the practice of safe sex," they wrote.

HPV can cause cervical cancer and genital warts. Herpes increases the chances of HIV infection.

The American Academy of Paediatrics previously said there was not enough evidence to recommend routine circumcision of infants. The doctor's group is reviewing its position based on recent studies.

The latest research involved 3,393 HIV-negative heterosexual adolescent boys and men from Uganda who were part of the original HIV study. About half were randomly selected to undergo circumcision right away while the rest had the procedure two years later. All had physical exams and were offered voluntary HIV counselling and condoms.

After two years, herpes infection was detected in 114 circumcised men compared with 153 uncircumcised men. HPV was detected in 42 circumcised men compared with 80 uncircumcised men. There was no significant difference on the rate of syphilis infections. — AP