What is circumcision?

The male penis is covered with a layer of skin called the foreskin. Removal of this skin is called circumcision.

Why is it a good idea to circumcise?

- For hygiene reasons: it is easier to keep the penis clean.
- To reduce your risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV.
- Female sex partners are protected from cervical cancer and other infections.
- For cultural beliefs.
- For medical reasons to treat various penile problems that require removal of the foreskin.

Circumcision and reducing the risk of STIs

- The inside of the foreskin is different from the skin on the rest of the penis. The tissue contains many more cells that are susceptible to STIs, including HIV.
- The foreskin is at risk of tearing and getting other infections, which can also increase a man's risk of contracting STIs.
- When a man is circumcised, his foreskin is removed, and the number of cells that are susceptible to STIs, including HIV infection are significantly reduced.

Although studies show that circumcision reduces the risk of STIs and HIV, it does not protect you fully and you should always practise safe sex: Abstain, Be Faithful and Condomise.

Facts you should know

- If you are under the age of 16 you will need the consent of your parents to get circumcised.
- Circumcision of males older than 16 may only be performed if consent is given to the circumcision after proper counselling.
- It is important that medical male circumcision is done by people trained and qualified to do it.
  - You will first receive counselling about what to expect and be asked to sign a consent form.
    - You will be offered an HIV test and other routine health screening.
    - The procedure will be done under local anaesthetic so that it is not painful.
    - After the procedure you will be given pain medication.

Follow-up visits: you will be given a date to return 2 to 3 days after having been circumcised. Keep all appointments. The stitches will dissolve on their own. Write down any questions you may have. This way you will remember to ask these questions during your next visit.

Having sex: you need to wait at least 6 weeks after the procedure before you masturbate or have sexual intercourse (sex) with your partner.

You may feel some discomfort when having sex for the first time after the procedure. Talk to your health care worker if you are worried, have concerns, or are having related problems when having sex.