

2.4 million

The number of men between the ages of 15 and 49 the HIV/Aids programme in KwaZulu-Natal aims to circumcise by 2014

News

Circumcision device a safe choice

Tara Clamp allows for procedure with minimum pain and also fits with transformed Zulu cultural practice

CHRIS MAKHAYE

Siyapha Mazibuko (19) is one of dozens of nervous boys and young men disembarking from a bus at Pietermaritzburg's Northdale Hospital.

He is one of 215 young men who will be circumcised on the day. Many of them are from rural areas surrounding Richmond, such as Njobokazi, Nkheni and Nkizwana. They have been bussed in - free of charge - so that they can be counselled, tested for HIV and circumcised before returning home.

"It was not painful. It took the doctors about five minutes to remove my foreskin and replace it with the plastic thing (Tara Clamp)," says Mazibuko.

He was given painkillers and ordered to return to the hospital after six days for the clamp to be removed. "The only snag was that they didn't allow me to take the removed foreskin ... so that I can bury it at home," he complains.

Mxolisi Sibeko (22), of Mago-da near Richmond, says he underwent the circumcision to save his life: "Many of the people who are dying of HIV today are young people like me. I want to secure my future," he says.

"But we were told that now that we had undergone the operation it did not mean that we could now go and sleep around."

This week's circumcision drive was conducted in five regions of

Fact box

Five weeks ago Vusi Hleakiso, a 22-year-old community radio station DJ, joined hundreds of young men who volunteered to undergo circumcision at Umshushu, south of Durban. Many of the other volunteers were teenagers who took advantage of the extended holidays and the chilling winter weather.

"I felt I should not preach to others about this operation but I should go there myself and lead by example. I am feeling nicely and there were no complications whatsoever," he said.

However, since then he has since not yet engaged in sex, after he was warned that he had to abstain for six weeks. "Even when this period is over I will not just engage in casual sex," he said.



Boys from rural areas in Richmond, KwaZulu-Natal, head to Pietermaritzburg's Northdale Hospital when they will be circumcised and get back home the same day. A special plastic clamp is fastened on their penises after their foreskin has been cut. PHOTO: ANITA KUMWENA

Timeline

- December 4, 2009: Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini re-introduces male circumcision to reduce spread of HIV and Aids.
- January 2010: The king's delegations and kwazulu-natal cabinet discuss interventions to conduct mass circumcisions.
- March 2010: Premier Zweli Mkhize announces a R75 million budget to train nurses and doctors.
- April 2010: The first mass circumcision project is done at four sites in kwazulu-natal.
- This week: Just over 5 300 circumcisions have been completed in the province. No deaths, amputations or female mutilations reported. Of these, 4 000 circumcisions were done using the foreskin-guided operation at hospitals and the Tara Clamp was used on 1 300 males.

or will never be able to have sex again because of the operation. He adds: "A few have complained about pain ... (but) there is no invasive operation that can be conducted without any pain. So far only four had to be admitted to hospital and stabilised. They were sent home with a few days."

Head of the Malaysian specialist team Dr Gurchan Singh says the Tara Clamp has been used in Malaysia and countries in Asia

how they must protect themselves so that they share our vision for an Aids-free generation." But the department has come under criticism from Aids activists such as the Treatment Action Campaign for using the Tara Clamp method, which they say is painful and more expensive than the sutured operation.

But Shabalala disagrees. "Of all the operations we have done so far no one has died, no one has had his male member amputated

400 men were circumcised in the pilot project in April. Dr Sandile Shabalala, head of the HIV/Aids programme in the province's health department, says the aim is to circumcise 2.4 million men between the ages of 15 and 49 by 2014.

He says more than 5 000 have already been circumcised. "Men first undergo counselling and HIV testing, during this process they learn about such things as rape, their behaviour as men and

But after recent studies revealed that circumcised men had 60% less chance of contracting HIV, Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini decided to revive the practice. But he wanted it to be conducted by doctors in order to prevent deaths, such as those that often occur in Eastern Cape.

Since then the government has come on board and the first mass circumcision drive was conducted next to one of Zwelithini's palaces in KwaNongoma. More than

torred by a team of 10 Malaysian Tara Clamp circumcision specialists. These specialists also train local doctors and nurses on how to use the device. "This involves putting the clamp in place and removing the exposed foreskin with a scalpel.

Until recently Zulus did not go for circumcision as a rite of passage into manhood after the Zulu king, Shaka, banned it in the early 1800s.

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