



Prevention and Treatment of Injuries and Infections Related to Pubic Hair Removal

ASHLEY L. HODGES
AIMEE C. HOLLAND

During the 1920s, with the first signs of a medical model of childbirth, perineal shaving before birth appeared. As the perceived need to manage what was seen as unclean and hazardous grew, pubic shaving and aseptic cleansing became common practice. Although evidence emerged during the 1970s suggesting that

pubic shaving before childbirth increased the risk of infection, the practice continued well into the 1980s before becoming obsolete (Jolly, 2017). Although views about perineal shaving for labor have changed, today the practice of routine pubic hair removal as a form of grooming is commonplace.

Abstract The 21st century has witnessed an increasingly prevalent trend of women removing their pubic hair. Body hair removal norms have changed significantly over the past several decades. Regardless of the motivation or technique behind pubic hair grooming, this trend is presenting a unique challenge for health care professionals with regard to health education about safe removal and treatment for associated injuries and infections. To provide appropriate education to women, nurses and other clinicians should be familiar with cultural norms, motivations, expectations, methods, dangers, best practices, and treatment options. They should be comfortable discussing grooming practices with women and be prepared to provide guidance on best practices. Women should also be made aware that pubic hair removal may put them at increased risk for transmission of sexually transmitted infections. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2017.06.001>

Keywords depilation | genital waxing | pubic hair removal | pubic shaving | sexually transmitted infection



Background

Depilation is the removal of hair at the skin by chemical or mechanical methods (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, n.d.). In Western societies, the practice of pubic hair grooming and depilation are now considered common behavior (Butler, Smith, Collazo, Caltabiano, & Herbenick, 2015; Stone, Graham, & Baysal, 2017).

Although there are known risks associated with depilation, many women practicing it report increased satisfaction with their genitals and greater sexual functioning and sensation (Butler et al., 2015; Herbenick et al., 2013). For many women, pubic hair removal is often associated with a perceived increase in hygiene

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and overall satisfaction with appearance. Riddell, Varto, and Hodgson (2010) found that women have a positive association with pubic hair removal and swimwear aesthetics, femininity, cleanliness, and comfort.

There are numerous theories about the driving force behind this normative behavior of depilation. Several reports attribute the trend to media depictions of the human body whether through art, magazines, movies, pornography, or fashion (Bercaw-Pratt et al., 2012; Butler et al., 2015; Swain, Tully, Redford, &

McGwin, 2016). Women and men are inundated with print and television advertising characterizing pubic hair removal as a routine part of hygienic grooming. Early reports suggested that grooming practices were directly related to sexual activity practices and relationship types (Herbenick et al., 2013). In more recent reports, there appears to be a stronger association with age, race, and education level (Herbenick et al., 2013; Rowan et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2017). Individuals most likely to engage in depilation are young White women who have attended at least 1 year of college (Rowan et al., 2016). Although pubic hair depilation was found to be present across diverse racial and ethnic groups, White women report more frequent shaving (DeMaria, Flores, Hirth, & Berenson, 2014; Rowan et al., 2016). Based on the widespread practice of pubic hair grooming in women, health care professionals will routinely provide care to women who practice depilation.

The mere act of depilation or epilation (removal of hair including the root through practices such as waxing) may result in injury; however, removal of the protective shield of pubic hair presents additional risks. Protection of the genitalia from foreign bodies, bacteria, and viruses is a primary function of pubic hair. Women's pubic hair serves as a barrier to irritants and protects the vulva and vagina from infection (Stone et al., 2017). It also protects skin covering the mons pubis,

Ashley L. Hodges, PhD, CRNP, WHNP-BC, is an associate professor and the Assistant Dean for Graduate Clinical Programs; Aimee C. Holland, DNP, WHNP-BC, FNP-C, is an assistant professor and the Assistant MSN Program Director; both authors are in the School of Nursing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in Birmingham, AL. The authors report no conflicts of interest or relevant financial relationships. Address correspondence to: ashleyhodges@uab.edu.



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