

Have a
Safe Bris

for Your Baby



Metzitzah B'Peh: Know the Risk

When a baby is circumcised, some ritual Jewish circumcisers (mohelim) do a practice called metzitzah b'peh. Metzitzah b'peh is when the mohel uses their mouth to suck blood away from the baby's circumcision wound as part of the circumcision ritual.

After metzitzah b'peh, some babies can get sick with herpes, which can even lead to death.

Doctors and public health experts have found that metzitzah b'peh can put babies at risk of getting a harmful virus called **herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1)**.

Many adults carry HSV-1 in their bodies. They may have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, such as cold sores. Unlike adults, babies are too young to fight the virus. Babies with the virus can develop brain damage or a lifelong disability, or in some cases the virus can lead to death.

Medicines can help treat the symptoms, but babies who get HSV-1 will have the virus for the rest of their life.

A baby can get the virus when the mohel's saliva gets on the baby's skin and circumcision wound. **If a mohel performs metzitzah b'peh, even for just a moment, there is risk of herpes infection. Even if the mohel has no symptoms or no obvious signs of infection, they could still have the virus and not know it.**

To protect the health of New York City's infants, the Commissioner of Health has ordered mohelim identified as having infected a baby with HSV-1 through metzitzah b'peh to not perform this practice during circumcision rituals for other babies.



Example of skin blisters due to herpes simplex virus type 1 infection. (Image courtesy of Philip S. Larussa, MD.)

Reducing the Risk

Avoiding metzitzah b'peh during the bris eliminates the risk of herpes transmission during the bris.

Before you hire a mohel for the bris, ask them if they do metzitzah b'peh. Some parents say if they had known that the mohel planned to do metzitzah b'peh, they would have asked the mohel not to do it.

If you do not want metzitzah b'peh, tell the mohel you do not want it. They are required to respect your wishes.

If you decide to include metzitzah b'peh during your baby's bris, take the following steps:

Before the Bris

- **Talk with your baby's doctor about metzitzah b'peh.**
- **Before you hire a mohel for the bris, ask if they have received an order from the Commissioner of Health to not perform metzitzah b'peh. If a mohel answers "yes," you should not hire that mohel.**
- **Whichever mohel you choose, ask the mohel to make sure they rinse their mouth with mouthwash (Listerine Original Gold, with 26.9% alcohol) for at least 30 seconds immediately before performing metzitzah b'peh.**

After the Bris

- **If a mohel performed metzitzah b'peh during your baby's circumcision, watch your baby's skin for little bumps or blisters, especially on or around the genitals and buttocks. If you see this or any other sign that your baby may be sick, or if your baby is not acting normally, seek medical attention right away.**

For more information about
having a safe bris, talk to
your baby's doctor or visit
nyc.gov/safebris.



