

Menstrual Hygiene Management

Level: Seconde

Specific Objectives:

Students should understand why females menstruate, how often menstruation happens, and how girls properly and hygienically manage their menstruation.

Expected Behaviours:

- To manage their periods, girls should use disposable pads if available and accessible, or small cotton cloths that are thoroughly washed and dried between each use in the sun.
- These should be for personal use only and not shared with family or friends.
- The vagina must be washed with clean water, without soap, before, during and after menstruation, to prevent infection.

Information:

Biology of Menstruation:

When girls reach puberty, they will begin menstruating (having their periods). Once girls have their first period, it is a sign that they can reproduce (become pregnant and have a baby). Every month, the body prepares for a potential pregnancy by thickening the lining of the womb (uterus) and releasing an egg from the ovaries into the fallopian tube. This release is called ovulation. Any unprotected sexual contact presents risk of pregnancy. Without pregnancy, the uterine lining thickens and is destroyed, after which it is released into the vagina. This is menstruation (period).

- Age of puberty: 10-16 years old
- Duration of menstruation: 3-7 days
- Periodicity: 21-35 days

When there is fertilisation (an egg and a sperm together are called an embryo) the embryo implants in the thickened lining of the womb (uterus) and a foetus begins to grow. Menstruation and ovulation stops during pregnancy.

Many girls do not have a regular period (once a month) at first. It is very normal to start menstruating then not have another period for several months. But, the cycle will become regular eventually, although this could take several years.

Periods can cause cramping or pain when the uterus lining is being shed. This can be lessened by eating healthily, going for a walk, or holding a warm towel to the lower abdomen. Menstruations should not be an obstacle to daily life.

Menstrual Hygiene:

Managing periods can be tricky, but the most important thing to know is how to keep the body and period supplies as clean and hygienic as possible. During menstruation, it is fine to shower and clean the outside of the vagina once or twice per day as normal. Avoid washing more than this, as it can begin to cause skin irritation from over-washing and do not use soap, as this can also promote irritation and infection. Simply use water.

The best thing to use during menstruation is disposable pads, if available and accessible. If not, cotton cloths placed inside the underwear can be used instead. Towels and cloths should be soaked in boiling water between each use. After washing (or boiling), they should be hung outside in the sun to dry. Leaving it inside in a dark space can cause it to stay damp, which allows bacteria to grow and could cause infections or skin irritation. If possible, it is best to have several cloths so that each one has time to completely dry before using it again.

Once puberty has begun, girls should carry a few disposable pads or cotton cloths with them in case menstruation starts unexpectedly whilst they are away from home. Hand washing facilities can be used to wash the vagina and the cloth or disposable pad can be placed in the underwear. If there are no washing facilities, girls can simply place the cloth in their underwear and wash themselves properly when they return home.

Summary and Key Messages:

- Menstruation begins during puberty and is a normal part of a monthly cycle that allows females to get pregnant and have a baby when they are ready.
- When a girl is menstruating, she should thoroughly wash her sanitary cloth and dry it completely in the sun to avoid skin irritation and infection.

Notes:

- Schools should provide girls with adequate latrines and water facilities during menstruation. This should include women's toilets and water.

Sources:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/puberty/Pages/Startingperiods.aspx>

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002267/226792e.pdf>