How to keep yourself clean during your period?

- Every day (morning and evening if possible) wash your genitals with soap and water.
- Keep unused cloths and pads clean (wrapped in tissue or plastic bag) for further use.
- Put the area dry with a cloth, and put a fresh cloth, pad, cotton or tissue on your underwear.
- Always wipe from front to back after defection. Wiping from the back makes the introduction of bacteria from bowel into the vagina.
- Never touch when washing (washing out the vagina with water). This can facilitate bacteria into the uterus.
- Wash hands after changing the pads.

Potential health risks of poor menstrual hygiene

a) Use of unclean sanitary pads or material can cause bacterial infection to vagina.

b) Lack of frequent change of sanitary pads may cause skin irritation which can become infected if the skin is broken.

c) Lack of hand washing after changing the sanitary pad can facilitate the spread of bacteria if one is infected.

Factors to consider when choosing materials to use during menses

- Affordability
- Availability
- Absorbency of the materials i.e are they suitable for light or heavy flow days
- Frequency the materials would need to be changed

Challenges facing girls during menstruation period

- Lack of knowledge/guidance on how to go about menstruation period
- They fear standing up to answer questions in the classroom in case they have stained their skirts.
- Shame and discomfort for fear of other people finding out that they are on their menses.
- Lack of accurate information and fear about what is happening to them.
- Risk of infectious diseases due to inability to change their pads regularly i.e. urinary tract infection, vaginal candida, etc.
- Taboos where many cultures believes menstruation blood is dirty and embarrassment.
- Lack of knowledge on what can be done and what cannot be done, where to be and where not to be during their menses.
- Lack of support and understanding from the adults in their lives on how they should manage Pre-menstrual syndrome.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

What is MHM?

This is the use of a clean menstrual management material to absorb and collect blood/blood clots. One can use a soap and water for bathing. Also ensuring a reliable access to sanitary facilities to dispose off used menstrual management materials.

Requirements during menstruation

1. Access to appropriate hygiene and sanitary facilities and equipment such as water, soap, toilets.
2. Access to sanitary pads or towels, or other products for discretely absorbing the menstrual flow should be readily available.
3. Safe and clean facilities for disposing off used menstrual materials such as sanitary bags and collection bins.
4. Sensitization of parents, girls and boys on menstruation.

LET’S TALK ABOUT PERIODS

Mother educating her girl

Guiding Tool: GROWING THROUGH MENSTRUATION AND COMPLETING SCHOOL
**INTRODUCTION**

**Human Rights and Child Growth**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child under Article 2 Para 1 recognizes that “States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status”. It is therefore the obligation of the government to ensure these rights are implemented as guaranteed by the convention. Locally, the rights of a Kenyan child are protected in the 2010 Constitution under Article 53 thereby guaranteeing both girls and boys equal access to basic social services including reproductive health needs.

**What is Puberty?**

Puberty is the process that boys or girls undergo to become adults in essence, the period from childhood to adulthood.

It is at this time when their bodies start maturing by developing into that of a young woman and man.

**When does Puberty Occurs?**

Girls and boys have varying bodily changes during puberty. Most girls and boys begin to notice changes in their bodies between the ages of 10 and 14. This period if she is under stress or change of environment.

If a girl who has periods every month misses a period, and from 21 to 45 days in young teens. The bleeding usually lasts between 2-7 days each month, with some lighter flow and some heavier flow days.

The menstruation cycle starts to line the walls of the girl’s uterus for fertilization. If the egg is not fertilized, the lining of the uterus is shed through the vagina along with blood.

Menstruation

**What is menstruation?**

Menstruation occurs when the body sheds the lining of the uterus. It involves the release of an egg (ova) from one or both sides of the ovaries, which then moves into the uterus through the fallopian tubes. The body’s tissues and blood start to line the walls of the girl’s uterus for fertilization. If the egg is not fertilized, the lining of the uterus is shed through the vagina along with blood.

**Menstruation periods start between the ages of 10 and 14.**

**The menstruation cycle**

A cycle is counted from the last day of 1 period to the last day before the next period. The average menstrual cycle is usually 28 days but can vary from 21 to 35 days in adults and from 21 to 45 days in young teens.

If a girl who has periods every month misses a period, it may not mean she is pregnant. Also a girl may miss period if she is under stress or change of environment.

**The physical changes that take place in girls and boys at puberty**

**BOYS**

- Chest broadens
- Voice breaks and deepens
- Boys gain weight and grow taller
- Body and facial hair appears (armpits, pubicarea, moustache, beard, or sideburns)
- Shoulders get wider, muscles start to get bigger and stronger

**GIRLS**

- Breasts start to develop
- Girls gain weight, particularly on the hips
- Menstruation cycle starts
- Bodies become curvier and hip
- Hair grows in pubic area and armpits
- Muscles get bigger and stronger, but they do not show up as much as boys’ muscles

**Signs and symptoms**

They vary depending on an individual girl’s genetic composition and hormonal balance, as girls are genetically heterogeneous

- Abdominal cramps
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- General discomfort
- Headaches
- Back pain
- Mood swings
- Soreness of the breast

**How to manage your first period?**

- Talk to other girls and women, such as your mother, sister, aunt, grandmother, female friend or older woman in your community.
- Don’t be afraid. It can be scary to see the blood on your underwear, but it is normal and natural.
- If at school, tell the matron, female teacher or fellow student.
- Feel proud! Your body is developing into that of a young woman.
- How to capture the blood?

- Place a cloth, pad, cotton or tissue on your underwear.
- Feel proud! Your body is developing into that of a young woman.
- How to manage the stomach pain from your period?

- Put a towel or bottle with hot water on your stomach area when resting.
- Try to do some exercises and keep your body active and eat balance diet.
- You can take painkillers every four to six hours on most painful days. Seek advice from a doctor or pharmacist.
- Drinking lots of water

**How often should I change my pad?**

- You should change a pad whenever you feel it is soaked. Each one decides for herself what works best. But for health reasons, change a pad at least 4 to 8 hours of use. If a pad is left for too long beyond 8 hours it may cause infections and even smell, making it uncomfortable for people to sit around you.

**How to dispose of used pad or cloth?**

- If you are re-using a cloth, put it into a plastic bag until you can wash it with hot water and soap and dry in the sunshine or iron.
- If you are using disposable pad or want to dispose of your cloth, wrap it in paper to make a clean package and put it in the bin so it can be disposed with other rubbish or burnt later.
- If there is no other option, drop it straight in the latrine pit. Don’t throw it to the sinks at the washroom as this could block the pipes.