

# PERIODS DON'T STOP FOR PANDEMICS

## WHAT COVID-19 MEANS FOR MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Each day, an estimated 300 million women and girls menstruate. Being able to manage menstruation safely, hygienically, with confidence and with dignity is critical for their health, education, human rights, economic development and overall gender equality.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic started, more than 500 million women worldwide did not have what they needed to manage their menstruation.<sup>1</sup>

### THE PROBLEM

The current pandemic highlights and further exacerbates the menstruation-related challenges many women and girls face around the world.



#### Disrupted access to information about menstruation

Schools, community centres and other places where women and girls can typically access critical information about menstruation are closed in many countries.

Routine health services are reduced. Women and girls typically have less access to digital information<sup>2</sup> than men hampering their ability to seek information on menstruation through digital channels during lockdown.



#### Persisting period stigma and taboos

Lockdowns intensify the impact of household-level taboos and stigmas on women and girls and make it more difficult to manage menstruation, without shame and discomfort in often confined spaces.

On Menstrual Hygiene Day 2019, people around the world organised 726 on-the-ground events in 74 countries.<sup>3</sup> This year, people can't come together in person to publicly challenge the stigma and taboos surrounding menstruation.



#### Disrupted access to products

Many subsidised supply schemes, e.g. free distribution of menstrual products in schools, have been suspended.

The economic impact of COVID-19 forces many women and girls to prioritise other basic needs over safe menstrual products.

Disrupted supply chains drive prices up, making menstrual products unaffordable for even more women and girls.



#### Lack of access to WASH infrastructure

Millions of women and girls lack access to water, sanitation and handwashing (WASH) facilities to wash themselves, change and dispose of menstrual materials safely and comfortably.

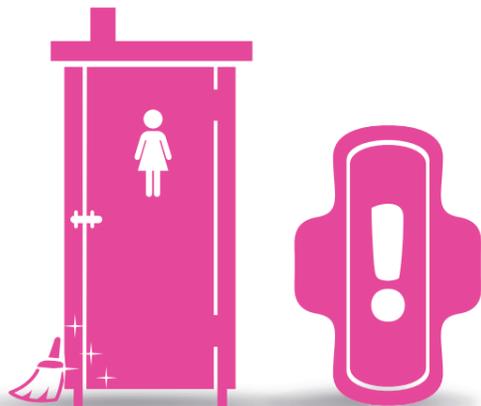
Poor WASH infrastructure in healthcare facilities means female health workers and patients can't manage their menstruation adequately in these locations.

### ACTION NEEDED

#### During the pandemic

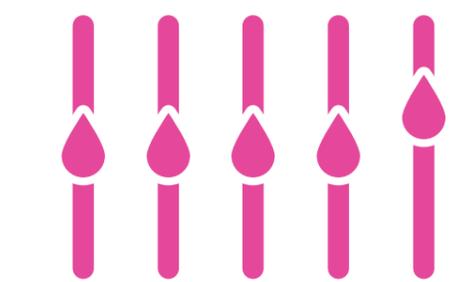
Periods don't stop for pandemics. It's critical to include menstrual health and hygiene in COVID-19 emergency response interventions and policies across sectors, including health, education, SRHR, WASH and gender.

Specifically, we call on all relevant actors to:



Continue efforts to ensure access to menstrual products and safe water, soap and period-friendly sanitation facilities at home and in health centres, so women and girls can manage their periods safely, hygienically and with dignity – wherever they are. This includes designating menstrual products as essential commodities to minimise barriers to manufacturing and supply. If distribution of menstrual products is done, ensure it is well managed to protect women and girls from COVID-19.

Wherever possible, sustain on-going interventions to tackle period stigma and provide access to information about menstruation. Explore alternatives to interpersonal communication, such as online, radio, telephone and messaging services. Provide information about home made alternatives for those who cannot access menstrual products.



At least maintain levels of investment in menstrual health and hygiene during the pandemic.

#### Beyond the pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis will eventually pass. Once the pandemic is over, it is time for urgent action to address the ongoing global crisis in menstrual health and hygiene.

- For women's and girls' health.
- For girls' education.
- For human rights.
- For economic development.
- For sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- For gender equality.



### 2030

We are convinced that it is possible to create a world in which no one is held back because of their periods by 2030. To make this happen, all relevant actors – governments, UN agencies, NGOs, the corporate sector, philanthropy – must significantly step up action and invest in menstrual health and hygiene once the COVID-19 crisis subsides.



**FOR A WORLD IN WHICH EVERY WOMAN AND EVERY GIRL CAN ACHIEVE HER FULL POTENTIAL AND REALISE HER DREAMS – IT'S TIME FOR ACTION!**

**#MHDAY2020 #ITSTIMEFORACTION #PERIODSINPANDEMICS**

1) FSS: Advancing Gender Equity by Improving Menstrual Health, 2020. 2) <http://www.oecd.org/interact/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf> 3) <https://menstrualhygieneday.org/about/impact> \* This infographic contains information from many MHD Day partners, who shared their insights on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that they see emerging in their work.