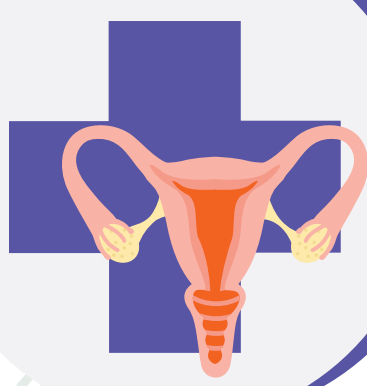




# MENSTRUATION AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR SCHOOLS



The onset of menstruation is a marker of normal reproductive health and wellness.

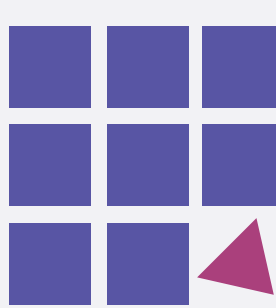
**10–16 YEARS**



Menarche typically occurs between ages 10 and 16 years, with a decline in the average age at menarche observed across geographies. This makes menstrual health and hygiene relevant for both primary and secondary school settings.



The lack of access to resources for adolescents to manage their menstrual hygiene in schools results in absenteeism, particularly in low resource settings.



Social and cultural norms can also lead to the exclusion of adolescents from school during menstruation, with norms varying widely between and within countries.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Menstrual health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.<sup>1</sup>
- In Uganda, ten percent of girls in primary school miss 4–5 days of school each month due to menstruation.<sup>2</sup>

## APPROACHES TO MAKE SCHOOLS MENSTRUATION FRIENDLY



### CHALLENGE

#### Insufficient water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure in schools

Over 850 million school-age children have basic or no handwashing services at school.<sup>3</sup>



### ENTRY POINTS FOR EDUCATION, GENDER, HEALTH AND WATER SECTORS TO RESPOND<sup>2, 4</sup>

#### Enable adolescents to maintain their menstrual hygiene in a safe and dignified manner in all schools by providing:

- ✓ Basic, separate sanitation facilities that provide privacy;
- ✓ Disability-friendly water and sanitation infrastructure, including ramps, handrails, and low sinks;
- ✓ Soap, water, toilet paper, and space for washing; and
- ✓ Places to safely and discreetly dispose of materials used for managing menstruation.



### CHALLENGE

#### Limited awareness and education around menstruation

A recent review of education-related policies in 21 low- and middle-income countries found limited explicit mention of menstruation or menstrual health.<sup>5</sup>



### ENTRY POINTS FOR EDUCATION, GENDER, HEALTH AND WATER SECTORS TO RESPOND<sup>4</sup>

#### Provide critical knowledge on menstruation, teach pain management strategies, and address harmful social norms by:

- ✓ Integrating menstrual health within curriculum on comprehensive sexuality education and WASH;
- ✓ Providing pre- and in-service training to teachers on menstrual health and hygiene; and
- ✓ Delivering age-appropriate and accurate puberty education in advance of menses to all students to break taboos around menstruation.



### CHALLENGE

#### Lack of affordable and available menstrual supplies

A multi-country study found that there is high period poverty in many countries across Africa, where a month's supply of sanitary pads can cost between 3–13% of a monthly minimum wage salary.<sup>6</sup>



### ENTRY POINTS FOR EDUCATION, GENDER, HEALTH AND WATER SECTORS TO RESPOND<sup>4</sup>

#### Ensure adolescent girls have access to hygienic, adequate, and culturally acceptable materials to manage menstruation in schools, starting with:

- ✓ Providing free menstrual supplies in schools; and
- ✓ Advocating for the removal of taxes on menstrual supplies.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- A growing number of countries in the Africa region, including Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda, provide free menstrual supplies in schools.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup>
- In 2004, Kenya became the first country to eliminate value-added tax on menstrual supplies, and in 2011, it removed import taxes on these products.<sup>10</sup>

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