

# PROGRAMMING GUIDANCE ON MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE IN COVID-19 RESPONSE

COVID-19 indirectly affects menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) through various avenues. For instance, COVID-19 restricts mobility, increases challenges in obtaining certain essential items, reduces interaction with social support networks, reduces privacy of household members who are usually out of the house and are now under lockdown, and causes stress – any or all of these dimensions may have impacts on MHH and MHM. **Overall, we must ensure that policies and procedures recognize that menstrual needs are basic and essential needs.**

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE

### Healthcare Workers

Healthcare workers who menstruate face unique challenges in fighting the virus. They comprise most of the healthcare workforce, but their own MHM needs are not always considered.

- Menstrual products should be included in essential healthcare equipment and material procurement.
- Menstruating healthcare workers need enough quantities of menstrual hygiene products which are compatible with the need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) for many hours, potentially without breaks.**
- If healthcare workers choose to take oral contraceptive pills to suppress their menstruation during the pandemic, they should have access to them. However, healthcare workers should never be coerced to take contraceptives.

### Healthcare Facilities

- Healthcare facilities should have MHM-friendly toilet facilities, including water, soap, light, a lockable door, and a bin or other place for the disposal of non-reusable menstrual materials.

## WHEN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION OR HYGIENE MATERIALS

### MHM During Lockdown

During the COVID-19 lockdown, there are many ways that stigma and taboos limit people who menstruate from being able to manage their menstruation hygienically, safely, in privacy and with dignity as they might be confined with household members who are not normally home during the day. This may force menstruators to confront stigmas more directly than normal and may limit their usual strategies to manage their menstruation discreetly.

- When WASH or other hygiene information is disseminated, it should include MHM components, including that menstruation is a normal biological process.**
- When sanitation and hygiene information are broadcast to the community, **ensure men/boys and women/girls receive at least basic MHH information.**

### Access to Menstrual Hygiene Materials

In many countries, menstruators are unable to access menstrual products, either because governments did not recognize them as essential items (and production halted) or because of panic buying limited affordable supply. Actions should be taken to improve access to menstrual materials.

- Menstrual hygiene products should be listed by government entities as essential commodities.** (Or if production restrictions are in place, they should be listed as exceptions.)
- When menstruators are quarantined in official care centres, they should be provided menstrual hygiene products, water, soap, and other basic essential hygiene items. **Any distribution of food, soap or other sanitation equipment, and any other basic, essential items (to healthcare facilities or households) should include menstrual hygiene products.**
  - Any distributed menstrual products should be accompanied by information about menstruation, and how to manage one's menstruation hygienically and safely (including product use, cleaning and disposal).
- Companies should be discouraged or prevented from increasing the price of menstrual hygiene products, even though supply is decreased, and demand has remained stable or even increased.
- Any barriers to manufacturing and supply of menstrual products should be removed.
- Instructions for how to make, clean, and eventually dispose of homemade, reusable menstrual products should be distributed. (See additional resources below.)

### COVID-19 Potential Impacts on the Menstrual Cycle

Many people are experiencing high stress situations caused directly or indirectly by COVID-19, and stress can impact the menstrual cycle. Although menstruating is normally a sign of a healthy reproductive system, changes in the menstrual cycle due to increased stress are also normal and not necessarily something to be alarmed about.

- Information should be distributed regarding the potential of increased stress caused by COVID-19 to impact the menstrual cycle**, including by menstrual bleeding starting *late or early*, changes in pain levels or changes in the flow of menstrual bleeding.

### SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CERTAIN POPULATIONS

- When gaining understanding about vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities: remember to find out if there are unmet menstrual needs or any other challenges relating to menstruation during this time.**
- For menstruators whose facility for changing their menstrual materials and washing themselves are shared with other households: Given that they must use these facilities more frequently during menstruation, potentially increasing their exposure to COVID-19, they should have targeted information about how long the virus can survive on the surfaces that they may need to arrange their menstrual materials.
- In humanitarian settings, make provision of menstrual materials non-negotiable – however, manage distribution well to ensure physical distance is being observed.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

MHM and COVID-19 catalogue of various relevant resources: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qPQspbiWSWsfllTQ2j-2PvIbQuGTPLAksIhRDYsCLRs/edit>

Guidance on menstrual hygiene products, including making your own:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X1HZyyOcyoxSfzaRwWol2KrxLsnJ42kW/view?usp=sharing>

Mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on MHH: [https://mcusercontent.com/d12d86e5c8b981b0521d81f6d/files/894515a3-f298-4693-bfb6-fa7d5e9c3830/Brief\\_on\\_mitigating\\_the\\_impacts\\_of\\_COVID\\_19\\_on\\_menstrual\\_health\\_and\\_hygiene\\_24\\_April\\_2020.01.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/d12d86e5c8b981b0521d81f6d/files/894515a3-f298-4693-bfb6-fa7d5e9c3830/Brief_on_mitigating_the_impacts_of_COVID_19_on_menstrual_health_and_hygiene_24_April_2020.01.pdf)

Webinar on MHM and COVID-19: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqUIbivcqiy&feature=youtu.be>

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