

Menstrual Health Glossary

Key words and acronyms in the field, from UNICEF + WHO

Menstruation or menses is the natural bodily process of releasing blood and associated matter from the uterus through the vagina as part of the menstrual cycle.¹

A **menstruator** is a person who menstruates and therefore has menstrual health and hygiene needs – including girls, women, transgender and non-binary persons.¹

Menarche is the onset of menstruation, the time when a girl has her first menstrual period.¹

Menstrual hygiene materials are the products used to catch menstrual flow, such as pads, cloths, tampons or cups. These may also be referred to as menstrual materials or period products.¹

Menstrual supplies are other supportive items needed for MHH, such as body and laundry soap, underwear and pain relief items.¹

Menstrual facilities are those facilities most associated with a safe and dignified menstruation, such as toilets and water infrastructure.¹

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) refers to management of hygiene associated with the menstrual process.¹ Adequate MHM involves:

- **Knowledge and awareness** about the menstrual process.
- **Menstrual hygiene materials** such as washable pads, disposable pads, tampons, and cups,
- **WASH infrastructure** such as
 - Safe, clean, convenient, and private spaces for changing, washing, and/or disposing of menstrual hygiene materials
 - Adequate amounts of clean water and soap.
- **Supportive social environments** that enable menstruators to manage their periods with dignity and confidence.
- **Policies and systems** that create positive norms and dismantle limitations associated with menstruation.²

Menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) encompasses both MHM and the broader systemic factors that link menstruation with health, well-being, gender equality, education, equity, empowerment, and rights..¹

Period Poverty is the lack of access to adequate MHH, including sanitary products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, handwashing facilities, and/or waste management.³

Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is sometimes referred to as female circumcision or FGM (female genital mutilation). FGC is a term that respects both the rights that people must have over their own bodies and the social and cultural contexts in which these practices take place. Extreme forms of this practice may prevent menstrual blood flow, which can lead to infection.

SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Sexual and reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. It implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce, and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so.⁴

CSE: Comprehensive Sexuality Education enables young people to protect their health, well-being and dignity. And because these programmes are based on human rights principles, they advance gender equality and the rights and empowerment of young people.⁵

WASH: WASH is the collective term for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. Due to their interdependent nature, these three core issues are grouped together to represent a growing sector.⁶ WASH infrastructure is an essential component of MHM as menstruators need hygienic, safe, and convenient spaces for changing and disposing of menstrual materials as well as sufficient clean water.

Hardware: interventions that address “tangible” components of MHM such as menstrual materials and products and WASH infrastructure.

Software: interventions that address the “intangible” components of MHM such as education, awareness, stigma, and social norms.

The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are a set of 17 global goals designed by the United Nations as a shared blueprint for all countries towards a peaceful and prosperous future for people and the planet by the year 2030. Learn more [here](#).

Sustainable Development:

- Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet.
- For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.⁷

- ¹ UNICEF (2019). Guidance on Menstrual Health and Hygiene. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/wash/files/UNICEF-Guidance-menstrual-health-hygiene-2019.pdf>
- ² Amaya, Marcatili, & Bhavaraju (2020). Advancing Gender Equity by Improving Menstrual Health. FSG. Available at <https://www.fsg.org/publications/advancing-gender-equity-improving-menstrual-health#download-area>
<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/period-poverty-everything-you-need-to-know/>
- ³ Sanchez & Rodriguez (2019). Period Poverty: Everything you need to know. Global Citizen, 5 Feb 2019. Available at <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/period-poverty-everything-you-need-to-know/>
- ⁴ UNFPA (2020) Sexual and Reproductive Health: Overview.
<https://www.unfpa.org/sexual-reproductive-health#:~:text=Overview,how%20often%20to%20do%20so.>
- ⁵ UNFPA (2020) Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Overview. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education#:~:text=Comprehensive%20sexuality%20education%20is%20a.school%20or%20out%20of%20school.&text=But%20it%20also%20goes%20beyond,their%20sexual%20and%20reproductive%20health.>
- ⁶ UNICEF (2016). About WASH. Available at https://www.unicef.org/wash/3942_3952.html
- ⁷ UN (2020) The Sustainable Development Goals. Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>