

JUST THE FACTS: UNDERSTANDING MENSTRUATION

THE BASICS

MENSTRUATION IS NORMAL! IT IS THE MONTHLY SHEDDING OF BLOOD AND UTERINE TISSUE AND AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE REPRODUCTIVE CYCLE. TYPICALLY, IT LASTS...

2-7 DAYS



THE AMOUNT OF BLOOD IS USUALLY BETWEEN

1 AND 6



TABLESPOONS EACH MONTH AND CAN BE MESSY.

ABDOMINAL CRAMPS, NAUSEA, DIARRHEA AND HEADACHES ARE COMMON BEFORE AND DURING A PERIOD.



WHY IT MATTERS?

- Girls who get blood on their clothes are often teased by teachers, boys or other girls.
- Social norms may lead women and girls to feel that menstruation is dirty, shameful or unhealthy.
- Without access to good menstrual materials and private toilets or washrooms for changing, girls and women may not want to go far from home. Teachers may miss school, health workers may miss work, and girls and women may not attend school, go to the market or wait in line for supplies.

Menstruation is very personal.

Women and girls often do not want others to know they are menstruating – even other women and girls.

WHAT IS MENARCHE?

- Menarche is the onset of menstruation. Girls generally get their first period between 11–15, although some can be younger or older.
- **The first period is generally a surprise!** Sometimes girls are scared or worried they are sick. They may not know who to ask for advice.
- Information about menstruation is frequently passed on from mothers, friends, sisters or aunts, and is often a mixture of cultural beliefs, superstition and practical information that is sometimes helpful and sometimes not.
- In many cultures mothers may feel uncomfortable to talk to their daughters about periods because it is linked to sexuality.



WHAT DO THEY NEED?

- A range of materials can be used to catch the blood, including a sanitary pad (disposable or reusable), a tampon, or a piece of cloth in their underwear.



- **Menstrual periods are irregular and can catch girls and women by surprise.** This causes anxiety about finding a bathroom and materials quickly!
- Menstruation can be messy! Women and girls need a private space with water and soap to clean themselves and soiled materials.

- Even when using good menstrual materials, women and girls may be worried about blood stains on their clothes.
- Women and girls need access to a private, clean space (toilet or washroom) to change materials throughout the day and night and to hygienically dispose of menstrual waste.



Research for health
in humanitarian crises

elrha

COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY

MAILMAN SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

