Guidance
Period product scheme for colleges in England

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- a sudden high fever
- flu like symptoms (dizziness, sore throat, exhaustion, etc.)
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- dizziness

You should seek medical advice as soon as possible if a learner is experiencing a combination of these symptoms.

Equality requirements

You are required to comply with the relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and should pay attention to the public sector equality duty (section 149 of the Equality Act).

Under the provisions of the Equality Act, schools and colleges must not unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of their age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership, sexual orientation or sexual identity or protected characteristics. This includes transgender boys and non-binary learners who may have periods. You must also make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantage and to meet the needs of the protected groups when implementing this scheme.

You should consider the gender, culture, religion and age range of your learners. This will help you decide if it is appropriate or necessary to provide additional support for learners with protected characteristics.

Religious and cultural beliefs concerning periods and the use of period products can restrict access to certain types of period products. Learners from certain backgrounds may be less aware of internal products such as tampons and menstrual cups and how these should be used.

Understanding pupils' religious and cultural beliefs and building relationships between the school and local faith communities will help:

- make sure you're providing learners with products which meet their needs
- learners, parents and carers feel comfortable with the way(s) in which products are provided to learners

See the period products scheme: impact assessment for more information.

Making products available to learners

Once products have been delivered, you need to decide how to make these products available to learners. There are a variety of methods you could choose, some of which we set out in this section.

When deciding how to make products available, you should make sure the needs of all learners are met. This includes learners who do not identify as female but still have periods. For instance, transgender boys and non-binary learners who have periods. Making sure that the needs of people with protected characteristics are prioritised protected characteristics.

You should also consider:

- whether all learners can access the products easily and when they need them
- if learners have all the safety information they need for each product
- available in a format they can access and understand
- the individual needs of learners, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) those with English as an additional language
- if the way in which learners access products minimises the risk of embarrassment
- if you have clean and dry storage space for the products you're ordering

Our research with learners found that they prefer products to be available to them when they need to (and in particularly male) members of staff to avoid feelings of embarrassment. However, learners also indicated that the stigma and embarrassment around periods should not still exist and were keen to break this cycle.

Distribution examples

This section provides some example methods of distributing period products. This is not an exhaustive list. You should use a different, or combination of methods if appropriate.

Making products available in learner toilets or communal areas

Our research found that having products available for learners to take in toilets can reduce stigma and feelings of embarrassment. Products would also be available at the time and place they were most needed.

Having products in communal areas such as libraries or student services means that all learners, including those who would not use female toilets, can access the products.

If you decide to place products within toilets or other communal areas, you will need to consider how you can:

- provide safety information and advice for learners before they use the products
- monitor the products to ensure learners are not taking more that they need
- check the products to make sure they have not been tampered with

Making products available on request from a member of staff

Our engagement with stakeholders and teachers found that it was easier to provide learners with safety information and advice when providing products on request from members of staff. They also reported that it was easier for organisations to keep track of the number and type of products going to learners.

Our learner research found that:

- asking a member of staff for products was embarrassing and, in some cases, learners would rather go without products than ask
- some learners would feel more comfortable asking a student representative rather than a member of staff
- having posters or stickers on the back of toilet doors directing learners to a box of products would be useful, but could be improved by suggestions on how to use it properly

If you decide to make products available on request from a member of staff, you will need to consider how you can:

- minimise any embarrassment for learners, particularly those with non-standard needs, for example, non-binary learners and those who identify as female but have periods
- make the scheme accessible to all learners, for example, those with English as an additional language

Making products available via restricted access

Another option is making products available via restricted access. This could be through token vending machines or lockers placed in or near bathrooms.

If making products available this way, you must make sure learners have access to safety information and advice before using the products.

Research with learners found that they felt this distribution method was a good way to ensure that only those who need the products access them, more likely to be taken based on need. Learners also felt a key benefit of this approach was that they did not need to ask a member of staff for help. However, learners thought it may be embarrassing to obtain products in front of other people.

If you decide to make products available via restricted access, you will need to consider how you can:

- use a token system for vending machines or lockers without causing embarrassment for learners
- provide safety information and advice for learners before they use the products
- provide access to learners who would not use female toilets

Case studies

Example from a large sixth form college

The college has a population of over 5,000 learners. We have provided period products for many years from our own funds and from a scheme which provides colleges with free period products. We continued to provide online. We then distribute to learners using our student services base in one of the central buildings. We chose to house the box in a building that has a high percentage of female users.

We decided not to provide a mix of products to give the learners a choice to suit their needs for both their comfort and confidence. We feel that it is important that our learners have access to a range of products because given the range of courses students follow, including those corresponding to water sports, for example.

We never advertised that we had these products. Learners have simply come to student services to ask if we have anything that they can use. They then help themselves from an opaque box in a discreet cupboard. The system has worked well for both staff and learners as it is discreet yet readily available to anyone in need. We have never needed to distribute it in front of learners as they have been respectful of others and only taken what they needed at that time.

Since joining the scheme, we have only used advertising to identify a second location rather than raise awareness of the scheme.

Example from a primary school in Scotland

Are primary schools, in Scotland, has 285 pupils. At the end of the academic year, the school consulted with a group of girls in year 5 and 6 about the initial use of free period product provision. They discussed what products should be made available and where would be appropriate for easy access and. The discussion generated ideas about locations in school toilets, which the girls felt was inadequate. As a result, they collaborated on a proposal for a period product vending machine (including tampons and a gadget to safely) were placed in the disabled toilet between the year 5 and 6 classrooms. The young people felt that when in school, the disabled toilet was the most sensible place for them to access period products.

The school informed parents that education on the menstrual cycle and sanitary products would take place. At year 5 and 6 girls took part in a discussion which focused on the menstrual cycle but also allowed the girls to familiarise themselves with period products, how to use them and dispose them to underwater.

While usage of the products is not high, the school keeps it topped up terms. Staff feel that having a supply available removed the embarrassment factor of having to ask.

Example from a secondary school in Scotland

Springfield High School is a diverse inner-city high school in Scotland, with 809 pupils speaking 42 different languages between them. Pupils at the school have shared their experiences of the period product in the toilet.

There are individual products, a mixture of tampons and towels, available in toilets in every facility as well as the disabled toilets, which are rarely used. We have some pupils in the school who are transitioning so we spoke with them and our LGBT group to plan where would be the best place to put these.

Toilets, where free sanitary protection is available, have a poster on the door and there is a bit of teachers, from whom products can be collected, on the poster too. We think that it is important that pupils can collect them in bulk if they want as they can get them from the named teachers or there is a dispenser in the toilet. We have found that the dispenser has both pads and tampons or sanitary towels. There are stocks available in PE too. It's good to be able to get them in more than one way.

We check supplies a few times a week and know they are really being used as we are doing lots of topping up. Both teachers and pupils see the differences this has made. The biggest one is that the young people are no longer having to go the, often busy, welfare office to ask for products. It has removed the embarrassment. People can access sanitary protection where and when they need to, but also know where they can go for help if they want it.

Promoting the scheme

Communicating about the scheme will help:

- reduce the stigma around periods
- encourage learners to access period products when needed
- make sure learners know where and how to access products and which products are available

When deciding how will communicate about the scheme, you should think about:

- learners' ages
- learners' experiences of having periods
- relationships with parents/carers

There are several ways you can let learners know about the scheme. This could include:

- posters
- assemblies with learners
- letters to parents and guardians

You may wish to use the template poster provided by phs. There is also a range of other posters and materials available. Our research showed learners preferred posters which:

- had short, bold headlines
- used friendly, supportive and approachable language
- had positive can-do messages
- used pink and other feminine around girls
- used imagery which reflected the diversity of the school/college

Our research has shown that some words associated with periods may discourage learners from using the products and cause embarrassment. Some learners felt that words such as 'hygiene' and 'sanitary' could sound using words most negatively associated with periods (ex:

- sanitary (such as sanitary product): learners may associate this word with uncleanliness
- hygiene: we could imply that periods are in some way unclean
- hygiene: using language associated with poverty may discourage learners from using these products
- affordability: using the word or 'struggling' may imply that the products are only available for learners who cannot purchase the products themselves
- shame: this may discourage openness and reinforce the idea of stigma and embarrassment

How to reduce stigma

The UK's 100 academics many challenges regarding stigma and taboo surrounding periods. Stigma is a negative or disgrace that is associated with a natural biology process. You should consider what you can do to create healthy and respectful communication about periods amongst all staff and learners.

Our research with learners found that there was a significant amount of stigma relating to periods and asking for products. To help tackle this, you should consider:

- including learners who do not have periods into your discussions - this could include inviting them to talks about periods, or placing posters in areas accessed by all learners
- extending conversations and tools to parents and carers
- making sure all teaching staff have enough knowledge about periods and about the products available
- using open and positive language about periods

Educating all learners about periods is crucial to tackling the stigma which surrounds it. You may currently cover periods and the use of different period products in health education. From September 2020, teaching both boys and girls about puberty, including menstruation, will be compulsory in all state-funded schools, primary and secondary, as part of health education.

You can find a range of free resources online to help you discuss periods with your learners. You should assess each resource before using it to make sure it is appropriate for the age and maturity of learners and sensitive to their needs.

From spring 2020, all teachers will have access to a central programme of support for health education. This will include:

- an implementation guide
- access to high-quality resources
- case studies
- training materials

Customer support

For customer service support or complaints, contact phs customer services on 01827 255500 or email enquiries@phs.co.uk

phs will respond to questions about orders within 24 hours, and to other queries or complaints by the end of the following business day.

If your queries or complaint relates to the policy behind this scheme, including the funding available to each organisation, contact the Department for Education. We will usually get a reply within 15 working days.

Annex A: research

We used our research with teachers, learners and other stakeholders to develop this scheme. The results of our research have been included as part of our advice to schools and colleges on distributing products and promoting the scheme.

Learner research

To inform this guidance, we carried out independent research with learners aged 9 to 19.

We commissioned Hopscotch Consulting Ltd to help us understand:

- learners' perceptions of the period products scheme
- different methods for making period products available
- how institutions could communicate the scheme with their learners

Hopscotch used an online forum for this research and recruited 62 learners from a range of:

- ages
- locations
- institution types
- free school meals and SEND statuses

See period product scheme: the learner perspective for more details.

Stakeholder survey and discussion group

We held a discussion group and carried out a survey with charities and interest groups who shared their views and experiences regarding period product provision.

We asked stakeholders to share their perspectives on:

- what information institutions need when ordering period products
- the types of period products suitable for learners with different characteristics
- how organisations can make periods a positive experience
- how organisations can tackle period-related stigma

Teacher engagement

We held discussions with staff in education organisations including:

- primary headteachers
- secondary headteachers
- teachers
- leaders from further education organisations