



BEST PRACTICES GUIDE:

MENSTRUAL EQUITY IN AWAY-FROM-HOME RESTROOMS



MENSTRUAL EQUITY IN AWAY-FROM-HOME RESTROOMS

OVERVIEW:

In the last few years, our society has seen a dramatic shift in awareness around the needs of menstruators in public spaces. States like California have already implemented laws to provide free menstrual products in school restrooms, with similar bills being advocated for in over half of the states in the US. There are currently over 70 active bills in congress that are addressing menstrual equity in the restroom.

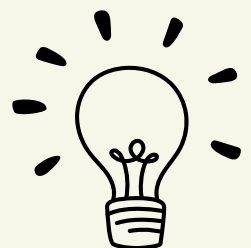
Overall, 2022 was a big year for the advancement of menstrual equity, with the launch of the industry-led "End Period Poverty" campaign, which is advocating legislatively for all menstruators to have access to period products and disposal solutions when they are needed. This trend is further supported by ISSA, the world's largest cleaning organization, who released a best practices document in 2022 stressing the need for access to menstrual care in public restrooms.

If your facility is committed to the health and safety of its users and you want to get started on creating menstrual equity in your space, we are here to help you get started.

DEFINITIONS:

Period poverty is the lack of access to the necessary menstrual products, education, and healthcare needed for a safe, healthy, and comfortable menstrual cycle.

Menstrual equity is the action of providing the necessary menstrual products, education, and health care needed for a safe, healthy, and comfortable menstrual cycle



THE IMPORTANCE OF MENSTRUAL EQUITY

Providing free menstrual care items and disposal solutions in public restrooms is not only a matter of convenience but also a basic necessity that can significantly improve the user experience. The reality is that a significant percentage of menstruating individuals have improvised menstrual products or have been caught off guard in public restrooms, leading to anxiety and discomfort. Providing free menstrual care items can help alleviate this issue and ensure that patrons feel valued and supported.

In addition to the obvious benefits of providing menstrual care items, there are several other gains for patrons, employees, and custodial staff. Access to reliable and easy-to-use dispensers stocked with menstrual care items, as well as clean and efficient disposal solutions, can help improve restroom cleanliness and reduce plumbing problems. Moreover, providing these solutions can demonstrate that facilities care about the well-being of their patrons and employees, which can help improve customer loyalty and employee morale.

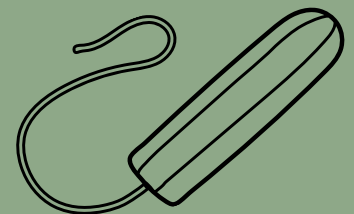
When developing a strategy for menstrual care management, facilities should take into account the entire user experience, including the process of accessing menstrual care items, removing and disposing of menstrual items, and how custodial staff handles the waste. By providing a comprehensive menstrual care solution, facilities can improve the user experience, promote good hygiene practices, and demonstrate that they care about the health and well-being of their patrons and employees.

MENSTRUAL CARE PRODUCTS

There are many types of menstrual products to choose from for home use; however, in public restrooms we recommend only providing the two most commonly used options.

Tampon

A tampon is a disposable menstrual product designed to absorb blood and vaginal secretions by insertion into the vagina during menstruation.



Pad

A pad is a disposable absorbent item placed on the underwear during menstruation to absorb blood and other vaginal secretions.



Menstrual Item Features to Consider

The market for menstrual products is diverse, each with unique characteristics and advantages. Understanding these differences is key when selecting the most suitable options for your facility and its users. The following sections explore these key factors, guiding you towards the optimal choice.

MATERIALS

Traditional pads and tampons, are often made from a combination of rayon, cotton, and synthetic fibers, and may contain chemicals or fragrances that can be irritating or harmful to some individuals, or contain chemicals that are not listed on the label. Organic and chemical-free options are available and should be considered.

ABSORPTION LEVEL

Menstrual products come in various absorption levels to accommodate the range of menstrual flows, such as Light, Regular, Super, and Super Plus. If providing a range of options is not feasible, choosing a middle-ground absorbency like Regular is considered the best practice.

TAMPON APPLICATOR

We recommend offering tampon options with an applicator versus without, as it allows for a more hygienic insertion process. Plastic applicators tend to be more user-friendly, but create additional waste and may be more expensive. Cardboard applicators are more environmentally friendly and cost-effective but some people find them more difficult to use.

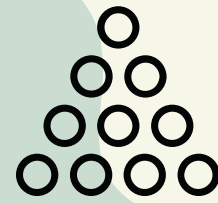
IMPACT ON ENVIRONMENT

When considering the environmental impact of tampons and pads, it's important to factor in the non-biodegradable materials, such as plastics, used in their production and packaging. Opting for products with minimal plastic use, recyclable packaging, and more sustainable materials can significantly reduce landfill waste and support a healthier planet.

DISPENSING METHOD

Menstrual items can be provided in a variety of ways. They can be provided in one area in the overall bathroom, or within each stall. Dispensing units can be wall-mounted units that dispense one item at a time, or as simple as a basket on a countertop. Items should be easily accessible and comply with ADA guidelines.

USAGE RATE GUIDELINES:



Depending on the nature of the away-from-home restroom, usage rates of menstrual products and disposal items may vary. For high-traffic public restrooms (i.e. airports or public transportation) usage rates will likely be higher than restrooms that are frequented by a relatively consistent group of menstruators over a long period of time (i.e. corporate environments or schools).

It is difficult to provide a precise estimation of the usage rate for menstrual items in your specific facility due to the many factors that can influence it. However, considering the following information can aid in determining an approximate usage rate that is tailored to your facility's needs.

- The average starting age of menstruation is 12 years old, with an overall range of between 8 and 17 years old.
- The menopausal transition (end of menstruation) most often begins between ages 45 and 55.
- Disposable pads and tampons need to be changed every 4-6 hours.
- The average menstrual flow lasts from 2-7 days but will usually last around 5 days.
- The menstrual flow is heaviest in the first 2 days, requiring more frequent changes.
- The average person will menstruate every 21-40 days, with 28 days being the average.

Upon implementation, it can be helpful to track the rate of usage to get a better understanding of your costs. Depending on the facility, the usage rate will likely remain consistent over time.

MENSTRUAL ITEM DISPOSAL SOLUTIONS

A lack of access to sanitary disposal solutions leaves the health of users and custodial staff at risk. It is also the primary cause of costly plumbing issues, and an overall lack of cleanliness in the restroom. There are two main components to proper menstrual item disposal: in-stall waste bins, and single use disposal bags.

Disposable pads and tampons cannot be flushed down the toilet and must be thrown away in a trash receptacle. Flushing of menstrual items leads to plumbing issues and is harmful to the environment at large as these products do not break down.



A.) In-Install Waste Bins

Disposal Receptacle: To ensure user privacy and proper disposal of menstrual products, it is recommended to have a separate trash receptacle installed within each stall.

Receptacle Liner: For easy and hygienic disposal of the trash contents, it's advisable to place liners inside each trash receptacle. This practice not only simplifies the removal process but also helps to keep the receptacle clean.

Additional Considerations:

SIZE

Does the size of the receptacle suit the space that it inhabits? Menstrual receptacles are usually slim in design and mounted within each stall.

LID OPERATION

Receptacles often have a lid or closure to visually conceal the contents. Is a touch-free or foot-operated opening mechanism important? Does the lid have a hinge that closes automatically?

LINERS

Does the liner extend over the top of the receptacle or sit inside it? If the liner sits inside the receptacle, is there a chance that material could miss the liner and contaminate the receptacle bin?

B.) Single Use Disposal Bags

While the trash receptacle and paper liner has long been the industry standard and status quo of menstrual item disposal, it is not a complete solution in itself. It is equally important to ensure that appropriate disposal bag solutions are also available, as it is the use of disposal bags that further keep restrooms clean, users and custodial staff safe from contamination, and ensures the reduction in costly plumbing issues.

Menstrual products, by their nature, can be bloody and messy, which can cause leakage and spills that can soil the liner and the trash receptacle. Pads have an adhesive backing that can make it difficult to place within the receptacle in a sanitary manner. Menstrual blood is blood, and thus can harbor Blood Borne Pathogens and transmissible diseases. Providing single-use disposal bags helps to reduce exposure risk to custodial staff, and restroom users.

OSHA guidelines stress that menstrual items should be contained in bags that "protect employees from physical contact with the contents" in order to prevent occupational exposure risk.

Placement of Disposal Bag Dispensers

To encourage proper disposal of menstrual items and reduce plumbing issues caused by flushing, it is best practice to provide an intentional and complete disposal solution directly in each stall of the restroom. Compared to tampons and pads, users are less likely to preemptively grab a disposal bag from outside the stall, or go out of their way to dispose of their item in a receptacle outside of the stall.

By placing a waste basket and a disposal bag solution within each stall, users are prompted to properly dispose of the item at the moment of use. Research shows there is still a lack of awareness around flushing practices, with some studies suggesting 50%+ of people still flush menstrual items. Providing direct and clear educational signage within the stall can further help combat this issue and promote more safe and environmentally-friendly practices.

Single Use Disposal Bag Features to Consider

There are a variety of disposal bag options available on the market, all with varying features. For a facility to receive the most benefit from the use of disposal bags (plumbing cost savings, custodial staff safety), it requires the users of the restroom to opt-in to using disposal bags.

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| MATERIALS | Opting for an environmentally friendly option that avoids plastic is the most advisable approach, given the frequent and disposable nature of this product. Additionally, patrons are more likely to use a sustainable disposal bag, as it is a guilt-free choice. |
| BAG DESIGN | Form follows function, so what bag features will allow for the largest user buy-in? Disposal bags with a design allowing for a touch-free removal process will reduce touch-point contamination and BBP exposure risk, as the blood does not come into contact with the user's hands in the process. Users also appreciate a touch-free removal for cleanliness and convenience. |
| BAG CLOSURE | Protection and cleanliness is maximized when the disposal bag seals shut completely, locking in odors and contents. |
| BAG SIZE | Does the size of bag suit the intended purpose of disposal, without taking up too much room in the small waste bins? |
| EDUCATION | Does the dispenser or brand provide educational signage to educate and encourage proper disposal? |
| DISPENSER DESIGN | Does the size of the dispenser fit well in your stalls with the other in-stall items? |

LANGUAGE - AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH



The terminology we use when discussing menstruation, menstrual products, and those who experience it can have a profound impact on individuals. By adopting gender-inclusive language that acknowledges menstruation as a natural and normal process, we can create a more supportive environment, and reduce the stigma and shame often associated with menstruation.

| Use These | Instead of These |
|---|------------------|
| People who menstruate / Menstruators / Students / Teens / Users | Women / Girls |
| Menstrual | Feminine |

Menstruator vs Women/Feminine

The reason is really quite simple: Not all women menstruate, and not all people who menstruate are women. The same applies for the word feminine, as the attributes of femininity are not truly related or indicative of menstruation.

Knowing this information, labeling menstrual care products as feminine is inaccurate and limiting. Menstruation is a natural bodily function that many people experience regardless of gender. Trans men, nonbinary individuals, agender folks, and intersex people are a few examples of people who may menstruate, but might not define themselves as feminine. Additionally, many women do not menstruate, so it doesn't make sense to define menstruation as a gender specific experience.



ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS



Menstrual Care in the Men's Room

Access to menstrual products is a basic necessity for anyone who menstruates, regardless of gender. However, many public restrooms only offer menstrual products in women's restrooms, leaving transgender men, non-binary individuals, and other gender non-conforming individuals without access to the necessary products. This lack of access not only creates a barrier for those who need it but also reinforces gender stereotypes, leading to feelings of exclusion and marginalization.

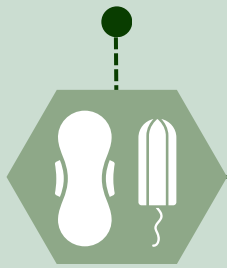
Providing menstrual products in all restrooms can help reduce the targeting or stigmatizing of any one particular restroom. In situations where it is not possible to provide access to products in every restroom, facilities should consider providing them in a variety of men's restrooms that are evenly distributed across the facility's floor plan. Additionally, any single-stall restrooms in the facility that are considered gender neutral spaces should provide menstrual care items as well. Signage or memos can also be posted to notify individuals of the access locations available.

Furthermore, to avoid situations that may force individuals to reveal their menstrual status or lead to awkward inquiries, menstrual products should be conveniently and promptly available. Providing menstrual products free of charge can help users quickly access the menstrual items they may need.

ADA Compliance

Ensuring that menstrual care dispensers and products are mounted or offered in a way that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is crucial to providing equitable access to all individuals. This means that dispensers should be mounted at an appropriate height and angle for wheelchair users, and should be easy to reach and operate for individuals with different abilities. In addition, the products themselves should be packaged in a way that is easy to open and handle for individuals with dexterity or vision impairments.

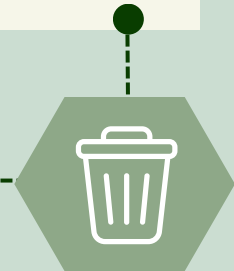
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS



STEP 1

MENSTRUAL ITEM SELECTION

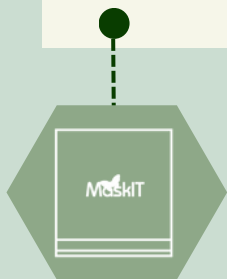
Decide which products you will provide in restrooms and find a suitable vendor



STEP 2

RECEPTACLE SELECTION

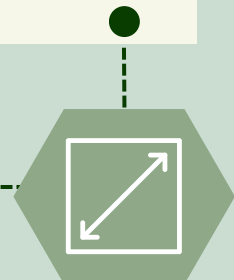
Decide on what disposal receptacle option works best for your facility, if they are not already installed.



STEP 3

DISPOSAL BAG SELECTION

Decide on a disposal bag option and determine where you can purchase the option you select.



STEP 4

SCALE OF ROLL OUT

Decide what restrooms you will offer products in, and conduct a bathroom/stall count to determine needs and costs. Incorporate all costs into annual budget.



STEP 5

PURCHASE STARTING SUPPLY

Purchase first stock of menstrual items, as well as disposal solution, & dispensers. Include refills to cover 3-6 months.



STEP 6

INCLUSION EDUCATION

Educate staff on how to ensure safety and dignity to all menstruators, including trans and gender-non-conforming individuals.



STEP 7

STAFF TRAINING

Provide education and training to staff regarding policies and procedures to ensure a consistent and adequate supply of menstrual products.



STEP 8

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Seek feedback from restroom users and custodial staff on how things are going, and if any improvements can be made.

