

Chapter 5: MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is an essential aspect of hygiene for women and adolescent girls between menarche and menopause. Despite being an important issue concerning women and girls in the menstruating age group MHM is often overlooked before, during and post-disaster responses. Menstruation is a naturally occurring physiological phenomenon in adolescent girls and pre-menopausal women. Women and girls in low income settings have low awareness on hygienic practices and lack culturally appropriate materials for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) practices. Menstruation and associated activities are surrounded by silence, shame and social taboos that are further manifested in social practices that restrict mobility, freedom and access to normal activities among adolescent girls.

Young adolescent girls tend to be less prepared for MHM and suffer from anxiety, apprehensions, fear and shame during their menses. In addition, pre-existing social taboos and cultural restraints during menstruation mean that managing menstruation is a greater challenge during disasters. Further, there is limited access to reproductive health services and safe menstrual hygiene materials during disasters. Menstrual hygiene needs are not only specific and pressing to women and girls in reproductive age but also require access to same management of the menstrual period, and care of basic reproductive health. In emergencies, the usual lifestyles of affected individuals change and they are confronted with additional stress that could worsen their physical and psychological well-being. Provision of fundamental human requirements such as shelter, food, clean water and medicines is prioritized; however other needs such as safe menstrual hygiene management that can have profound psychosocial impact if unmet are often neglected.

Good menstrual hygiene is essential for the health and dignity of girls and women. Discussions on menstrual hygiene are important for adolescent girls to clarify existing myths and misconceptions around menstruation. Improving menstrual hygiene is important from the point of view of personal comfort and increased mobility. It also reduces the likelihood of infections resulting from poor hygienic practices during menstruation. Providing girls with the knowledge and skills on maintaining menstrual hygiene improves school attendance among girls who may not attend school on those days or even drop out of school altogether. Menstrual Hygiene

Management (MHM) programming in emergencies involves adjustments and improvements to a range of sectoral interventions including Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Protection, Reproductive Health, Education, and Shelter. While some components are specific to menstruation (such as the provision of sanitary pads), most components of MHM programming are concerned with improving the safety, privacy and dignity with which women and girls can live in emergency situation.

How to promote Menstrual Hygiene?

Promoting menstrual hygiene is achieved through:

- a) Provision of health education to girls and women on menstruation and menstrual hygiene
- b) Increasing community action to improve access to clean toilets with water, both in the home and in schools
- c) Promoting the availability and use of sanitary products
- d) Enabling safe disposal of sanitary products.

Menstrual Hygiene can be promoted in the community, in schools and in Child Friendly Spaces during a disaster. It is best to start with adolescent girls although other women in the reproductive age group also benefit from the information and access to sanitary products. In the community, the ASHA, the Anganwadi Worker (AWW), and the members of women's self-help groups (SHGs) can make a substantial difference to menstrual hygiene practices in Child Friendly Spaces in relief camps during a disaster.

Why there need for MHM Awareness

- Menarche and menstruation are topics that are not discussed openly – leading to a lack of accurate information and education
- There is poor understanding of healthy menstrual hygiene practices, and the risk that poor menstrual hygiene poses to women and their reproductive health.
- Traditionally cloth, ash, sand, hay, and other material have been used by women, and there is low awareness of the risks that the use of these materials pose.

- Embarrassment and lack of effective options to ensure menstrual hygiene could lead to school absenteeism or even dropouts.
- Availability of sanitary napkins in rural markets is low, and there is embarrassment associated with purchasing them

MHM TOOLKIT	
Module	Activities
<p><i>Module 1</i></p> <p>Menstrual Hygiene Management in Relief Camps</p>	<p>Checklist for Relief camps</p>
<p><i>Module 2</i></p> <p>Knowledge on menstruation</p>	<p>What is menstruation?</p> <p>Physical changes during puberty</p> <p>Fact sheet – menstruation</p> <p>Menstrual Cycle Calendar</p> <p>Fact sheet – myths and misconceptions</p>
<p><i>Module 3</i></p> <p>Mhm friendly toilets and washing areas</p>	<p>MHM friendly toilet</p> <p>MHM unfriendly toilet</p>
<p><i>Module 4</i></p> <p>Menstrual Hygiene Material and Disposal</p>	<p>Care and disposal of used menstrual material</p>