



## Menstrual Rights Are Human Rights

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Embarrassing moments happen all too often. Think back to the beginning of braces, teenage angst, and maybe even your first kiss. Inevitably as a teen, you have faced some form of embarrassment at one point or another.

Imagine this: you are in high school, and an exam is in session. You are a 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl who spent the whole night studying and feel an insurmountable amount of pressure to get an A. However, as you begin to write, you feel a cramp begin to emerge. You ignore it, thinking it must be stress or anxiety settling in, but the pain does not go away. As the realization settles in, you begin to panic. You know what this feeling is. You just got your period, and you are not prepared for it. You rummage around your bag checking every nook and cranny, praying that a tampon or pad is hidden somewhere. But you are left empty handed. You know the nurses' office is out of reach. Every option is exhausted. What do you do now?

This exact scenario happens all too often. Girls are left to suffer because they either lack or do not have access to essential feminine hygiene products. These products are a basic necessity, and without them being readily available, girls will be left feeling uncomfortable in school. Therefore, menstrual products should be provided in Philadelphia public school bathrooms.

The fundamental need is real. A [2019 survey](#), commissioned by Thinx and PERIOD, found that 61% of girls have worn menstrual products beyond the recommended four hours. Without access to replacements, girls will be at risk for contracting [Toxic Shock Syndrome](#), a very severe bacterial infection. Thus, without adequate access to these products, girls will be left at higher risk for preventable diseases.

Periods are a natural occurrence, and no girl should be forced to choose between her health and education. Philadelphia's negligence when it comes to supplying menstrual products is an outright refusal to admit that basic health rights and women's rights coexist. [The World Health Organization](#) has stated that a right to public health is naturally codependent with other variables of human rights— in this case, the right to education. Therefore, without feminine hygiene products, girls cannot actively participate in their education because elements of their health are being compromised.

Additionally, [dangerous euphemisms, taboos, and stigmas](#) contribute to the problem. It is not uncommon for girls to be told that they are acting grumpy, emotional, or sensitive because it is "that time of the month." Such stigmas are not only extremely inaccurate, but they completely disregard the menstrual experience as essential. In 2016, a study conducted by the International Women's Health Coalition found that there are currently up to [5,000 slang words](#) used to refer to menstruation in over 10 different languages. This shocking fact signifies an unfortunate trend in people's attitudes regarding menstruation. Periods are not taken seriously, and it is a big concern.

Ultimately, the taboos, stigmas, and stereotypes often lead to [period shaming](#), a phrase that aligns menstruation with negativity. This connotation leads to people viewing periods as dirty, scandalous, and undesirable. Periods are a natural occurrence, and those with uteruses should not feel ashamed of getting theirs in school. However, this is

unfortunately the case as 70% of girls say that just being in school alone makes them [self-conscious about their periods](#). This high statistic further proves that periods are not normalized in school.

In Great Britain, a [YouGov poll](#) found that 137,000 boys admitted to teasing girls about their periods in school. If periods were normalized through the installation of free feminine product dispensers, teasing would be less frequent and girls would be more comfortable attending school.

While some might argue that the cost of installation is too expensive, it is crucial to note that [this cost is actually minor](#). Since schools already pay for other basic hygienic necessities, they should provide menstrual products even though an accelerated cost is involved. School districts can work to lessen this cost by installing one dispenser on each school level floor until more money is allocated in the budget. This way, instead of the cost for installation [surpassing \\$8,000](#), it will be less severe and more manageable.

Philadelphia school districts are contributing to the stigma by [refusing to acknowledge the severity](#) of period poverty. Without providing those that menstruate with feminine hygiene products, Philadelphia schools are ignoring the trepidation that comes with having an unprepared period in school.

Ignoring menstrual rights in public schools is not just insulting, but it is fundamentally wrong. Therefore, the solution lies in advocating for [menstrual hygiene management](#), the ability for girls to use clean menstrual management materials during their cycles to collect blood and avoid public embarrassment. Philadelphia school districts and state legislators need to further evaluate their priorities and determine whether they're willing to finally put students' health and wellbeing first.

Published in The Wall Street Journal ([www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com))

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