



# Menstrual Hygiene in Indian Prisons

**For Prelims:** [World Menstrual Hygiene Day](#), [National Family Health Survey](#), [National Crime Records Bureau](#), [World Bank](#), [Menstrual Hygiene Scheme](#)

**For Mains:** Menstrual hygiene in Indian prisons, Women prisoners in India, Menstrual health policies

**Source:** TH

## Why in News?

On [World Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024](#), India celebrates significant progress in menstrual hygiene management, with the [5th National Family Health Survey \(NFHS 2019-2020\)](#) reporting that **around 80% of young women aged 15-24 now use safe menstrual hygiene products.**

- However, the needs of one of the most marginalized groups of **women in Indian prisons** remain overlooked. Societal biases deny these women **basic rights and proper menstrual hygiene management**, highlighting a critical area for further improvement.

## What is the Status of Menstrual Hygiene in Prisons?

- **Population:** According to the [National Crime Records Bureau](#), there are 23,772 women in Indian prisons, with 77% of them in the reproductive age group (18-50 years) and likely to be regular menstruators.
- **Inconsistent Access:** The availability of [sanitary napkins](#) is inconsistent across prisons, and the quality of these products could be better.
- **Uniform Product Size:** All prisons issue **'one size' sanitary pads**, which do not cater to the varying needs of different women.
  - Most prisons do not offer other types of menstrual products like tampons or menstrual cups.
- **Lack of Facilities:** Despite the [2016 Model Prison Manual's](#) recommendations, many **states have not provided female prisoners with adequate water and washroom facilities.**
- **Waste Disposal Issues:** Proper disposal of menstrual hygiene materials is often neglected, impacting both women's health and the facility's hygiene.
- **Additional Challenges: Overcrowding and poor socio-economic conditions** further hinder access to necessities like water, detergent, and soap.

## Why is Menstrual Hygiene Management Overlooked in Prisons?

- **Stigma and Silence:** Menstruation itself can be a **taboo subject**, and there might be hesitation to discuss it openly, especially in a prison environment. This can make it difficult for women to ask for what they need.
- **Lack of Legal Framework:** There is no law mandating the provision of free, unlimited sanitary products in prisons.
  - No prison rule has provisions for providing hot water to women prisoners to manage

menstruation.

- **Menstrual Health Schemes:** Existing schemes like the [Menstrual Hygiene Scheme 2011](#), [Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#), and [Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana](#) **do not specifically address the needs of women prisoners.**
- The **Model Prison Manual 2016** suggests providing sterilised sanitary pads as needed, but implementation varies widely across states and prisons.
- **Data Deficiency:** There is a lack of data on **water availability in prisons**, complicating efforts to address hygiene needs effectively.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Prison authorities may not be fully aware of the specific needs of women during menstruation, or the importance of menstrual hygiene for their health.
- **Budgetary Constraints:** Providing menstrual products can be seen as an extra expense, especially in overcrowded prisons with limited resources.

## Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

- It is a critical aspect of public health and human rights. It refers to the **practice of using clean menstrual materials to absorb or collect blood, which can be changed in privacy** as often as necessary during menstruation.
- MHM also includes the use of soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual materials.
- **UNICEF** emphasises the importance of MHM as it affects the **dignity, health, and education** of millions of people who menstruate, particularly in developing countries where access to clean water and sanitation facilities may be limited.
- The **World Bank** also highlights the need for access to **water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities**, affordable menstrual hygiene materials, information on good practices, and a supportive environment to manage menstruation without embarrassment or stigma.
- **Menstrual health is recognised as a human rights issue.** Everyone has the right to bodily autonomy, which includes the **ability to care for one's body during menstruation.**

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UNFPA-UNHCR

# Menstrual hygiene management kit (MHM)

One kit contains the essential menstrual hygiene items to cover the needs of a menstruating person for up to three months.

## Standard content



Disposable sanitary pads



Female underwear (panty)



Detergent/  
Washing Powder



Clothes  
pegs + string



Bath soap +  
plastic holder



Leaflet

## Variable content



Disposable  
sanitary pads



Reusable  
menstrual Pads



Menstrual  
cups



Tampons

## World Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024

- World Menstrual Hygiene Day is an annual awareness day held on **28<sup>th</sup> May**. It aims to **break the silence and stigma surrounding menstruation** and promote good menstrual hygiene management.
- **Theme: "#PeriodFriendlyWorld"**.
- **History:** In 2013, **Germany-based NGO WASH United** introduced Menstrual Hygiene Day to combat the stigma around menstruation and promote access to proper sanitary facilities and affordable menstrual products.

## What are the Government Initiatives Related to Menstrual Hygiene?

- **National Menstrual Hygiene Policy:** Introduced in 2023, this policy emphasises safe and

dignified MHM for all.

- Remarkably, the **policy identifies prisoners as a target population** with compromised access to menstrual hygiene facilities, marking a positive step forward.
- **Lack of Concrete Plans:** The policy does not provide a specific action plan for improving menstrual hygiene management in prisons.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS):** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched MHS to promote menstrual hygiene among rural adolescent girls aged 10-19.
  - The **scheme provides subsidised sanitary napkin** packs to adolescent girls through decentralised procurement, with Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers responsible for distribution and education.
- **Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):** [Suraksha Savidha Napkins \(oxo-biodegradable sanitary napkins\)](#) are available at Jan Aushadhi Kendras **for Rs 1 each.**
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) (Mission Shakti):**
  - Generating **awareness about menstrual hygiene** and the use of sanitary napkins.
- **Samagra Shiksha:** State-specific projects for menstrual health and hygiene, including the installation of **sanitary pad vending machines and incinerators** in schools.
- **Zero-Napkin Mission:** The zero-napkin mission aims to **replace synthetic napkins with menstrual cups implemented in Kerala.**
  - Due to the **environmental challenges and health issues posed by synthetic napkins**, local bodies in Kerala are distributing menstrual cups and raising awareness about their use.

## Way Forward

- **Period Pantry:** Create **designated and accessible locations in prisons** for inmates to discreetly request and obtain menstrual supplies, such as vending machines stocked with products or designated staff for distribution.
- **Hygiene Heroines:** Train **incarcerated women to become peer educators on menstrual hygiene** best practices.
  - This empowers them to share knowledge with fellow inmates, fostering a sense of community and promoting self-care.
  - Organise workshops for prison staff on menstrual hygiene management and dispelling misconceptions.
  - Involve female healthcare professionals for regular access to gynaecological checkups and education on menstrual health concerns.
- **Guarantee Basic Standards:** The government should **establish and uphold uniform national regulations for menstrual hygiene in prisons**, including providing unlimited, free high-quality sanitary pads, ensuring clean and functional toilets with proper ventilation in female wards, and providing safe and hygienic disposal bins for sanitary pads.
  - Upgrade prison infrastructure by allocating a budget for necessary repairs and upgrades to toilets.
- **Sustainability and Monitoring:** Establish a monitoring system to assess implementation, track product availability, and address issues. Promote menstrual hygiene as a basic right and include it in prison reform initiatives for an ongoing focus on women's well-being.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Q. Menstrual hygiene management is an essential component of public health. Discuss the importance of ensuring dignified and adequate menstrual hygiene facilities for incarcerated women in India.

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

### **Mains:**

Q. What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space? (2019)

