

KNOW YOUR PERIOD: THE NYC STUDENT GUIDE

NYC STUDENT PERIOD GUIDE

Students: Know Your Rights!

You can get period, or menstrual, products in bathrooms at school.

[LEARN MORE ON PAGES 1-2! →](#)

Puberty and Periods

Periods are made of blood and other fluids. Your period is a normal part of growing up. Periods are also called menstruation.

[LEARN MORE ON PAGES 3-4! →](#)

First Periods

Periods happen about once a month and usually last 3 to 7 days. They can be uncomfortable, but you can prepare!

[LEARN MORE ON PAGES 5-6! →](#)

Period Care

When you get your period, you will learn to use products called pads, tampons, or cups.

[LEARN MORE ON PAGES 7-11! →](#)

Resources

If you have questions about your period, you can ask an adult you trust, like a parent, teacher, school nurse, or doctor.

[LEARN MORE ON PAGE 12! →](#)

STUDENTS: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!



In New York City, did you know...?

You can get menstrual, or period, products for free in school. They're in bathrooms so students have products when they need them—*privately, without having to ask anyone.*

- ✦ Menstrual products are available for free in public and charter school buildings with grades 4 and above.

GRADES 4+:

Pads are in single-occupancy bathrooms (this means the bathrooms with a door that we use one at a time).

GRADES 6+:

Tampons and pads are in single-occupancy bathrooms and all girls' bathrooms.

- ✦ This is required by [Local Law 84 of 2016](https://intro.nyc.gov/local-laws/2016-84).
(intro.nyc.gov/local-laws/2016-84)

If the menstrual product dispenser in your school needs a refill, tell a custodian or another adult. If you have questions about the products your school provides or about how to use them, you can talk to school staff, like a nurse, teacher, or counselor.

You can get menstrual products for free in temporary housing.

- ✦ Menstrual products are available in temporary housing locations. More information about, and resources for, students in temporary shelters is on the [Public Schools website](https://schools.nyc.gov/school-life/special-situations/students-in-temporary-housing). (schools.nyc.gov/school-life/special-situations/students-in-temporary-housing)
- ✦ This is required by [Local Law 83 of 2016](https://intro.nyc.gov/local-laws/2016-83).
(intro.nyc.gov/local-laws/2016-83)

This timeline is about the recent history of **advocacy** — including by student advocates! — to create a fairer city for people with periods.

You might learn more about advocacy in health education, social studies, or civics classes. Advocacy can start with writing emails or letters to government representatives, going to meetings about issues in your neighborhood, or learning about your community by volunteering or talking to your neighbors or your peers.

Menstrual Equity in NYC

2016

Encouraged by student advocates, the mayor signs a new law that makes New York City the first place in the United States to provide free menstrual products to students in grades 6 and above in public and charter schools.

2020

New York City distributes menstrual products at schools and local food banks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

New York City Council holds a public hearing about **menstrual equity**, which is when every person has fair access to period products, stigma-free education, and space to care for oneself during menstruation.

2023

All public and charter schools with grades 4 and 5 start supplying menstrual products in single-occupancy bathrooms for students.

2024

Five new menstrual equity laws in New York City go into effect. One requires schools to share information like this booklet so students can learn about their rights!

PUBERTY AND PERIODS

During **puberty**, a person's body and mind change to prepare for becoming an adult. Everyone goes through puberty. When people reach a certain age, usually between 8 and 14, **hormones** (chemicals that act as bodies' "messengers") tell the brain to start this time of growth. Each person is a little different, so everyone starts and goes through puberty on their own schedule.

Puberty includes physical changes (ways our bodies change), emotional changes (ways thoughts and feelings change), and social changes (ways our relationships change). Learning about these changes can help young people know what to expect and to prepare for their journeys into adulthood.

One of the physical changes that happens during puberty, for anyone with a uterus, is the start of **menstruation**, or getting a period. It's a very normal and healthy thing that happens. During a period, a fluid that contains blood (**menstrual fluid**) trickles out of the vagina, usually for 3 to 7 days.

That may sound scary, but it is actually a pretty amazing event! It's a sign that a person's body is growing and developing. When you have your period, normal life doesn't have to stop: You can go to school, see your friends, and play sports. There's nothing to be embarrassed about.

You can support friends who have started their period by being a good listener, treating them the way you'd want to be treated, sharing what you know about periods and period products if they ask, and learning about what they're experiencing.

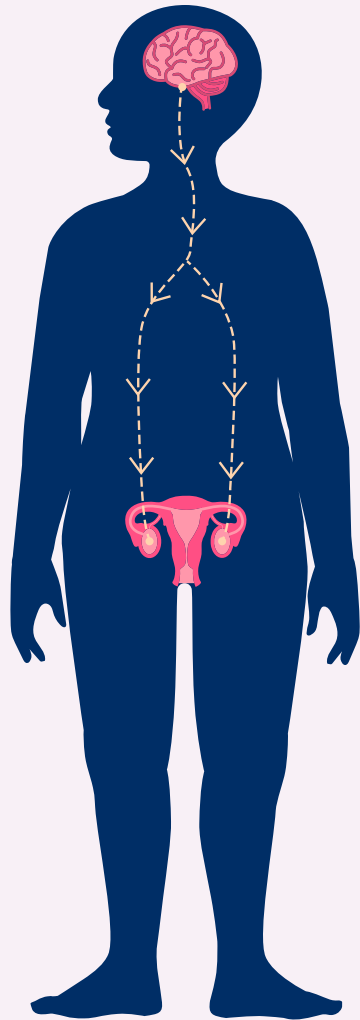


Period Biology

Periods are part of a cycle that helps bodies prepare for potential pregnancy. Hormones start the process by sending a message to the uterus and ovaries, which are part of the **reproductive system**.

Then, about once a month, the ovaries release an egg. The uterus responds by creating a thick layer of blood, nutrients, and tissue. If someone does not become pregnant, the blood and nutrients are not needed so they are broken down and leave the body. This blood and tissue are released through the vagina.

That's what people call a period or menstruation! This process repeats about every 21 to 35 days, which is why the process is called a **menstrual cycle**: It repeats on a regular basis. [Watch this video to learn more about the biology of your period.](https://www.amaze.org/video/period-symptoms-and-self-care) (amaze.org/video/period-symptoms-and-self-care)



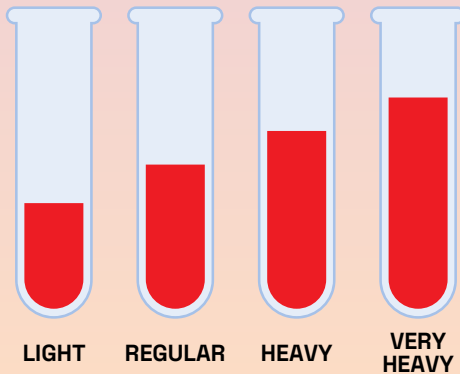
FIRST PERIODS

You'll learn a lot about your first period during your health education classes in elementary, middle, and high school. Since everyone's body is different, periods will also be different for every person! Periods start at different times of day and at different ages, and people will experience different signs and symptoms before and during periods. Across different cultures, first periods can have symbolic meaning and some families celebrate first periods in special ways.

What do periods feel like?

Everybody's period is a little different. For some people, the days before or during their period might be uncomfortable or painful. They might have cramps, back or neck aches, nausea, or diarrhea. For others, the moment their period starts may not feel any different, and it could begin with just a small amount of bloody fluid.

At times, bleeding can be heavy, but usually, menstrual fluid trickles out. Periods don't shoot out or pour out. It can look like you're losing a lot of blood, but you're not! It's usually 2 to 3 tablespoons over a few days, which is less than 1/4 cup.



What do periods look like?

A period might not look like fresh, bright red blood. Because it's made of blood, tissue, and other fluids, it can look thicker, and it can be pink to brown to maroon and even blackish. Some people may have dark clumps of blood. All these colors and textures are totally normal.

How long do periods last?

Most periods last about 3 to 7 days. It's typical to have a heavier flow in the first day or two and a lighter flow toward the end of your period.



How often do periods happen?

It takes your body a while to get used to having periods, so they can be unpredictable at first. In general, adults have periods about every month. For young tweens or teens, it's less regular, but usually at least every 3-6 weeks after a first period.

ADULTS



TWEENS AND TEENS



PERIOD CARE

There are lots of different products you can use to manage your period. You can explore and decide which you like the most. Using period products can help prevent leaks or stains on your clothes or sheets. You don't need to feel ashamed of your period, and plenty of people still prefer to only tell close friends when they have their period. No one will be able to tell what type of product you're using if you do not tell them. [Watch this video to learn how to use each product.](https://www.amaze.org/video/period-hygiene-tampons-pads-menstrualcups) (amaze.org/video/period-hygiene-tampons-pads-menstrualcups)

Types of Period Products

Pad



WHAT IS IT?

Menstrual pads, or just **pads**, stick to the inside of underwear and absorb menstrual fluids. Types of pads include disposable or reusable and washable.

HOW IS IT USED?

Each pad should only be used once and replaced every 4 to 6 hours or as needed. After removing a pad, roll it up and wrap it in the wrapper of a new pad or in toilet paper. Throw it in a trash can (**never** the toilet)!

WHAT IS IT MADE OF?

Pads are usually made of cotton or other soft material. The “size” of pads tells you how much fluid they can absorb: panty liner, light, regular, heavy, overnight.

Tampon

WHAT IS IT?

Tampons are inserted into the vagina and absorb menstrual fluids. Some tampons have applicators made of plastic or cardboard that help insert the tampon.



HOW IS IT USED?

Each tampon should only be used once and replaced every 4 to 8 hours or as needed. It is rare, but leaving a tampon in for too long can put someone at risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome or TSS, which is an illness caused by bacteria. After removing a tampon, wrap it in toilet paper and throw it in a trash can (**never** the toilet)!

WHAT IS IT MADE OF?

Tampons are usually made of cotton or other soft material. The “size” of tampons tells you how much fluid they can absorb: light, regular, super, super plus, ultra.

Cup

WHAT IS IT?

A **menstrual cup** is a bell-shaped cup that is inserted into the vagina and collects menstrual fluids.



HOW IS IT USED?

The amount of time a reusable cup can be used depends on the size and type of the cup. Cups should be cleaned every 4 to 8 hours and sanitized regularly, following the product instructions.

WHAT IS IT MADE OF?








Menstrual cups are made of flexible materials like rubber or silicon. They’re available in different shapes and sizes, and many cups are reusable for months or years.

At the store, you might notice these items are called “feminine care” or “sanitary napkins.” In NYC schools, we say period or menstrual products!

The size of period products is about the amount of fluid they can absorb—not someone’s body size or shape.

How do I decide what product to use?

Many people use different products in different scenarios. For example, you might be more comfortable sleeping with a pad than with a tampon, but you might be more comfortable using a tampon than a pad if you’re swimming or doing other athletic activities. [Watch this video to learn more about managing your period.](https://www.amaze.org/video/puberty-flowing-with-confidence) (amaze.org/video/puberty-flowing-with-confidence)

Flow Volume	 Pads	 Tampons
	Regular	Light
	Super	Regular
	Extra Long	Super
	Overnight	Super Plus
	Extra Heavy Overnight	Ultra

When I throw out menstrual products, why can't I flush them down the toilet? Menstrual products can clog toilets and damage the pipes that bring water indoors.

Preparing for Periods

Carry a “period kit.” Include your preferred period product, wipes, a bag for stained underwear (just in case), and a clean pair of underwear.

Track your period on a calendar. You can note the first day of your period on a calendar each time it starts. You may notice a pattern in your cycle, which can help you plan for when your period might start again. In the first few years of your period, you may not see a pattern.



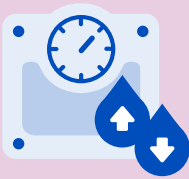
Although apps are available to help track your menstrual cycle, some people decide not to share data about their health online, which includes digital apps. Being careful when providing any personal information is part of learning [how to be a good digital citizen](https://www.infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/programs/digital-citizenship). (infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/programs/digital-citizenship)

Preparing for Symptoms

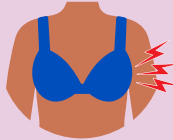
Before your period:

In the week or so before their period starts, some people feel bloated, tired, moody, have headaches or crave certain foods. This is known as premenstrual syndrome or PMS. Most people with a uterus have PMS at some point in their lives, but not everyone does. PMS is your body's reaction to changing hormone levels.

Physical symptoms of PMS



Fluid-related weight change



Breast tenderness



Acne flare-up

Emotional/Behavioral symptoms of PMS



Difficulty concentrating



Feeling sad



Trouble falling asleep

During your period:

When the muscles of the uterus push out the menstrual fluid, it can sometimes cause cramping. Pain from cramps can often be relieved by medicine available at the store, like ibuprofen, or by using a heating pad or hot water bottle at home.

If you have cramps that make you feel sick, double over with pain, or miss school, it's important to talk to a doctor or nurse.

RESOURCES

Find a Provider

Most doctors, including pediatricians and primary care providers, should be able to answer basic questions about periods.

Gynecologists are doctors who specialize in health care for the vulva, vagina, uterus, ovaries, and breasts. They can help with more complicated issues with menstruation.

Some schools have [school-based health centers](https://schools.nyc.gov/school-life/health-and-wellness/school-based-health-centers). (schools.nyc.gov/school-life/health-and-wellness/school-based-health-centers) They're run by local hospitals, medical centers, and community organizations. [Find out if your school has a health center](https://schools.nyc.gov/docs/default-source/default-document-library/list-of-nyc-school-based-health-centers-english.pdf). (schools.nyc.gov/docs/default-source/default-document-library/list-of-nyc-school-based-health-centers-english.pdf)

In New York, [teenagers can access some health care services](https://teenhealthny.org) on their own. (teenhealthny.org) Learn more about the city's [sexual health clinics](https://nyc.gov/site/doh/services/sexual-health-clinics.page), which serve any person who is 12 and older, regardless of immigration status. (nyc.gov/site/doh/services/sexual-health-clinics.page)

Find Menstrual Products

Menstrual products can be purchased at many stores, including grocery stores, drug stores, or pharmacies.

Menstrual products are available for free in schools and in a few other places around New York City, including food banks or pantries, summer meals locations, and some public libraries.

REFERENCES

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Boston Public Schools
- Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center
- Oregon Public Schools
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

This guide was created by New York City Public Schools in collaboration with the New York City Commission on Gender Equity in accordance with Local Law 11 of 2024. It was last updated in August 2024.