

Medical myth buster

May 28: Menstrual hygiene day

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Introduction

May 28 is observed as the Menstrual Hygiene Day. Every woman experiences a monthly biological cycle known as menstruation or a period, where the lining of the uterus breaks down and leaves the body through the vagina i.e. endometrium. Menstruation and menstrual hygiene continue to be met with silence and neglect all around the world. The mission of this day is to break the silence and taboo, raise awareness and change negative social norms surrounding menstrual hygiene management in the world. Why May 28?

According to Water and sanitation for health (WASH) United, a German non-profit organization and founder of the Menstrual Hygiene Day, the average interval of a menstrual cycle is 28 days. On average, women and girls menstruate for 5 days per month. Hence 28-5, or the 28th of May was chosen to mark this day.

History

Water and sanitation for health United came up with the idea for a global day of action for Menstrual Hygiene Management in May 2013. The organization carried out a 28-day campaign on social media to test the waters and see if other organizations were interested in this issue, too.

Importance Of Menstrual Hygiene Day

Poor menstrual hygiene caused by a lack of education and awareness on the issue, persisting taboos and stigma, limited access to hygienic menstrual products, and poor sanitation infrastructure undermines the educational opportunities, health, and overall social status of women and girls around the world, says WASH United. As a result, millions of women and girls are kept from reaching their full potential.

At this stage, this issue needs the spotlight of a dedicated day to break the silence and accelerate action, the organization says on the importance of the day.

Significance

With Menstrual Hygiene day, not just WASH United, but several organizations and activists involved in the cause, aim to create a world where no woman or girl is held back because she menstruates, by 2030. To ensure a world without period stigma and

period poverty, every woman and girl needs to be empowered to manage her menstruation safely, hygienically, with confidence, and without shame. COVID-19 and Menstrual Hygiene Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, it has become clear that the pandemic has severe secondary impacts on girls' and women's ability to manage their menstruation and their health.

As per many experts and organizations, the poorest sections of the society were the worst affected in accessing menstrual hygiene products during the pandemic.

However, a recent analysis by UNICEF titled 'Mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and menstrual health and hygiene, shows that it is not just them, but also the healthcare workers who are on the frontlines of fighting the virus.

Globally, women make up 70 per cent of the health workforce and are more likely to be front-line health workers, especially nurses, midwives and community health workers. These women face additional challenges in managing their menstruation, which may compromise their health and dignity as well as the ability of the health system to deliver.

Challenges and management ideas



As per the UNICEF report, these challenges include, but are not limited to:

Facility managers are not aware of and/or do not prioritize the Menstrual hygiene needs of female health care workers. Lack of menstrual hygiene materials for health care workers provided by health systems. Putting on and removing PPE prevents quick changing of menstrual hygiene materials, leading women to bleed into protective suits, suppress menstruation through the use of oral contraceptive pills, or potentially miss 5 days of work. Lack of access to WASH facilities at

health care facilities, preventing women from managing basic hygiene including menstrual hygiene while at work.

How to manage it?

Building clean toilets with uninterrupted water supply in rural schools, ensuring the availability and accessibility of sanitary napkins, and imposing mandatory menstrual health classes for both boys and girls can create an enabling environment for girls and prevent them from potentially dropping out of school.

We must also ensure that all women have access to quality sanitary pads or other hygienic methods of protection, even in emergencies. There is also a need to educate women and girls about the environmental pollution and health hazards associated with the disposal of sanitary napkins. Studies show that a woman generates 125kg of sanitary waste, on average, during her menstruating years when she uses disposable

sanitary products.

Awareness about the use of natural sanitary products made from materials like banana fiber, bamboo fiber, etc., is equally essential. Civil society organizations' actions and others working with rural women have introduced the idea of setting up low-cost sanitary napkin units, which also provide livelihood opportunities to rural women, but many women and girls in remote areas are yet to be reached.

The private sector also has a crucial role to play by funding the installation of sanitary-pad vending machines in secondary schools for girls in rural areas through their CSR initiatives. Such initiatives, along with WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and MHM awareness campaigns, have the potential to drastically improve women and girls' menstrual health outcomes. Finally, educational institutions and workplaces must consider the option of menstrual leaves for those women and girls experiencing extreme pain and discomfort during their periods.

An informed discourse around menstrual hygiene has gained momentum in recent years, but we have miles to go before we achieve our ultimate goal of ensuring that every woman or girl has an understanding of her menstrual health needs and access to related products and services.

On this Menstrual Hygiene Day

"Let us pledge to ensure that menstruation will not impede our young girls and their aspirations."



Commit to quit tobacco

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Just as I shut down my laptop, brooding over being subjected to seven hours of online lectures, Savitri, my indispensable household barged into the room, anxious, agitated, and profusely sweating. “I need it. It satisfies my hunger, it’s my only friend!” She cried out. Today was the third day since she finally quit it, fragile amidst her agonizing battle against the cravings for tobacco. As I comforted her, I wondered how many more people out there, are completely oblivious of tobacco, arranging their slow death. Tobacco, this universally accepted silent killer causes over 8 million deaths each year, murdering up to half of its active users and several non-users on being exposed to secondhand or third-hand smoke. About 23% of all adults are smokers, which seems dwarfed by the fact that 30% of adolescents indulge in some form of tobacco, reinforcing that the average age for the first use of tobacco is just thirteen.

The fatal pleasures of tobacco cater to countless masses by means of a copious array of products ranging from cigarettes, cigars, and chewable tobacco (gutka), to exotic hookahs, all equally lethal. A concoction of around 4800 chemicals, with 69 of them being carcinogenic, the cigarette smoke generates a diverse variety of dangerous squeal, such as Coronary artery disease, asthma, malignancies of vital organs, COPD, and many more, contributing significantly to a drastic decrease in life span and diminished quality of life. In addition, indulgence in nicotine, while pregnant, accounts for about 10% of all infant deaths. Despite this, a significant fraction of all pregnant women smoke.

Regarded as one of the leading preventable causes of morbidity and mortality, tobacco use, exceeding its enormous toll of disease, suffering, and death, also burdens the global economy. Annually, an estimated 1.4 trillion U.S. dollars are spent on healthcare costs, lost productivity, fire damage, and environmental harm. Inevitably pushing lives in a downward spiral, because someone once said, “the wretch Eder one is, the more one smokes; and the more one smokes, the wretch Eder one gets— in a vicious circle.” The ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 is showing us the mirror, reflecting the dire risks posed by tobacco to our health and wellbeing. Smokers face a 40–50% higher threat of developing severe disease and death from COVID-19.

On the other side of the coin, the present situation is set to be a remarkable motivation for tobacco addicts to quit it and be a winner. It’s high time we allied ourselves with the forces of change, to facilitate the transition, in our capacity at various tiers. Every little contribution potentiates the achievement of the goals set.

Charity begins at home, but should not end there. Let’s start with our family, friends, and household making them AWARE of the hazards of tobacco. As medical students or healthcare workers, we can VOLUNTEER for various government organizations and NGOs to propagate in schools and colleges, the anti-tobacco concept put forward by the World Health Organisation.

Social media, print media, and electronic media reforms are a must to curb the advertisements of tobacco or nicotine products. Counseling Parents and adolescents, to mitigate the effects of peer pressure, busting the myths of ‘being cool’ when one makes use of tobacco.

Timely interventions in the global health policies as well as state and central government laws to levy a heavy tax on tobacco products, imposing stringent rules on manufacturing tobacco products, in order to suppress and discourage its consumption while aiming to bring about a complete and effective ban on tobacco products in the long run. Successful implementation of the above action plan would bring about a mammoth boost to executing the vision of a tobacco- free world.