

# Period Poverty

## Implications for Texas

October 31, 2024

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Period poverty affects girls and women physically, psychologically, and financially, and has socioeconomic impacts on society.
2. Legislation and programs that address period poverty and menstrual health inequity are needed to ensure a healthy and productive society.

## Background

**Period poverty — the lack of period-related products, facilities, and education — which can affect overall well-being.<sup>1</sup>**

### Defining Period Poverty<sup>1</sup>

Period poverty is the **lack** of:



Menstrual hygiene products



Sanitation facilities & waste management



Access to menstrual health education

### Period Poverty in the United States



Individuals aged 18-49 who had menstruated in the past year experienced period product insecurity in 2021.<sup>2</sup>



Over a **third of adults** and a **quarter of teens** struggled to afford menstrual hygiene products in 2023.<sup>3</sup>



3 in 4 teens reported a need for more menstrual health education in 2023.<sup>3</sup>

## Nationwide Implications

### Menstrual health inequity exists in the U.S.

- Period poverty is found across all ages and various socioeconomic domains. **Minorities, first-generation college students, and those living in poverty** are the most affected.<sup>2</sup>

### Insufficient menstrual health education

- In 2023, nearly half of adults and teens reported feeling too ashamed or embarrassed to seek help with questions about their bodies.<sup>3</sup>

### Impacts of Period Stigma on Health and Comfort<sup>3</sup>



**41% of adults** in 2023 felt uncomfortable discussing menstruation at home.<sup>3</sup>



**42% of teens** in 2023 reported feeling unprepared for their first menstrual cycle.<sup>3</sup>

### Socioeconomic Impacts<sup>4</sup>

18%

missed work due to lack of menstrual products.

36%

used a substitute for menstrual products.

34%

wore a product longer than recommended.

18%

struggled between buying necessities (e.g., food, soap) or menstrual products.

\*on U.S. individuals aged 18-49 who had menstruated in the past year

**Psychological and financial inability to adequately manage menstruation adversely impact physical and mental health.**

**Impacts on Teens' Physical and Mental Health<sup>3</sup>**



**44%** reported stress and embarrassment.



**40%** wore products longer than recommended, which is associated with an increased risk of infection.

- Menstruation can be used as a vital sign (similar to blood pressure or heart rate) to inform potential health concerns. Those who lack access to education may not be able to identify abnormal menstrual patterns that require medical attention, leading to potential health concerns later on.<sup>5</sup>

**Period poverty limits productivity and participation in society.**

The inability to manage menstrual cycles results in reduced civic participation and attendance at school, work, and extracurricular activities.

**Teens\* Who Reported an Inability to Complete and Focus on School Work (2023)<sup>3</sup>**



were due to a lack of access to menstrual products



were due to symptoms

\*ages 13-19

**Recommendations in Texas**

**As the state with the second largest population and economy in the U.S., Texas stands to benefit from a productive, healthy society.**

**Women in Texas: By the Numbers<sup>14-18</sup>**

**50.1%** of Texans are female

**15.4%** of women are uninsured

**6.4 million** Women of childbearing age (15-44)

**651,111** ages 19-44 are insured with Medicaid or Medicare\*

**208,129** were enrolled in WIC in 2023

WIC: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

- Provide data-driven and standardized menstrual health education in public schools.<sup>6</sup>
- Ensure access to free menstrual hygiene products in public schools.
  - Legislation:* To date, 28 states and the District of Columbia have enacted similar legislation requiring and funding menstrual hygiene products in public schools.<sup>7</sup>
  - Pilot Program:* School attendance increased by 2.4% at a high school in New York City after New York State enacted legislation providing free menstrual products to students.<sup>8</sup>
  - Ready Availability:* Menstrual products are tax-exempt in Texas (SB 379, took effect on 9/1/2023). Though products are not freely available, some school districts, such as Austin, Dallas, and Fort Worth ISD, provide free menstrual hygiene products to students who need them.<sup>9-12</sup>
- Make menstrual hygiene products available through government assistance programs.<sup>11</sup>
- Modifying programs like SNAP and WIC to allow the purchase of menstrual hygiene products would alleviate the financial cost involved with menstrual care for those who receive food assistance benefits.<sup>11</sup>
- Categorize menstrual products as a paper product under the supplies category of janitorial expenses to make their availability mandatory.

ISD: Independent School District; SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; WIC: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

## Experts

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