

Menstrual Hygiene Products and Schools

Schools in BC are required to provide menstrual products to all students who may require them. See [Provision of Menstrual Products - Province of British Columbia](#). Menstrual supplies include pads, panty liners, period panties, tampons and menstrual cups. A glossary of these items is included below.

Some schools have opted for vending machines to dispense menstrual products and there may be questions about what supplies should be included. While there can be concerns about the use of disposable products and the resulting garbage, most schools do not have the budget to purchase non-disposable products. A simple recommendation for schools would be to purchase **unscented products**, and have a selection of slender or light flow tampons, panty liners and thin pads.

Tampons with applicators are easier to use for younger less experienced tampon-users. Tampons can be used safely by any person who is menstruating regardless of age as long as they feel comfortable inserting them. Information on using tampons for the first time can be found here: [Tampons – Center for Young Women’s Health](#). Concerns have been mentioned about tampon use and toxic shock. It may be helpful to share that instructions in tampon boxes recommend that they be changed every 4- 8 hours. Further helpful information is found online on the website from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada here: [Your Period – Sex & U.](#)

Some schools have encountered students in younger grades (k-2) taking supplies from vending machines. This provides a perfect opportunity to encourage a discussion on body science in early grades and to normalize menstrual supplies and their use.

Glossary:

Menstruation Supplies include pads, panty liners, period panties, tampons, and menstrual cups

- Used to manage menstrual flow.
- Can be bought at drug, grocery, convenience and health stores or online.
- Choose products that are unscented.
- Always dispose of used menstrual supplies in the garbage, not the toilet.

Pads are applied to underwear to absorb menstrual flow as it leaves the vagina.

- Pads come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Pads can be either disposable or reusable (washable).
- Disposable pads attach to the inside of underwear by sticky strips. If they have wings, the wings wrap around the leg openings of the underwear. Wings are meant to help prevent leakage.
- Reusable (washable) pads have snaps to keep them in place.
- Change pads often as needed. If disposable, wrap in toilet paper and put in the garbage. If reusable, put them in a resealable plastic bag (such as a Ziploc® bag) if away from home.
- Reusable pads are washed in the laundry just like any other clothing. Cold water is more effective than hot when washing any item with blood on it.

Panty liners are similar to pads but thinner and absorb only light menstrual flow.

Period panties are underwear that contain an additional absorbent layer of material in the gusset (crotch). Some may also have removable, reusable inserts to absorb even more menstrual flow.

- Some people will use period panties to replace pads, tampons or cups. Others will use them as backup, in case a tampon or cup leaks.
- Panties are washed in the laundry just like any other clothing. Cold water is more effective than hot when washing any item with blood on it.

Tampons are absorbent products put inside the vagina to absorb menstrual flow before it leaves the vagina. They may or may not come with a plastic or cardboard applicator.

- Use the lowest absorbency needed; if the tampon is still somewhat dry after 3 or 4 hours, use a lighter absorbency.
- Tampons need to be changed often: usually at least every 4 hours during the day and no longer than 8 hours at night. Follow the instructions for that particular product.
- To dispose of used tampons, wrap them in toilet paper and put them into the garbage.
- Follow the instructions carefully to learn how to use safely. Incorrect use can result in Toxic Shock Syndrome, a rare but serious infection. Check in with a trusted adult for support.

Menstrual cups are silicone or plastic cups that are inserted into the vagina and collect menstrual flow. Follow the instructions for how to insert.

- Can be safely left in for up to 12 hours, but may need to be changed or emptied more often depending on menstrual flow.
- Disposable cups are removed, wrapped in toilet paper and put in the garbage.
- Reusable cups are removed, rinsed as directed and reinserted and sterilized as per recommendations

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