

PRESS RELEASE



For Immediate Release -- 17 May 2016

Girls' menstrual needs neglected, new journal article finds WaterAid at Women Deliver 2016

Girls' needs around menstruation have been neglected by health and education systems around the world, leading to inequity in education and missed opportunities for girls, WaterAid has warned at the Women Deliver conference on the health, rights and well-being of women and girls.

A [new article](#) in the medical journal PLOS Medicine, co-authored by Thérèse Mahon, Head of South Asia region for WaterAid, has highlighted a lack of guidance, facilities and materials for girls to manage their periods at school, affecting their health, their education and their self-esteem. Girls facing shame, fear and confusion around periods have this exacerbated when there is no clean source of water, soap, or safe, private girls' toilet with space to wash in.

The result is that girls will struggle to succeed at school – even as the priority given to girls' education increases.

Thérèse Mahon, WaterAid Head of Region for South Asia, said:

“The conclusions in this article are shocking. Too often, girls around the world have no idea what is happening when they begin menstruation causing fear and shame around a completely healthy, natural process. Both female students and teachers are frequently without a way to care for themselves during menstruation in schools, impacting their abilities to learn and to teach. Girls are being made more vulnerable to shaming, harassment and even coercive sex in order to obtain money for sanitary supplies. And yet there is an absence of research, particularly about what works, to drive policies to change this. We are joining with others, across sanitation and hygiene, health

and education, to call for a clear evidence base, guidelines for menstrual hygiene management in schools and closer work with the education sector as well as health to empower girls and women during this natural process.”

More than a billion women and girls around the world must manage their periods without a safe, private place to go to the toilet. And nearly half of schools in low- and middle-income countries do not have basic toilets – meaning girls who are menstruating risk embarrassment and shame during this time, and may decide not to attend.

A USAID study has shown that safe, private toilets for girls in schools, combined with private places to wash, can boost their enrolment by 11%.

On Tuesday 17 May WaterAid will host a side event at Women Deliver focusing on menstrual hygiene as an issue of women and girls’ health and human rights, and calling for cooperation with the education and health sectors as well as those working in reproductive and sexual health to ensure girls are prepared for the onset of menstruation, to ensure they can care for themselves in a dignified and hygienic way at home and at school, and to dispel the myths and taboos that often accompany menstruation.

Margaret Batty, director of global policy and advocacy at WaterAid, said:

“On any given day, some 800 million women and girls are on their periods, and hundreds of millions of them are subject to ostracisation, shame and risk of infection because of the stigma that still surrounds menstruation. We need to mobilise policymakers in education and sexual and reproductive health to ensure the basic rights and dignity of girls and women are met.”

Ms Batty will be joined on the panel by organisers WaterAid America director of policy and advocacy Lisa Schechtman and Nina Besser, programme officer of the International Women’s Health Coalition, as well as Kenyan youth rights’ activist Vivian Onano, on a panel moderated by senior Guardian journalist Elizabeth Ford.

The event is at 6 pm in Room 147 at Bella Centre, Copenhagen.

Explore our photo gallery illustrating the challenges young women face trying to manage their periods when clean water, private toilets and a place to wash with soap are hard to come by. <http://assetbank.wateraid.org/assetbank-wateraid/images/assetbox/395ba5d3-6a8d-467a-abf5-7a384efb3ad9/assetbox.html>

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WaterAid at Women Deliver:

- **‘Breaking the Taboo: Protecting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of menstruating women and girls’**, featuring youth rights activist Vivian Onano, Nina Besser of the International Women’s Health Coalition and moderator Elizabeth Ford from The Guardian. *(To register for this event on **Tues 17 May**, Bella Centre Room 179, 6 pm please click [here](#).)*
- **‘Would you give birth without clean water, soap and a toilet?’** An event focusing on the need for water, sanitation and hygiene in healthcare facilities

to improve maternal and newborn health, featuring speakers from WaterAid Rwanda, Unicef, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Centre for Health and Gender Equity, and Every Women Every Child as well as a community health expert from Zambia, Dr Margorie Makukula. (To register for this event on **Wed 18 May**, Bella Centre Room B1M1, 7 am, please click [here](#).)

Other WaterAid visuals:

Pregnant? Congratulations! But will your hospital have water? Some 38% of healthcare facilities in the developing world don't – which means millions of women in Africa give birth each year in healthcare facilities without. Check out our new film, 'The Ultimate Pregnancy Test'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jH26uimQ8eA>

Watch WaterAid's stunning film, Parallel Lives, illustrating the differences – and similarities – in the lives of midwives in Liverpool, UK and Kiomboi, Tanzania.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pz84KiKAKPs>

Experience Parallel Lives as an interactive film here:

<http://www.wateraid.org/uk/news/news/experience-life-as-a-midwife-with-our-new-interactive-film>

Explore our photo gallery showing how what women bring to the hospital to give birth changes around the world, depending on what they find upon arrival. <http://assetbank.wateraid.org/assetbank-wateraid/images/assetbox/3f55c031-7fae-440f-9512-f15d367934d6/assetbox.html>

About WaterAid

WaterAid's vision is of a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation. The international organisation works in 37 countries across Africa, Asia, Central America and the Pacific Region to transform lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in some of the world's poorest communities. Since 1981, WaterAid has reached 23 million people with safe water and, since 2004, 21 million people with sanitation. For more information, visit www.wateraid.org, follow @WaterAidUK on Twitter, or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/wateraid.

- Around 315,000 children die each year from diarrhoeal diseases caused by dirty water and poor sanitation. That's nearly 900 children each day, or one child every two minutes.

- Over 650 million people (around one in ten) are without safe water
- Over 2.3 billion people (around one in three) live without improved sanitation
- For every £1 invested in water and sanitation, an average of £4 is returned in increased productivity.
- Just £15 can help provide one person with access to safe water.