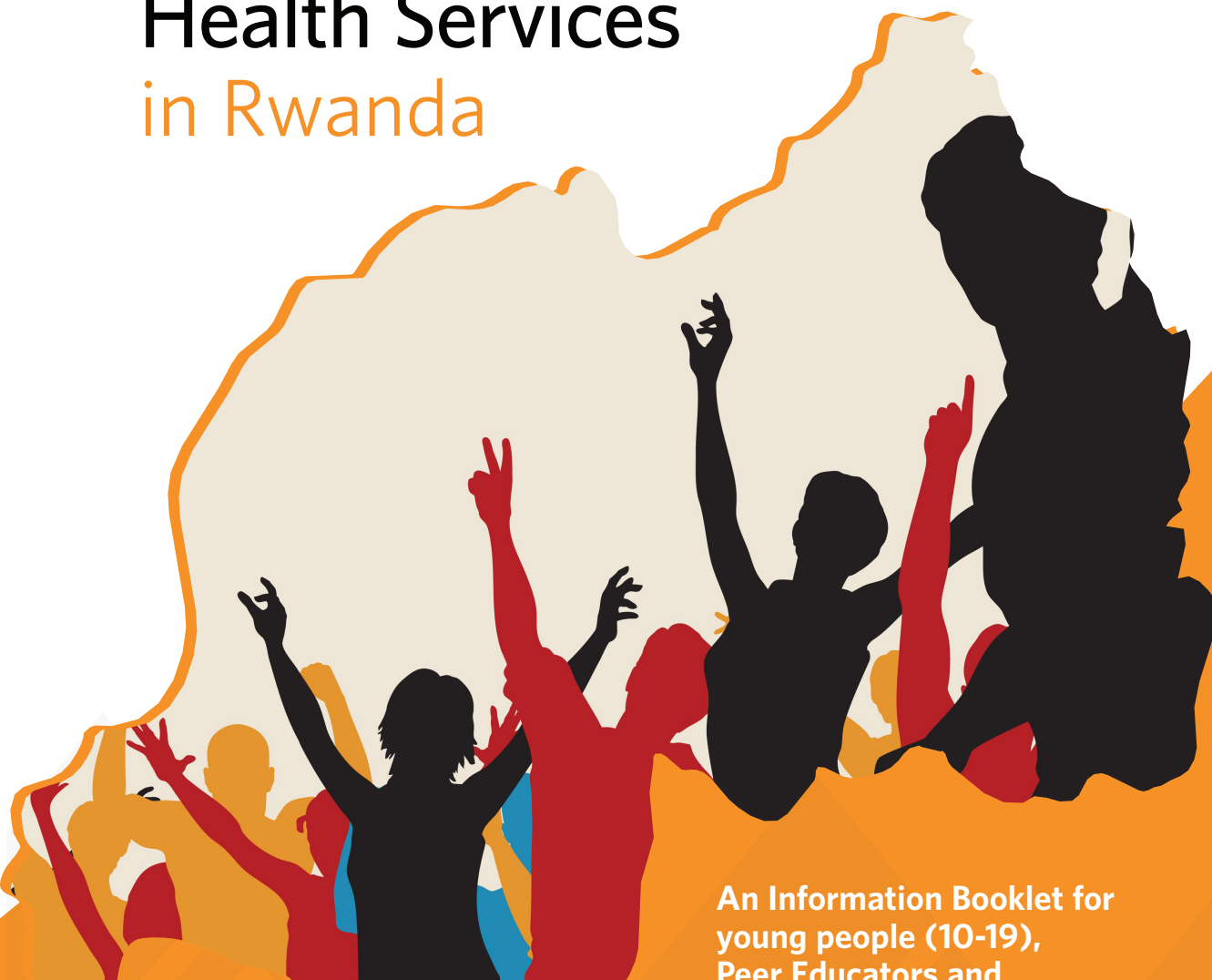

Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Youth Friendly Health Services in Rwanda



An Information Booklet for
young people (10-19),
Peer Educators and
Youth Counsellors.

DID YOU KNOW

that the Safeguard Young People (SYP) Programme is coming to Rwanda?

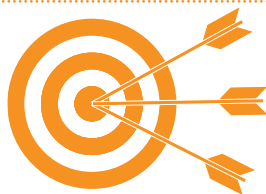
SYP programme is a multi-country regional youth programme implemented by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It focuses on empowering adolescents and youth (10-24) using human rights-based approaches to ensure youth-friendly laws and policies, integrated HIV and Sexual Reproductive Health information and services, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) for in and out-of-school and with a special focus on girls and young people's active participation in development processes.

From 2013-2019, the SYP programme main focus has been on the following eight **(8)** Southern African countries:

1. **Botswana;**
2. **Lesotho;**
3. **Malawi;**
4. **Namibia;**
5. **South Africa;**
6. **Swaziland;**
7. **Zambia and**
8. **Zimbabwe.**

In 2020, UNFPA and SDC have agreed to expand the programme to East Africa and to include Rwanda and Tanzania.



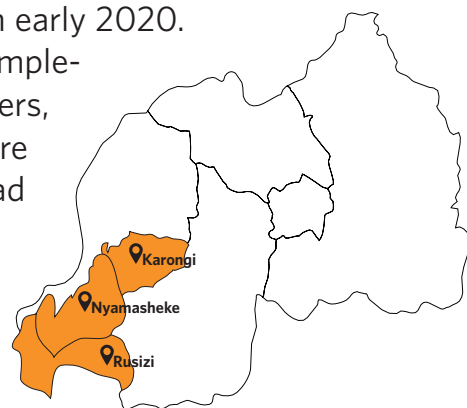


What is the Purpose of this Booklet?

This booklet aims to give you essential information you need as a young person. It tries to address the gaps in knowledge identified by the study which was conducted in the three districts (**Karongi, Nyamasheke and Rusizi**) of the Western Province of Rwanda in early 2020.

The information contained in this booklet complements information you receive from teachers, parents and healthcare providers. If you are aged 10 - 19 years old, we invite you to read this booklet and protect yourself against rumors and misconceptions. You know that:

"Knowledge is Power."



Let's clarify some Key Words in this Booklet

Youth Friendly Health Services

Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS) are services that are accessible, acceptable and appropriate for adolescents. They help young people to seek information and services related to adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

They are provided by healthcare personnel respecting young people's privacy, choices and confidentiality.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a curriculum based programme, taught over several years, providing age-appropriate information consistent with the evolving capacities of young people and discussing issues which refer to adolescent sexual and reproductive health, puberty and menstruation and healthy relationships.



In Rwanda, CSE has been integrated in the competence-based curriculum for **primary** and **secondary schools** and teachers should mainstream the concepts of **CSE into daily teachings**.

Puberty/Adolescence

Puberty refers to the transitional biological stage marking the end of childhood and the start of early adulthood; the period of time during which the body matures and achieves reproductive capacity; usually between 10 – 16 years, sometimes earlier or later in some people. It is also called Adolescence.



Sex

Refers to the biological differences between men and women. You are either born a male or female. Generally, these differences are permanent that is, they cannot be changed. The term “sex” is also used to refer to sexual intercourse.



Gender



Refers to the differences between men and women created by society on the basis of sex. Gender includes:

- Unequal treatment;
- Unequal power between men and women;
- Different roles taught to boys and girls;
- Our idea of what is male and female and gender roles ascribed to them.

Gender roles

Ideas about how men and women should behave—are created by society, culture and traditions. As they grow up, girls and boys learn about how women and men should behave from their parents, community, religious institutions, schools, and the media. Gender roles are also different for people of different ages—for example, young girls may be given very different tasks and levels of responsibility from their grandmothers. These gender roles are biased and cause discrimination.

Sexuality

Includes much more than just sexual intercourse, it covers:

- An awareness and feelings about your own body and other people's bodies;
- The ability to be emotionally close to someone else;
- A clear understanding of what it means to be male or female;
- Feeling of sexual attraction to other people;
- The physical capacity to reproduce.



How to make Sexual Decisions?

Decision-making is a very hard process, especially when it involves topics such as sex and relationships. Young people may choose, according to their values, traditional and religious beliefs, to abstain from sexual activity until they are married, others may give in to pressure to have sex. It is important to know that **our choices have consequences** and that failure to make good decisions about sex is one reason so many teenagers have unplanned pregnancies and/or become infected with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. It is fundamental to acknowledge that:

- It is best to wait to have sex until you are ready and mature enough;
- Don't let anyone pressure you into having sex;
- Acknowledge that sex is not the only way to demonstrate feelings.



Abstinence

What is it and Why is it important for you?

Abstinence is the avoidance of, or non-involvement in all forms of sexual activity.

Being abstinent is one of the best decisions that you will ever make.

To stick to your decision, you would have to know why you want to abstain.

Abstinence is the only method that will avoid pregnancy, STIs and HIV / AIDS 100 percent. **As a young person, you should abstain from sex until your body has matured and you have completed your education.**

Abstinence has many benefits; let's mention only 5 key ones:

Five (5) benefits you get from abstaining From sex



1. You learn the difference between sex and love;
2. You avoid the pain that comes from having sex when you are not ready;
3. You can focus on your education without fear of contracting STIs or dropping out of school due to pregnancy;
4. You won't feel guilty or have bad sexual experiences which you may regret;
5. You will respect yourself and be confident in your decisions.

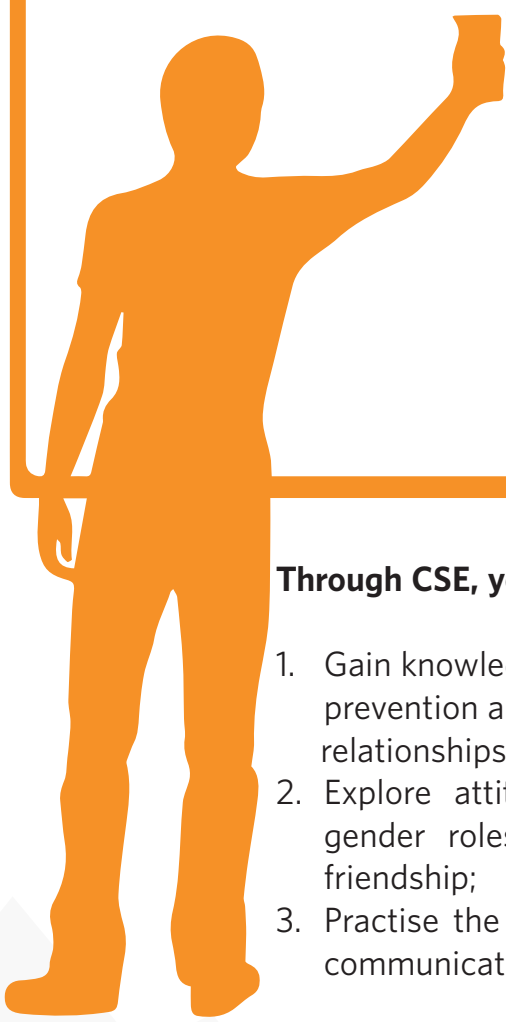


What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education(CSE)?

The main objectives of CSE teachings are to provide children and young people in Rwanda with an opportunity to learn more about themselves, their interests, strengths, family and personal values and the factors that influence their feelings about themselves; assist them to establish goals and make decisions related to parenthood and to encourage them to achieve their goals.

Sexuality: A significant aspect of a person's life, from birth to death, consisting of many interrelated factors, including anatomy, growth and development, gender, relationships, behaviors, attitudes, values, self-esteem, sexual health, reproduction, and more

In summary, CSE aims to increase learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes in eight (8) key areas:

- 
- 1. Relationships**
 - 2. Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality**
 - 3. Gender**
 - 4. Violence and Staying Safe**
 - 5. Skills for Health and Well-being**
 - 6. The Human Body and Development**
 - 7. Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour**
 - 8. Sexual and Reproductive Health.**

Through CSE, you should be able to:

1. Gain knowledge about yourself, sexuality, pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections, relationships and other related topics;
2. Explore attitudes and values about growing up, gender roles, risk taking, sexual expression and friendship;
3. Practise the skills of decision making, goal setting, communication, negotiation, and resisting pressure.

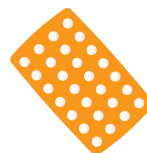
Sometimes, due to cultural or religious barriers, not all teachers feel comfortable in talking about sexuality and other CSE topics to students; however, it is your right as a student to ask for clarifications and explanations on these topics, as they are fundamental for a healthy growth. The school is one of the best places to obtain clear and true information about sexuality, healthy relations, menstruation, puberty and many more: **ask questions!**



Do you know what Contraception is about?

Contraceptives are different methods to avoid unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

These include intrauterine device (IUD), condom, pills, injectables, abstinence and many more methods.



Sometimes, young people have very confused ideas about contraception as they gathered information from not trustworthy sources, for example:

“Sometimes I also think of getting a family planning method now (before being married)... but I am afraid that this may have consequences on my life, since I may not be able to give birth because of the family planning methods I used in the past ”

(IDI, Girl 15-19 Karongi District)



“Some people fear going to the hospital, because they may be seen getting injections for family planning even if they are not yet married...and some might report to their parents”

(FGD, Girls 15-19 Karongi District)





This is not true! Health workers provide information and advice on contraceptive methods, regardless of their marital status and respect their privacy confidentiality, so they are not allowed to tell other people in the village about the services you requested.

If you want to know more about contraception... You can always ask your teacher, Community Health Workers or the healthcare provider in the nearby Youth Corner; they will give you information and direct you on the best contraceptive method for you!



What is a Condom?

A condom is one of the contraceptive methods which is easier to obtain and to use. It is a barrier method, meaning that it “blocks” the sperm from entering the vagina. Thanks to this, condoms (males and females ones) are the best modern contraceptive method to prevent not only unwanted pregnancies, but also sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

You can buy condoms at the shops, but you can also obtain them for free from Community Health Workers, Condom kiosks, health centers and youth corners.

Common Misconceptions about Condoms

There are a lot of myths and beliefs around condoms, but make sure you get your information from trustworthy sources!

Many people are afraid of condoms and think it is “dangerous”:

“The issue is that the youth are worried that condoms might get stuck inside them and this can require going to the hospital which is shameful to them, so they decide to not use it”

(FGD, Girls 15-19 Karongi District)



This is not true, and as long as the condom is applied correctly, it is a safe method.

“Some say that they don’t enjoy having sex when they use condom; then they decide not to use it”

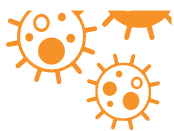
(IDI, Boy 15-19 Karongi District)



As the condom is an additional layer on top of the male’s penis skin, some might say that the “pleasure” is reduced. This is not always the case and it is important to remember that safety is the most important thing! If your partner refuses to wear a condom when you are asking him or her to wear one, be firm in your decisions and say No to unprotected sex - it can save your life!



**SAY NO
TO UNPROTECTED
SEX**



Do you know what is a Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

STIs are infections which are mostly spread by having and unprotected sex , but can also be spread by exchange of blood, vaginal fluids or semen. They are many and very different, such as gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes, HIV/AIDS and more and they present very different symptoms, from itching and redness of genitals to abrasions and many more: for more information, make sure you ask your teacher or community health workers. You can also go to a youth corner nearby your place!

If you have had unprotected sex, ensure to visit the nearby health center for testing and check-ups. And remember...**always abstain from sexual intercourse**. If you are a sexually active young person, use condoms. Condoms are the most effective modern contraceptive method to prevent STIs and unintended pregnancy.



What do you know about HIV?

Most of us know that HIV is a sexually transmitted virus and may lead to depression.

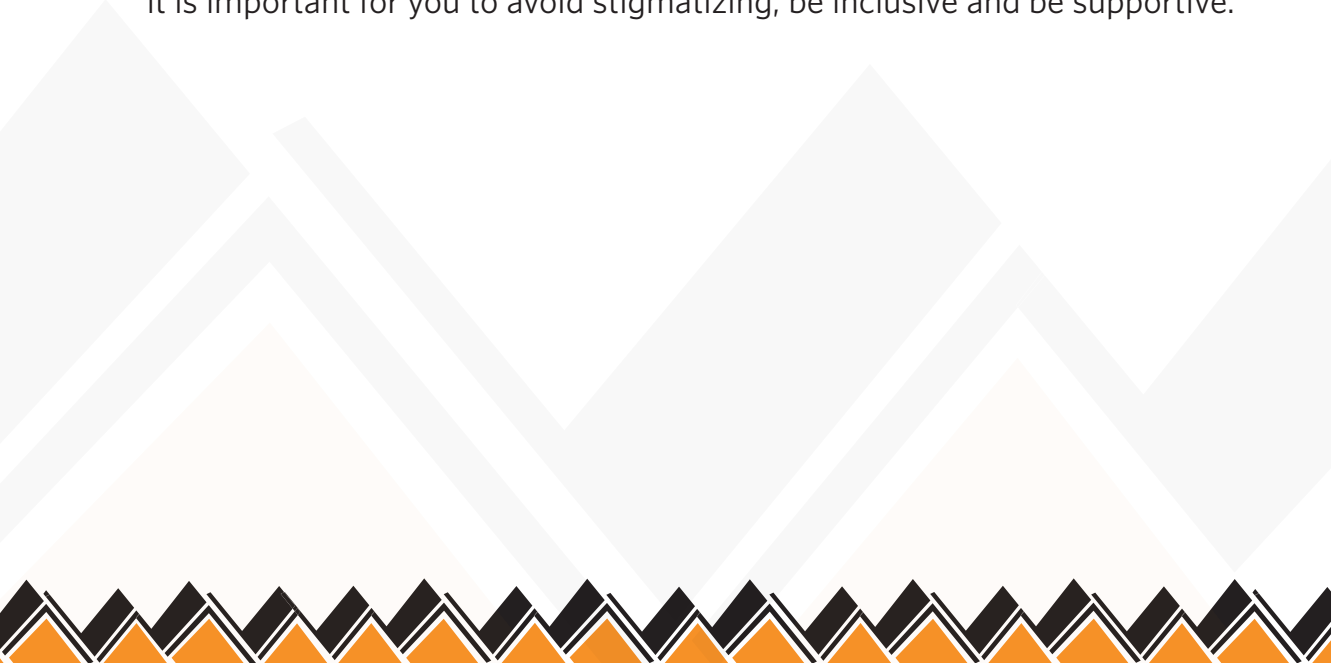
HIV can be transmitted through vaginal fluids and semen while having unprotected sex (vaginal, oral and anal) and through infected blood (like sharing needles and syringes or other sharp objects). It cannot be transmitted by hugging or kissing, nor by eating together or spending time with an infected person!

If abstinence is not an option, the best way to deal with HIV is to ensure to always have protected sex and limit the number of sexual partners, to do regular testing to check your status (it is free!) and, if positive, to immediately start medication: if you are on medication for HIV, you can live a healthy life and give birth to HIV negative children!

You can go for Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) at the closest health centre at any time of the day! You will not have to pay anything and the health care providers will take you through every step with patience and care and give you the test results in just a few minutes. You can also refer to the VCT or to the community health workers.

Sometimes, people living with HIV are stigmatized by society and distanced from families and communities. This causes them to live in shame and isolation and leads to depression for unfounded reasons such as being able to infect others and be “bad” people.

These are myths that deeply affect the feelings and mental health of people living with HIV. Remember that being together, eating, playing, studying with a person living with HIV will not put you at risk of contraction of HIV. Also, you cannot blame someone for having HIV: they might have made a wrong choice in engaging in risky sexual behaviours, but this is not for you to judge! They might have also been infected with HIV at birth or by contact with infected blood during an accident, you will never know and therefore it is important for you to avoid stigmatizing, be inclusive and be supportive.





What is Gender Based Violence?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender, usually compromising the health, security and will of the victim. Gender-based violence is violence involving men and women, boys and girls, in which the female is usually the victim. It is derived from unequal power relationships between men and women.

Violence is directed specifically against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately. It includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological harm (including intimidation, suffering, coercion, and/or deprivation of liberty within the family, or within the general community). Although less common, men can also be victims of GBV.

Gender-based violence takes many forms. It is deeply rooted in the way we are raised and socialised – to believe that men have the right to expect certain things from women and the right to use physical or verbal force if these expectations are not fulfilled. It is also linked to the power and privileges that men enjoy in society. Recognising gender-based violence as a problem and addressing it successfully is an important first step for all learners.

Men and boys are more likely to be victims of violence, as they are more likely to be involved in warfare or gang violence. Women and girls are more likely to experience violence in public and private spaces such as the home and in the community. Often women and girls are harmed by someone they know, usually a relative, neighbour or boyfriend.

Know Types Of Gender Based Violence

Gender based violence may be:

- Physical (beating, kicking, burning, stabbing, feticide, infanticide, etc.);
- Mental and emotional (deliberately ignoring, insulting or manipulating, humiliating, confinement or isolation, irrational suspicion or verbal (taunting, shouting, making threats, etc.);
- Economic (depriving someone of money, paying less than what is due, restricting access to money and property etc.);
- Sexual (child defilement, sexual harassment, coerced sex etc.);
- Harmful traditional practices (female genital mutilation, forced divorce or marriage etc)



Violence may lead to physical injury, mental and emotional trauma, loss of self-esteem and even death. The harmful effects of violence are thus numerous and very serious.

Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights and it is always wrong. It is not the fault of the victim and the victim should not be ashamed in reporting it.

Gender based violence and child defilement must be reported to **Isange One Stop Centre (IOSC)** including police, but if you are afraid to go directly through them, you can also refer to people near you who you trust and they can support in this: **parents, teachers, community or religious leaders and even friends** can help you in reporting child defilement and gender based violence including getting the necessary treatment.

The Isange One Stop Centres (IOSCs) are safe places to go if you become a victim of child defilement and gender based violence and obtain all the needed support from experienced people. **Ensure to locate where the closest IOSC is in your locality.**



What is Teenage Pregnancy?

It is considered “teenage pregnancy” when a girl below the age of 19 gives birth. In Rwanda, teenage pregnancy is rampant although there has been a decrease since 2015 to 2019, there is still more to be done; in 2015 about 1 in 13 girls (7.3%) in Rwanda was a teenage mother, today about 1 in 20 girls (5.2%) are teenage mothers

Teenage pregnancy is considered as a result of GBV and sexual violence due to the fact that, since the girl was under-age when she became pregnant, she could have not legally given consent for a sexual intercourse. Although this might be confusing, as you might think that a girl became pregnant when she had sex with her boyfriend because she “wanted to”, according to the law, someone who is below 18 years old does not have the capacity to make consensual decisions and therefore the sexual intercourse results in an act of “child defilement”.

Teenage pregnancy is often the result of coerced sex (meaning when the partner insists a lot of having sex and emotionally forces the other to accept) and coercion to have unprotected sex.

Some youth also believe that due to their young age or the fact that it is their first time having sex, they cannot be pregnant or make a girl pregnant: This is not true! As long as both partners have reached puberty, the girl can be pregnant!

“No, I don’t think I can make a girl pregnant because I am young”

(FGD, Boys 15-19 Karongi, P7)





Why do we say “Teenage Pregnancy” is Bad?

Teenage pregnancy often has a negative and sometimes devastating effect on both the mother and the newborn in terms of physical, emotional and financial aspects. Let us try to analyze them one by one:

Physical effects of teenage pregnancy: often, the body of a young girl, although it has already reached the menarche, it is not fully developed to give birth to a new life and it might bring complications during pregnancy and/or birth which might even lead to death either of the mother or of the baby (or both).

Emotional effects of teenage pregnancy: teenage pregnancy can have a very serious effect on the mother's mental health as she can undergo a lot of distress due to the pregnancy itself but also due to the social stigmatization suffered from the family, friends and communities which may lead to social isolation and depression. School drop-outs can also affect girls' mental and emotional wellbeing.

Financial aspects of teenage pregnancy: as a matter of fact, raising a baby is costly and will require financial resources which teenagers might not have, but this is not the only issue. Very often, when a girl becomes pregnant, she drops out of school: this leads her to undermine her education and therefore her future job opportunities, creating a “poverty-cycle”.

In all the above mentioned aspects, the effect on girls are disproportionate compared to the effects on boys or on the fathers of the child: besides not suffering any physical effect, boys usually do not have to face school drop-outs or stigmatization and they are usually less affected financially.

Common Misconceptions about Pregnancy and Sexual Activity

You can't get pregnant the first time you have sex.



You can get pregnant anytime you have vaginal sex. If you're having sex without any method of contraception, you can get pregnant — whether it's the first time or the 100th time. It's even possible for you to get pregnant before you have your first period. So abstain from sexual activity.

You can't get pregnant during your period.



It's not very common, but it's possible to get pregnant from sex you had during your period. This is because sperm can hang out in your reproductive organs for six whole days, waiting for one of your eggs to come out.

Douching/bathing after sex prevents pregnancy.



The only thing that will prevent pregnancy is abstaining from sexual activity or using a birth control method if you are sexually active.

If you get a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) once, you can never get it again.



A lot of STIs can be cured with antibiotics. But once they're cured, you can get them again. So if you get treated for an STI, your partner should be treated also — otherwise they could give the infection right back to you if you have sex again. And you should keep getting tested whenever you have unprotected sex or start having sex with someone new.

But why take the risk? **Protect Yourself, Protect your Health** and the benefits are many.

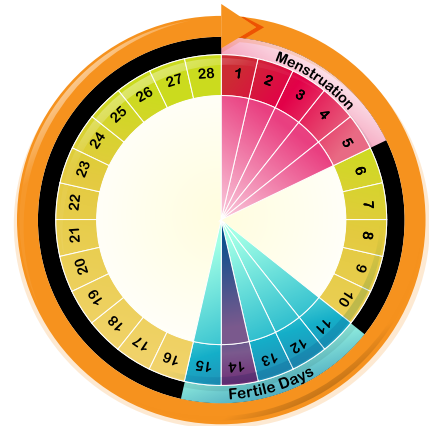


What is a Menstrual Cycle and Menstruation?

Menstruation is part of the menstrual cycle cycle of biological changes that take place in a woman or girl's reproductive system to prepare her body for a potential pregnancy. It is the process in which the uterus sheds blood and tissue through the vagina.

This is a natural and healthy process for girls and women of reproductive age. It typically lasts 2 to 5 days, but this varies by individual. When a person begins to menstruate, this is called menarche. The age of menarche varies by individual and from that moment on, the girl must know she can be pregnant.

THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE



The menstrual cycle is roughly 28 days long, but it can be shorter or longer. It begins with menstruation (considered day 1 of the cycle). Menstruation is the shedding of the lining of the uterus and the remnants of the unfertilized egg. It continues with an increase in the hormone estrogen, and the lining of the uterus becomes thick and spongy again (typically days 6-8).

An egg is released from one of the ovaries, called "ovulation" (around day 14, but this can vary), then the egg moves through the fallopian tube towards the uterus (typically day 15-24). If the egg is not fertilized, it will not be implanted in the uterine wall but instead fall apart, and hormone levels such as estrogen and progesterone, will drop. This process is followed by the start of a new cycle.

While a person's menstrual cycles may be consistent – even predictable – they can also change or vary, particularly in the first few years after menarche. Some changes, such as absence of bleeding, signal a pregnancy. Other changes can be related to contraceptive use, stress, nutrition, physical activity or health concerns. Some cycle changes are just a natural part of ageing.

Menstruation can also be very painful for some girls - it is normal and it varies from person to person.

What is Menstrual Health Management?

Menstrual health management (also known as menstrual hygiene management) is the set of activities which can ensure hygiene and sanitation during the menstruation process. As a matter of fact, menstruation is a very delicate process in a woman's body and proper hygiene can prevent infections and diseases.

There is now wide agreement about what women and adolescents require during menstruation:

- You must have access to clean material to absorb or collect menstrual blood;
- You must be able to change these materials in safety and privacy, and have a place to dispose of used menstrual supplies or to wash reusable supplies;
- Menstruating women and girls must also be able to safely and privately wash with soap and water.
- You should have basic education about the menstrual cycle and how to manage menstruation without discomfort or fear.
- Women and girls should also have access to health information and care if they experience menstruation-related disorders.

Menstrual products must also be safe, effective and acceptable to the people who use them. These products may include: Disposable sanitary napkins, reusable sanitary napkins, disposable tampons, menstrual cups, and clean, absorbent fabrics such as rags or underwear, which need to be properly washed and sun-dried, then stored in a clean and dry place until the following cycle.



Menstruation is a very normal aspect of female puberty, and it does not need to be stigmatized. A woman, when availed the proper menstrual health management products, can easily perform her daily activities (whether these include going to school, studying, meeting with friends or eating with the family) even while menstruating.

Common Misconceptions about Menstruation

Misconceptions about menstruation have led to women's and girls' exclusion from all kinds of roles and settings. It is important that you know the truth about some of these misconceptions:

Menstruation indicates readiness for marriage and sex

While menstruation is one indication of biological fertility, it does not mean girls have reached mental, emotional, psychological or physical maturity. In rare cases, menarche can take place before a girl reaches age 7 or 8, for example. And even older teens may not be mature enough to make informed choices about marriage, sexual activity or motherhood.

All women are moody when they menstruate

The menstrual cycle is driven by hormonal changes. These have different effects on different people. In some women, moodiness is a side-effect of these hormonal changes. Other women do not experience mood changes.

Menstruation should not be discussed publicly

Silence about menstruation can lead to ignorance and neglect, including at the policy level. This leaves women and girls vulnerable to discrimination. Those living with HIV can face stigma when seeking sanitation facilities, menstruation supplies and health care, for example. Those in prisons or other forms of detention may be deprived of menstruation supplies.

Menstruation limits what women and girls can do

No. While menstruation has been used in many countries and cultures to exclude women and girls from all kinds of roles and settings, there is really nothing that menstruating people cannot do. However, the management of menstruation does influence what people can do. Menstrual symptoms can also affect what women and girls feel like doing.





Recommendations

- Abstain from sexual activity until you are older and mature enough to make life decisions;
- If you are having sexual intercourse, always have protected sex to avoid unintended pregnancies and STIs;
- Do not be ashamed to ask for information or services, it is your right! You can talk about this to your teachers, to community health workers and to the health providers which are at the youth corner or in the health center nearby your place. Remember: Community Health Workers and health personnel are bound to keep your secrets, they will not talk to your parents or others;
- When your teacher is taking you through comprehensive sexuality education, don't be afraid to ask questions: topics such as sexual intercourses, contraceptives, healthy relationships and menstrual cycles are part of CSE and it is your right to obtain those information;
- If you have experienced sexual violence, don't be ashamed in asking for help, and if you hear someone is a victim of sexual violence, be ready to help and support without stigmatizing the person. Remember the Isange One Stop Centre is the best place to get comprehensive support from trained professionals;
- As a youth, you are the one who can make change: speak up and let your voice be heard! Everyone needs to know your opinion in matters which regards youth, including in sexual and reproductive health. Nothing for youth without youth.



The consequences [of teenage pregnancy] are so many, like to drop out for those who study, to be a burden for your family because you consume much and it becomes so difficult for you especially when your sex partner cannot help you by providing all you need, like diapers, porridge, what to feed your child or even providing food for you. You are under the responsibility of your parents and sometimes your parents are not able to satisfy all your needs. This is when your kid can be affected by malnutrition (...) because you gave birth and failed to give appropriate care.

(IDI, Girl 20-24 Rusizi).

Developed in
partnership with:

