



BHES

Menstruation and menopause policy

Note: in this policy reference to governing body or governors refers to the management committee and its members.

Where contextually appropriate for school read service.

Bristol Hospital Education Service

Established over thirty years ago, Bristol Hospital Education Service is an Outstanding educational provision designed to support young people who are unable to access mainstream education because of medical needs.

Date: 07/10/2025

HISTORY OF POLICY CHANGES

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Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to normalise comfort in the workplace for female staff who are menstruating. It is intended to overcome period stigma and create an environment where women staff members feel confident to raise issues and ask for support and adjustments at work.

Menstruation is a normal part of a woman's life. Bristol Hospital Education Service recognises that women who are menstruating need dignity, privacy, and respect in the workplace, and that menstruation is an equality and occupational health and safety issue. This means that women may need appropriate flexibility, support, and adjustments to remove or reduce disadvantages to women and allow them to thrive at work.

Sickness and absence policies should not penalise women unfairly because of menstruation symptoms they may be experiencing such as: cramps, fatigue, or migraine.

Introducing the actions in this policy can encourage a positive workplace that empowers women and supports their wellbeing and effectiveness. Implementation can also help avoid discrimination or harassment on grounds of sex or disability. A general risk assessment, or work environment assessment, can make sure that the physical environment is not making a woman's period symptoms worse.

Scope

This policy applies to all Bristol Hospital Education Service workers, regardless of their contract type or job role.

Bristol Hospital Education Service has adopted this policy following consultation and negotiation with its staff and the recognised trade unions.

Equality

Bristol Hospital Education Service will always comply with all relevant employment and equality legislation and regulations, and is committed to safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of all staff, ensuring a fair and supportive working environment for everyone.

Providing appropriate access to suitable toilets and period products at work will enable women experiencing heavy periods to continue working rather than to call in sick.

Bristol Hospital Education Service will ensure that women are not discriminated against, particularly on grounds of sex or disability. Relevant case law in this area is outlined below under 'Avoiding discrimination'.

Awareness

Bristol Hospital Education Service will ensure that staff - particularly colleagues with line management responsibilities - have some awareness of menstruation, the variety of experiences, and the potential impact on work, can assist in supporting women in the workplace.

It is important to recognise the following:

- menstruation is not an illness.
- menstruation is a natural biological event.
- the symptoms of menstruation vary from woman to woman and often from month to month.
- many women have negligible symptoms.
- women who are struggling due to menstruation related symptoms may not feel comfortable to say so due to the stigma of discussing periods.
- symptoms can range from: mild headaches, tiredness, and back pain, to fainting, debilitating cramps, nausea, or migraines.
- Menstruation and menopause are not mutually exclusive, and symptoms can vary throughout different stages of a woman's life.
- simple measures can alleviate many of the less severe menstruation symptoms.
- some women can experience symptoms in the weeks before their period, known as premenstrual syndrome (or PMS).
- the symptoms of PMS can include mood swings, feeling upset, anxious, or irritable, tiredness or trouble sleeping, bloating or abdominal pain.
- women can also experience endometriosis (10 per cent of women in the UK experience the condition), uterine fibroids, or other painful periods.
- a small number of women may experience more severe premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). Symptoms of PMDD are more intense and impact negatively on daily activities. Symptoms can include severe cramps, headaches, severe insomnia, extreme anxiety, or depression.
- Most women have never taken time off for period pain or related symptoms; severe menstruation symptoms might necessitate sick leave.

Access to toilets

One of the main issues surrounding menstruation is the access to bathroom facilities, the time needed, during a menstrual cycle, to ensure adequate ablutions, and the need for privacy during this time.

As such, Bristol Hospital Education Service will ensure there are sufficient female staff toilets, within reasonable reach of classrooms, and female staff have enough time to use them throughout the course of the working day.

Flexible adjustments

To facilitate adequate support for women during their working day, Bristol Hospital Education Service will ensure the following adjustments are implemented where necessary:

- adjustments to start or finish times of the working day for women experiencing severe period pain or endometriosis.
- scheduled breaks between lessons to enable women to use toilet facilities.
- scheduled breaks between the end of the school day and any twilight events/meetings.
- remote or homeworking for some tasks as appropriate.
- lockers or other space for women to store a spare change of clothes.
- cover to enable women to use facilities during lessons. For example: a simple system to enable women to ask for temporary cover to allow them to use toilet facilities during lessons (e.g. ask a student to take a laminated card/particular innocuous object to the school office to indicate that emergency temporary cover is being requested).
- The aim is to remove period stigma. But where women members of staff feel uncomfortable going to their line manager, because he is a man, alternative contacts should be available. Confidentiality will always be respected.

Period products

Whilst the majority of female staff will carry their own period products, the act of having to carry these conspicuously to a toilet block can cause frustration or incite anxiety. Putting the following in place will alleviate those areas immensely and ensure female staff feel supported in their workplace:

- to avoid having to carry a product from the classroom to the toilet, period products available in all toilet blocks used by female staff, including any mixed sex and disabled facilities.
- sufficient robust toilet paper and spare toilet paper.
- period product paper bags and waste bins in all toilet cubicles used by female staff which are regularly emptied.

Access to hot water

It is well known that hot water bottles or heat pads can sooth period pain. To enable female staff to alleviate menstruation-related pain, Bristol Hospital Education Service will ensure they have access to facilities to enable hot water bottles to be filled, and opportunities to do so throughout the day.

Pain killers

Keeping a supply of pain killers, e.g., paracetamol, available for staff use in the staff room or reception will assist women in managing period pain at work. For safety reasons, the supply should be stored securely, not in first aid boxes, with a secure sign-out system.

Appropriate seating

An adjustable chair or appropriate back support can alleviate some back pain associated with menstruation. Bristol Hospital Education Service will provide appropriate auxiliary aids for female staff as appropriate.

Access to appropriate sick leave policies and procedures

For the most part, the majority of women are able to continue to work as normal when they are menstruating. However, adjusting the working environment to women's needs will reduce the need for any sickness absence.

Women will call in sick when they are too sick to work. Any instances of sickness absence stated as being related to menstruation, endometriosis, uterine fibroids, menopause or perimenopause, will be recorded separately from other sickness absence and will not trigger disciplinary penalties.

Avoiding discrimination

Placing a woman at a disadvantage for reasons related to menstruation could amount to sex discrimination or harassment based on her sex. In [Rooney v Leicestershire City Council](#) (2021) a woman was treated negatively due to going through menopause. Women who need time off work to manage severe period pain should not be disadvantaged in comparison to men.

The symptoms of severe premenstrual dysphoric disorder or endometriosis could amount to a disability. In [Manning v The Governors of Trinity Church of England School](#) (2019) the tribunal accepted that a teacher with endometriosis was a disabled person. She experienced blood loss, which caused the anaemia, resulting in tiredness; and pain led to sleeplessness and an inability to carry out day-to-day tasks.

Review and monitoring

Bristol Hospital Education Service will review this policy every two years in consultation with the recognised trade unions