Menstrual Health and Hygiene

Why in news?

Menstrual Hygiene Day is observed on May 28th to highlight the critical importance of proper menstrual hygiene management and break stigma around it.

What is Menstrual Health and Hygiene?

- Menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) means the ability to access menstrual products, privacy to change the pads/menstrual cups etc, and access to facilities to dispose of used product.
- **Menstrual products -** Pads (or sanitary napkins), cloth napkins, tampons, menstrual cups, etc.

What are India's efforts towards MHH?

- India has been a front runner for action on menstrual hygiene but often the focus has often been on India's rural population.
- The National Health Mission 2011 promoted a menstrual hygiene scheme among adolescent girls in rural areas.
- Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is an integral part of the 'Swachh Bharat Mission' guidelines.
- The Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation also issued MHM guidelines for schools in 2015.
- **Free Napkins -** Different states have their own schemes, but the primary focus of service delivery remains on the distribution of sanitary napkins.
- Kerala and Karnataka governments have been distributing menstrual cups as a sustainable alternative to sanitary napkins.
- Click here, to know more about India's efforts.

What are India's challenges in MHH?

- **Urban India -** India's rapidly growing urban areas lack accessibility to toilets in many public spaces.
- **Educating Men -** Menstrual health is not a 'women's subject' and it is important to educate boys and men about menstruation.
- Comprehensive and meaningful education on menstrual processes, supportive environments, encouraging participation, and honest conversations make them better understand.
- **Social Taboos -** The social taboos about menstruation limit girls' and women's lives and restricts them at different levels.
- The practice of segregating menstruating girls and women to '*kurmaghars*' (period

huts) are still found in places like Maharashtra.
- **Accessibility -** Women in informal work (e.g. construction work) often have no access to washrooms, clean water, and to cost-effective hygiene products or their safe disposal.
- **Menstrual Leave -** The 2022 'Right of Women to Menstrual Leave and Free Access to Menstrual Health Products Bill' specified three days of paid leave for women.
- Only Kerala and Bihar currently have menstrual leave policies for women.

What are the other issues around Menstruation?

- **Inclusivity -** The menstrual needs of the differently abled, transgender men, and people with other gender identities who menstruate like intersex has to be addressed.
- **Disposal -** Safe disposal of sanitary napkins is often overlooked and has misconceptions around it.
- **Quality -** The quality issues in sanitary napkins distributed could possibly undermine the goal of providing it.
- **Alternatives -** Menstrual cups are a cheap, sustainable, and eco-friendly alternative to sanitary napkins but still women are sceptical.
- **Socio-economic Factors -** these factors limits their choice of menstrual products and disposal mechanisms.

What need to be done to improve MHH?

- Awareness about periods along with efforts to address harmful social and gender norms.
- Menstrual products, both reusable and disposable, must be more available through various access channels.
- Female-friendly community and public toilets to be built more to provide safe, private, clean facilities to manage periods.
- The provision of dustbins and incinerators in female toilets for waste disposal and management.
- Addressing the needs of menstruating people in urban slums and refugee camps.
- Catering the menstrual needs of formal and informal women workforce and workspaces.

Quick Facts

Menstrual Hygiene Day

- Menstrual Hygiene Day is observed every year on the 28^{th} day of the fifth month.
- It is because menstrual cycle averages 28 days in length and people on an average menstruate for five days each month.
- Menstrual Hygiene Day was started by Germany-based NGO WASH United and it was observed for the first time on May 28, 2014.

References

1. The Hindu - Menstrual health is a public health issue
2. The Hindu - What are India's challenges in Menstrual Hygiene?

3. Hindustan Times - 5 consequences of poor menstrual hygiene management

