# Menstruation and Fieldwork

Menstruation is an important topic for everyone completing fieldwork:

* People who menstruate
* Team members
* Fieldwork leaders

It is still very much seen as a taboo topic, and this can be a barrier for students completing fieldwork as they may feel worried about it, or about discussing it. But this shouldn’t be the case.

Remember that menstruation is a biological function and not just a feminine function. People of all genders can menstruate. Use inclusive language when talking about menstruation.

## Talking to students about menstruation

* Remind students that it is a completely natural process, and they shouldn’t be worried about completing fieldwork whilst they are menstruating.
* There are lots of products that can be used.
* Tell students that you and other staff will also have a stock of tampons and sanitary towels with you, should they be needed.

## Toilet breaks

* One way in which to relieve the anxiety around fieldwork is to let students know in advance where the toilets are and when the toilet breaks will be. At some fieldwork locations there is a fair distance from fieldwork site to the toilets, explain this to students and show it on a map so that distance is clear. Also explain this to parents if they are concerned.
* Encourage students to go to the toilet before embarking on fieldwork, particularly if you know that toilets are a long distance from the fieldwork site.

## Menstrual products

Menstrual products have come a long way and now there is a huge range of products available.

* **Tampons and sanitary towels**: A range of absorbencies are available. These are the most common products, and they are disposable. Some toilets may not have a bin to dispose of these, remind students not to flush them down the toilet. You may want to encourage students to bring some bags with them to put their products into to then dispose of later on.
* **Reusable sanitary towels:** These are washable sanitary pads that are put into underwear and fastened with poppers. These can have a very high absorbency. When changed, they need to be placed into a wet bag. They can be rinsed before putting them into a bag if needed.
* **Menstrual cups:** These are made from medical grade silicone. They can be worn for up to 12 hours. There are different capacities on menstrual cup. To empty them, they are removed and emptied into the toilet. They can then be washed and sterilised. <https://putacupinit.com/chart/> is a great website to help you get the right size menstrual cup. Many chemists now stock menstrual cups on their shelves.
* **Menstruation underwear:** These are reusable and washable underwear which have a layer of high absorbency material inside. They look like a normal pair of underwear. Once used, they can be washed. They can last all day. Student should bring a wet bag with them to put their used underwear into. Some people find this type of underwear quite tight, but they need to fit well to avoid leaks.