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# Menstrual Hygiene Day and International Day of Action for Women's Health — May 28

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**SOCIAL ISSUES****GS1****GS2**

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# Menstrual Hygiene Day and International Day of Action for Women's Health – May 28

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## WHY IN NEWS:

**May 28** is observed globally as the **International Day of Action for Women's Health** (since **1987**) and **Menstrual Hygiene Day** (since **2014**). The **2026 theme** for Women's Health is **"Essential, Not Optional: Strengthening Health Systems to Uphold Health Rights and SRHRJ in Times of Polycrisis"**, while Menstrual Hygiene Day continues its long-term campaign **"Together for a #PeriodFriendlyWorld"**. The convergence of these two observances on the same date makes May 28 the global focal point for women's reproductive and sexual health rights.

## WHY MAY 28?

REASON	EXPLANATION
<b>Cycle length</b>	Average menstrual cycle is <b>28 days</b>
<b>Period duration</b>	Menstruation typically lasts <b>5 days</b> – so the <b>5th month, day 28</b> (May 28) was chosen for Menstrual Hygiene Day
<b>Women's Health Day</b>	Established by the <b>Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)</b> in <b>1987</b>

## THE TWO OBSERVANCES — SIDE BY SIDE

PARAMETER	INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH	MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY
<b>Year initiated</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Initiated by</b>	Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)	<b>WASH United</b> (Germany)
<b>Geographic origin</b>	Costa Rica (5th Int'l Women's Health Meeting)	Berlin
<b>Theme 2026</b>	"Essential, Not Optional: Strengthening Health Systems to Uphold Health Rights and SRHRJ in Times of Polycrisis"	"Together for a #PeriodFriendlyWorld" (multi-year)
<b>Focus</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights and Justice (SRHRJ)	Period stigma, infrastructure, products, education

## MENSTRUAL HYGIENE — INDIA IN NUMBERS

INDICATOR	VALUE	SOURCE
Indian women using <b>hygienic methods</b> of period protection (15–24 yrs)	<b>77.3%</b>	NFHS-5 (2019–21)
Rural	~72%	NFHS-5
Urban	~89%	NFHS-5
Girls <b>dropping out</b> of school due to menstruation	~ <b>23%</b>	UNICEF + NGO estimates
Women aware of menstrual cup as an option	~ <b>28%</b> (urban) / ~ <b>9%</b> (rural)	NFHS-5
Cost of "period poverty" to Indian economy	Lost school/work days; estimates of ~ <b>USD 3 billion/year</b> in lost productivity	

## INDIA'S POLICY FRAMEWORK

### Central Government Schemes

SCHEME	YEAR	DETAIL
<b>Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS)</b>	<b>2011</b>	MoHFW; targets adolescent girls in rural areas (10–19 yrs)
<b>Suvidha Sanitary Napkin</b>	<b>2018</b>	Under <b>PMBJP</b> (Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana) — <b>₹1 per pad</b>
<b>Janani Suraksha Yojana / Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram</b>	2005 / 2011	Maternal health
<b>PM-Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)</b>	2016	9th of every month — ANC at govt. facilities
<b>Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) Strategy</b>	2013	Umbrella framework
<b>Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) — MHM guidelines</b>	2015, updated	Mandates menstrual hygiene management in rural sanitation

### State Schemes (selected)

STATE	SCHEME
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>Khushi</b> — free sanitary napkins to girls (Std. VI to XII) since 2018
<b>Tamil Nadu</b>	Free sanitary napkin programme (1998 — one of the earliest)
<b>Kerala</b>	“She Pad” — free pads to school girls
<b>Maharashtra</b>	Asmita Yojana — subsidised pads via SHGs
<b>Rajasthan</b>	Udaan Yojana — Rs 21,000 crore over 5 years on free pads (announced 2021)

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS AND JUSTICE (SRHRJ)

The 2026 Women's Health theme uses the **SRHRJ** framing — adding “**Justice**” to the older **SRHR** acronym. It signals:

- Access to contraception, safe abortion, maternal care.
- **Bodily autonomy** as a non-negotiable right.

- Intersectional analysis — caste, class, sexuality, disability.
- “Polycrisis” framing — climate change, conflict, pandemic effects on women’s health.

## INDIAN LEGAL ARCHITECTURE

LAW	ROLE
<b>Article 21</b>	Right to dignity → reproductive autonomy ( <i>K.S. Puttaswamy, 2017; X v. Health Department, 2022</i> )
<b>Article 14, 15(3)</b>	Equality + special provisions for women
<b>Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (amended 2021)</b>	Up to 24 weeks for special categories
<b>POSH Act, 2013</b>	Workplace sexual harassment redress
<b>PCPNDT Act, 1994</b>	Pre-natal sex determination ban
<b>Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017</b>	<b>26 weeks paid leave</b> for first two children
<b>POCSO Act, 2012</b>	Sexual offences against children

## THE X V. PRINCIPAL SECRETARY, HEALTH DEPT VERDICT (2022)

A bench led by Justice DY Chandrachud held that **all women — married or unmarried — have the right to safe and legal abortion up to 24 weeks**. The Court read down restrictive interpretations of the MTP Rules — a landmark SRHRJ moment.

## GLOBAL COMPARATORS

INDICATOR	INDIA	GLOBAL AVERAGE
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births)	<b>97</b> (SRS 2018–20)	223 (WHO 2020)
TFR	<b>2.0</b>	2.3
Female labour-force participation (15+)	<b>37%</b> (PLFS 2023–24)	~50%
Adolescent (15–19) birth rate	22.5 (NFHS-5)	42

India’s MMR achievement is notable; FLFP and adolescent birth rates remain areas for action.

## SDG MAPPING

SDG	GOAL	LINK
<b>SDG 3</b>	Good Health and Well-being	Targets 3.1 (MMR), 3.7 (universal SRH access)
<b>SDG 5</b>	Gender Equality	Target 5.6 (universal access to SRH and reproductive rights)
<b>SDG 6</b>	Clean Water and Sanitation	Menstrual hygiene needs WASH infrastructure
<b>SDG 4</b>	Quality Education	Menstrual hygiene → school retention

## WIDER SIGNIFICANCE

- **Stigma reduction** — Bollywood/regional cinema (**Pad Man, 2018**), local NGO work, and SHG-led pad cooperatives have shifted discourse.
- **Tax reform** — **GST exemption on sanitary pads in July 2018** was a milestone after public campaign.
- **Curriculum integration** — NEP 2020 + NIPUN Bharat envisage age-appropriate health education.
- **Convergence opportunity** — Suvidha (low-cost pads) + Khushi/MHS (free pads) + Swachh Bharat (disposal infra) + Skill India (SHG-led pad manufacturing) could be braided into one mission.

## CHALLENGES

- **Inequity in access** — rural vs urban, caste, disability dimensions.
- **Disposal infrastructure** — open burning + landfill loads from non-biodegradable pads.
- **Menstrual cup adoption** is low; awareness gap.
- **Stigma at workplace** — paid menstrual leave debate (Spain, Indonesia, Japan have variants; India under discussion).
- **Adolescent boys' education** — gender-neutral menstrual education is sparse.

## WAY FORWARD

- **National Menstrual Hygiene Policy** — Draft (2023) by MoHFW awaits notification.
- **Period Friendly Workplaces** — at-work product access, dignity, sick-leave clarity.
- **Eco-friendly product mandate** — biodegradable pads + reusable cloth + cups under EPR framework.

- **Curriculum revision** — Class 6–10 health education modules to cover menstruation, contraception, consent.
- **Data refresh** — Census 2026–27 + NFHS-6 to capture post-COVID dynamics.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### GS Paper 1 — Indian Society:

- Role of women and women's organisation.
- Social empowerment.
- Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

### GS Paper 2 — Governance & Social Justice:

- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.

### Analytical hooks for Mains:

- Period poverty as an economic and human-development issue.
- Bodily autonomy and Article 21 — recent jurisprudence.
- Menstrual leave — policy design and equity trade-offs.

**FACTS CORNER**

Menstrual Hygiene Day: May 28, observed since 2014; initiated by WASH United (Germany).

Why May 28: Average cycle 28 days, period ~5 days → 5th month, day 28.

International Day of Action for Women's Health: May 28, observed since 1987; initiated by WGNRR.

2026 Women's Health theme: "Essential, Not Optional: Strengthening Health Systems to Uphold Health Rights and SRHRJ in Times of Polycrisis".

Menstrual Hygiene Day 2026 campaign: "Together for a #PeriodFriendlyWorld".

India hygienic-method use (NFHS-5): 77.3% for 15–24 yr women.

Maternal Mortality Ratio (SRS 2018–20): 97 per 100,000 live births.

TFR (NFHS-5): 2.0 (below replacement of 2.1).

MTP Act, 1971 (amended 2021): Up to 24 weeks for special categories.

Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017: 26 weeks paid leave for first two children.

GST exemption on sanitary pads: July 2018.

Suvidha pads: ₹1 per pad under PMBJP since 2018.

Odisha Khushi scheme: Since 2018 — free pads for school girls.

SDGs covered: SDG 3, 4, 5, 6.

Sources: WHO, UNFPA, MoHFW, PIB

Source: Menstrual Hygiene Day and International Day of Action for Women's Health — May 28 — Ujjyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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