

Scotland becomes 1st country to make free period products the law

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Periods are a biological predisposition of being born a female, and the average female will spend more than 2,500 days, or roughly 7 years, of her life menstruating, but many women and girls around the world cannot afford period products. On Tuesday, Scotland became the first country to legislatively combat this issue by making menstrual products free in public facilities nationwide.

The Scottish Parliament confirmed in a tweet on Tuesday that the bill had passed unanimously. According to the parliament's website, the law requires the Scottish Government to set up a universal system so that anyone in need of period products can get them for free. Schools, colleges and universities will also be required to make free menstrual products available in restrooms. Local authorities and education providers will be responsible for ensuring free products are made available under the law.

There are roughly 1.57 million menstruating individuals in Scotland, according to the bill's associated financial memorandum. Based on that figure, it's estimated the new law will cost the Scottish government roughly £8.7 million in 2022/23, although the real cost will depend on how many individuals use the products made available.

The bill was introduced by Member of the Scottish Parliament Monica Lennon in April 2019. After the bill passed on Tuesday, she tweeted that it was "about bloody time."

In a document pushing for free period products that was published in 2017, Lennon explained the harsh realities of period poverty in Scotland and the rest of the U.K. She said rising levels of poverty in general in Scotland were forcing women to choose between buying food or menstrual products.

"Despite the fact that a pack of sanitary pads can be found in most supermarkets for a couple of pounds and might not seem like a huge expense — when you have no or very little income, it can be insurmountable," she wrote.

According to the Scottish government's website, there were roughly 220,000 girls and women between the ages of 12 and 54 living in relative poverty after housing costs as of 2018.

A lack of proper menstrual products can have a negative impact on personal health. Prolonged tampon usage can result in Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS), which can be fatal. Those who have

additional health issues may need more period products than the average every month, creating a higher cost burden. It can also lead to anxiety, as many women and girls experience feelings of shame or embarrassment about their periods and are uncomfortable asking for products, even if they can't afford them.

Global children's charity Plan International released statistics in 2017 showing that a lack of menstrual products was a pervasive problem among women and girls in the United Kingdom, largely due to cost.

According to the organization, 10% of girls across the U.K. cannot afford sanitary products such as pads and tampons, and 15% of girls in the U.K. struggle to afford them. Another 19% of girls in the four nations — Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland — had to use less suitable products because of cost. Just under 50% of girls in the U.K. reported having missed school because of their periods.

Britain's central government has also taken steps this year to combat period poverty. In March it was announced that from January 2021 the current 5% sales tax on sanitary products, long known as the "tampon tax," will no longer apply, according to the BBC.