Open letter from academics, researchers and scientists calling for the specific regulation of menstrual/period products.

To:

Minister Emma Hardy - Minister of State in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
Minister Kate Dearden - Minister of State (Minister for the Future of Work).
Rt Honourable Yvette Cooper - Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.
Dame Lesley Regan - Women's Health Ambassador for England.
Ian Jordan - Head of Product Safety Sectors Policy. Consumer and Competition Policy. Department for Business, Innovation, Science & Trade

We are writing to you as academics, researchers and scientists working on all aspects of menstruation. We want to voice our concern about the lack of regulation for period products. And so, we are calling for the introduction of specific regulation for all period products.

As those working on the front line of studying and researching women's and female health, we are positioned to learn firsthand about impacts on health, especially sexual and reproductive health, from exposure to the many potentially harmful chemicals and substances found in period products.

We echo public concern which is unequivocally clear. Maintaining the current status quo is just not good enough anymore.

We believe menstruation is a public health and human rights issue. And that everyone who needs them, has access to safe, sustainable and accessible period products.

Innovation outstripping innovation
Period products are used by billions of people worldwide. Women, girls and those who menstruate use on average 11,000 period products over their lifetime.
The current global market for period products is worth over 38 million, with reusable products like pants and cups accounting for 12% of the market. There is a growing call for safe and sustainable products with 62% of global period product users demanding eco-friendly, organic, or toxic chemical free products.

While the market has seen a huge shift in the last 10 years with the advent of period pants and menstrual discs. Despite this innovation, these most intimate of products are still regulated under the General Product Safety Regulations (GPSR).

The GPSR covers other sundry consumer items such as candles and cutlery, and there is no direct mention of period products in the regulations. Instead, this legislation places the onus on producers to ensure the safety of their products, including period products, meaning there is no independent testing and little transparency. And to date industry, voluntary codes of conduct and standards have not provided the safety we deserve.

Substances found in period products

Period products are placed in prolonged contact with the highly permeable vulval and vaginal tissues. The vaginal tissue itself is thought to be 10-80% more absorbent than the skin on the rest of the body and can absorb certain substances very effectively.

Since 2002, independent tests have found levels of toxic chemicals like PFAS a "forever chemical", heavy metals like Lead, Arsenic and Mercury, pesticides such as glyphosate, biocidal silver and synthetic fragrances in both single use disposable (SUDs) and reusable period products including panty liners. Although some are present in small amounts, repeated tests have found similar levels and similar contaminants. Worryingly for many of these chemicals and substances, we know there are no safe levels of exposure.

The residues found can arise from intentional or unintentional sources. For example, pesticides applied to cotton crops used to make period products, crop or material contamination from polluted air, soil and water, by-products of the plastic and materials processing used, or intentionally added substances like anti-microbials, PFAS and fragrances.

Lack of transparency and regulation mean our cosmetics are better regulated than our period products. For example, if the same level of fragrance found in period products was used in cosmetics – it would require mandatory labelling and legislative compliance. Yet no such dictate is required for period products.
We believe in menstrual equity and dignity. For us safety and dignity are inextricably linked. As Scheaffer Okore states: "menstrual dignity for all must become an essential, immovable part of every human rights conversation".

Regulation not placation

This is not just a UK problem, in many jurisdictions, period products remain subject to fragmented, inconsistent, or inadequate regulatory oversight.
However, there are some good examples of legislators and jurisdictions who have acted to protect the health of their citizens through regulation, safer provision or focused strategies for example Catalonia, New York State, Wales, Scotland, Kenya

and Europe. Several US states have also banned PFAS in menstrual products.

Some concerned American customers have resorted to legal action, because of lack of transparency and warnings about PFAS in period products, and misleading advertising.

Women's Health Strategy
We would like to see the issue of regulation addressed in the Women's Health Strategy launched in April 2026. While the strategy marks a long-overdue shift in how women's health is recognised within UK policy and is a very positive step forward, particularly in improving NHS delivery, access and care pathways, it remains much more focused on treatment and care than on primary prevention.

Given potential harmful health impacts for exposure to toxic substances in period products we call on the government to seriously address menstruation and women's, and females' reproductive health not only through regulation but also a focused strategy. Addressing toxic exposures in period products would reinforce the strategy's goals on economic participation, chronic conditions, menstrual health, and equity for those most affected by gynaecological and hormonal disorders. Gynaecological conditions cost the UK an estimated £11 billion a year in absenteeism. And for we know for marginalised and racialised women and their communities, the impacts are far worse.

Public concern
While regulators and scientists debate about absorption rates and safe levels of toxic chemicals in period products, women, girls and those who menstruate are paying the price with their health.

Wen's and PAN UK's petition calling for regulation of period products has now surpassed 81,000 signatures and was delivered to 10 Downing Street and Defra on 5th November.

The current situation places an unreasonable burden on consumers to assess product safety in the absence of transparent ingredient disclosure, harmonised testing standards, and comprehensive independent oversight.
We want better for everyone who menstruates.

Going forward
To conclude, we, the undersigned, call on the UK government and all departments responsible for the regulation of period products to be world leaders in relation to women's and female health by becoming the first country in the world to specifically regulate period products.

Period products should be recognised as a distinct product category with regulatory standards reflecting their unique patterns of use, frequency of exposure, and contact with sensitive tissues. Existing frameworks designed for general consumer goods do

not adequately address these characteristics.

In addition, we want to see:

- Mandatory ingredients labelling and material disclosure, both for intentional and unintentionally found restudies.
- Publicly accessible product safety information with a regularly updated list of assessed and prohibited ingredients akin to the European cosmetics regulation.
- Transparency is essential for informed consumer choice and public trust.
- A precautionary approach to toxic chemicals in period products.

The absence of comprehensive regulation should not be mistaken for evidence of safety. Rather, it reflects a long-standing neglect of menstrual health within research, regulation, and public policy.

To conclude, we, the undersigned, call on the UK government and all departments responsible for the regulation of period products, and those reviewing the Women's Health Strategy, to be world leaders in relation to women's and female health by becoming the first country to specifically regulate period products.
As academics, researchers and scientists, we believe women, girls and those who menstruate have a fundamental right to safe, sustainable and properly regulated period products.

Signed:

Helen Lynn – Associate Research Fellow, University of Exeter.

Professor Gemma Sharp – Professor of Epidemiology, University of Exeter and Menarche Menstruation Menopause and Mental Health (4M) Consortium.

Andrea Ford – Researcher, University of Edinburgh.

Dr Sally King – Researcher, Kings College London.

Professor Bettina Bildhauer – Professor of Modern Languages, University of St Andrews.

Sara Halkiopoulos – Researcher.

Dominique Haig – Researcher (Independent).

Lorna Orriss-Dib – Researcher, Healthwatch.

Dr Bee Huges – Academic, Liverpool John Moores University.

Becky Underwood – Researcher, Aberystwyth University.

Dr. Rebecca Evans – University of Bath.

Dr. Nikki Hayfield – Academic, University of the West of England.

Abigail Lennox – Doctoral Researcher, University of East London.

Ellen Lambert _ Clinical Research Fellow, King's College London.

Masha Remskar – PhD Behavioural Scientist, University of Bath.

Dr. Chi Ezifula - Associate Professor and Consultant Physician, Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

Tessa Peery – University Student.

Lauren Davies – Statistician, University of Bristol.

Daphnée Dion-Carrier – University Doctoral Researcher.

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Katarina Mc Vann – Student, Kings College London.

Vhairi Wilde – Researcher, University of Glasgow.

Rebecca Anthony – Researcher, Cardiff University.

Koraima Sotomayor-Enriquez – Researcher, Kings, College London.

Naomi Alesworth - Global Public Health Research professional.

Dot Ward - Medical Student/Researcher, Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

Gloria Cliver – Medical Student, Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

Alice Ellis – Research Project Officer, Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

Caroline Newton - Undergraduate Researcher, University of Edinburgh.

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Danielle Markham - Researcher, Business Psychologist, University of Sussex.

Lara Dasar – PhD student, University of Aberdeen.

Kami Abdullayev – Researcher, University College London.

Sarah Westmore – GP, General Medical Council.

Ainhoa Rodriguez – Researcher, University of the Basque Country.

Poppy Taylor – Academic, University of Bristol.

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