

By Victoria Bugembe Nampala

Many girls and women notice that infections or irritation seem to occur more often during their menstrual periods. This can be confusing and sometimes frightening, yet it is a common experience. Health experts say the link is real, but it is also manageable. With accurate information, proper hygiene, and access to safe menstrual products, most menstrual-related infections can be prevented.

Dr Innocent Nuwahereza, a public health consultant, explains that menstruation naturally changes the vaginal environment for a few days each month. Under normal conditions, the vagina maintains a slightly acidic balance that helps protect against harmful bacteria and fungi. During menstruation, menstrual blood raises the pH and temporarily reduces this acidity.

"When the vaginal environment becomes less acidic, it becomes easier for yeast and harmful bacteria to multiply," Nuwahereza notes.

He adds that the cervix opens slightly during menstrual flow, which is normal, but can increase vulnerability if unclean materials are used or intimate hygiene is neglected.

"These biological changes do not mean infection is inevitable, but they do mean extra care is helpful during this time. Several types of infections are commonly reported around menstruation. Yeast infections are frequent and result from an overgrowth of *Candida* fungus."

He notes that they often cause itching, redness and a thick, whitish discharge. "Bacterial vaginosis occurs when the normal balance of vaginal bacteria is disrupted and may present with unusual discharge and a noticeable odour."

Stay infection-free during menstruation



Skin irritation or rashes may develop on the vulva or inner thighs when pads, liners, or cloth materials stay moist for too long, creating friction and allowing germs to grow

Nuwahereza says urinary tract infections can also occur more easily for some women during their periods because bacteria from the genital area can more readily reach the urethra. "In addition, skin irritation or rashes may develop on the vulva or inner thighs when pads, liners, or cloth materials stay moist for too long, creating friction and allowing germs to grow. These conditions are common and treatable and early care

usually prevents complications."

Dr Alex Owiny, an epidemiologist, stresses that infection risk is not only about personal hygiene but also about access and environment.

"We must understand menstrual health within the context of daily living conditions," he says. "Many girls and women still lack affordable menstrual products, clean water and private washing spaces. That increases risk, even when they are

AVOID HARSH CHEMICALS

Dr Emmanuel Buchana notes that some well-intended practices can unintentionally increase infection risk. He advises against using strongly scented soaps, antiseptics or douching products inside the vagina.

"The vagina is self-cleaning. Using harsh chemicals internally disrupts the natural protective bacteria and can actually trigger infections," he explains.

Dr Alex Owiny, an epidemiologist, warns that leaving a pad or tampon on for too long creates a warm, moist environment where bacteria multiply quickly.

"Wearing very tight, non-breathable underwear can also trap moisture and irritate the skin.

Unprotected sexual activity during menstruation may increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections, and protection remains important throughout the cycle."

trying their best."

Owiny explains that some women depend on reusable cloths that may not be thoroughly washed or fully dried in sunlight, which allows bacteria and fungi to remain. Others may stretch the use of a single pad beyond recommended hours because of its cost.

Owiny emphasises that improving menstrual health education and access to safe products has been shown to reduce infections and school or work absenteeism and that awareness should be supportive rather than blaming.

HOW TO STAY SAFE DURING MENSTRUATION.

Owiny says changing menstrual products regularly is one of the most effective preventive measures. "Pads and tampons are best changed every four to six hours, depending on flow, while menstrual cups should be emptied and cleaned as recommended."

The quality and suitability of menstrual products also play a role in comfort and safety. Breathable, well-made pads and hypoallergenic tampons or cups are less likely to irritate.

Nuwahereza explains that some people may react to certain pad materials or bleaching agents used in manufacturing. "If a woman repeatedly experiences itching, rashes, or unusual irritation that appears only when using a certain product, she should consider switching brands or types," he says.

He encourages choosing products from reputable manufacturers and checking for product standards where possible. Menstrual cups are a safe option for many users when they are properly cleaned and sterilised between cycles.

Health experts agree that education and open conversation are as important as products. When girls and women understand what is normal during menstruation, what warning signs to watch for and how to practice safe hygiene, they are better equipped to protect their health.