



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Männystrie O Poustie

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) ACT (NI) 2022

GUIDANCE FOR SPECIFIED PUBLIC SERVICE BODIES

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This guidance is issued by the Department of Health (DoH) in accordance with its statutory requirements under Section 5 of the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, referred to in this guidance as 'the Act'. The guidance applies to the public service bodies that have been specified as being subject to the requirements of the Act in the Period Products (Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 SR No.9.
- 1.2 In October 2021, Mr Pat Catney MLA introduced the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill in the Northern Ireland Assembly to address what he considered to be "... *an undeniable need to provide sustained free access to period products in education settings and other public buildings*"¹. The Bill had broad support in the Assembly and received Royal Assent on 12 May 2022.
- 1.3 Section 1 of the Act places a duty on the Executive Office to ensure that period products are available free of charge, on a universal basis, in appropriate locations. Section 2(1) of the Act requires each Government Department in Northern Ireland to specify, by regulations, '*Specified Public Service Bodies*' which must establish and maintain arrangements to ensure that period products are obtainable, free of charge, on their premises in Northern Ireland.

2. Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies

- 2.1 Section 2(2)(a) of the Act states that bodies that discharge functions in relation to persons in hospital premises must be specified. Following a targeted consultation, DoH specified the public service bodies listed below under the DoH Period Products Regulations.
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
 - Northern Health and Social Care Trust;
 - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust;
 - Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and
 - Western Health and Social Care Trust.
- 2.2 Each of these bodies has a statutory duty to provide period products free of charge on their premises and this should be in place from April 2025. For the avoidance of doubt reference to premises for these bodies includes all Trust premises and not just "hospital premises" as outlined in the definition section of this guidance (Section 11). The Act indicates that departments must review the regulations that specify their public service bodies within its functions at intervals of no more than three years

and, if necessary take steps to ensure that the regulations are updated. This means that while the initial focus of the regulations has been on the DoH Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) which fall under the definition of hospital premises as required under the Act, the list of DoH specified public sector bodies may be expanded in the future.

3. Funding

3.1 No additional funding is available for compliance with the Act. Specified public sector bodies will need to fund the cost of fulfilling their duties under the Act from within existing budgets.

4. Guidance Document

4.2 This document provides guidance for the specified public service bodies in relation to their duties under the Act. It has been developed in consultation with the HSC Trusts and aims to ensure that a consistent approach is applied where possible.

4.3 It is important to note that the Department of Health ("the Department") does not wish to be prescriptive regarding the manner in which its specified public service bodies establish and maintain arrangements to ensure that period products are obtainable free of charge on their premises. The guidance, therefore, sets the minimum requirements which must be met to ensure the spirit of the Act is realised. HSC Trusts are free to establish and maintain arrangements over and above these minimum requirements should it be considered appropriate to do so.

5. Aim of the Act

5.1 The overarching aim of the Act is to ensure period products are provided free of charge to all persons in Northern Ireland who need them. Furthermore, the Act specifies that arrangements established to meet this aim must ensure the following:

- that the period products are obtainable, by users, reasonably easily and in a way that respects the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of the persons obtaining them;
- that a reasonable choice of different types of period products are made available, having regard to articles which are reusable; and
- that the availability of free products and the arrangements for obtaining them are publicised in a way that respects dignity, privacy and confidentiality.

6. Timing for Implementation

6.1 In line with the regulations, HSC Trusts must provide period products free of charge on their premises from April 2025. **Annex A** of this guidance provides a synopsis of the steps to be undertaken in achieving this.

7. Definitions

7.1 The following definitions, derived from section 8 of the Act, should be applied by specified public service bodies.

Term	Definition
“period products”	Manufactured articles the purpose of which is to absorb or collect menstrual flow
“types of period products”	Tampons sanitary towels and articles which are reusable
“person”	In the context of a reference to a person who needs to use period products, means a person who menstruates (whether that person is a woman, girl or other person). This may include staff working on the premises, service users in the premises, visitors to service users on the premises, contractors taking forward work related to the premises but excludes persons who do not have a legitimate reason for working, attending or visiting the premises unless the specified public service body decides otherwise following consultation.
references to such a person’s “needs”	References to that person’s needs for period products arising from menstruation by that person
“hospital premises”	Means premises occupied by a hospital within the meaning of Article 2(2) of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 ¹
“site”	Reflects an area of ground where more than one building is constructed
“premises”	Includes all Trust managed buildings or at least one of a group of buildings within a site, with reasonableness to be applied when considering the proximity of adjacent buildings on that site. Signage indicating where these products are available should also be provided to users, with due regard for Section 3 of the act which states that period products must be obtainable— (i) reasonably easily; and (ii) in a way that respects the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of persons obtaining them;

¹ Any institution for the reception and treatment of persons suffering from illness, any maternity home, any institution for the reception and treatment of persons during convalescence or persons requiring medical rehabilitation, any institution for providing dental treatment and maintained in connection with a dental school, and clinics, dispensaries and out-patient departments maintained in connection with any such institution or home. [Health and Personal Social Services \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1972 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

	<p>“Premises” would not include areas which are utilised by another non-Specified public service body or a Private sector organisation.</p>
<p>Consultation</p>	<p>HSC Trusts may approach this as they see fit, to best establish a good picture of the range of needs of service users/ members of the public, staff and visitors – which may differ from one another. This could, for example, be through engagement in the form of confidential surveys, focus groups and/or established service user forums. It would not be a reasonable expectation to engage with every potential visitor and the Department therefore recommends that HSC Trusts identify, and engage with, any representative groups of the most regular visitors to their premises.</p>

8. Requirement to Consult

8.2 The Act requires that specified public service bodies consult with such product users who are likely to be in the premises of the specified public service body and may also consult with any other body or person the specified public service body thinks appropriate. For the purposes of operationalising the requirements of the Act, consultation could be meaningful engagement conducted through whichever method the body finds most suitable in order to ensure the broad views and opinions of product users are gathered. It is important to note, however, that the method of consultation must have regard to the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of product users. For this reason, an anonymised survey may be the best method for conducting this consultation.

8.3 Through this consultation, as a minimum, HSC Trusts should gather feedback and opinions on:

- the types of different products to be made available free of charge (including the provision of articles which are reusable);
- the locations where the products should be made available
- how users can access the products; and
- how the availability of the products, and their locations, can be publicised.

8.4 The feedback from this consultation will inform each HSC Trust of the most suitable arrangements to be put in place and will assist in the drafting of the written statement (further information provided below). Any engagement must have due regards to the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of product users.

8.5 HSC Trusts may approach these consultations as they see fit, to best establish a good picture of the range of needs of service users/ members of the public, staff and visitors – which may differ from one another. This could, for example, be through a combination of confidential surveys, focus groups and/or established service user forums. It would be challenging to with every potential visitor and the Department therefore recommends that HSC Trusts identify, and consult engage with, a representative group of the most regular visitors to their premises.

9. Arrangements for the Provision of Free Period Products

9.1 The Act provides that specified public service bodies specified by the Department “*must ensure that period products are obtainable free of charge (in accordance with arrangements established and maintained by the body) by persons in its premises who need to use them*”. In order to do so, specified public service bodies must provide “*period products, or [secure] their provision, in such locations within those premises as are specified in arrangements established and maintained*”.

9.2 Finally, the Act provides that the period products obtainable free of charge by a person under the arrangements established and maintained are to be sufficient products to meet the person’s needs while the person is in the premises. Reasonable care must be taken to ensure that the frequency of restocking products is sufficient to meet demand.

9.3 Section 3 of the Act states the following:

3.—(1) Arrangements established and maintained under section 1(1) or section 2(3) must provide for—

(a) period products to be obtainable—

(i) reasonably easily; and

(ii) in a way that respects the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of persons obtaining them;

(b) a reasonable choice of different types of period products to be obtainable, having regard to articles which are reusable; and

(c) publicising to persons in a way that respects their dignity, privacy and confidentiality—

(i) the availability of period products;

(ii) that period products are obtainable free of charge; and

(iii) the arrangements for obtaining those period products free of charge, including in particular how, where and when products may be obtained.

(2) Arrangements established and maintained under section 2(3) must provide for period products to be obtainable by persons in its premises at all times when the Specified public service body's premises are in use, whether or not in use by the public.

9.4 The Department considers that the following guidance should be applied by Specified public service bodies when establishing and maintaining the arrangements provided for by Section 3 of the Act (above). A checklist of the requirements under this guidance is also provided at **Annex B** for ease of reference.

10. User access to period products

10.1 The Act states that period products should be obtainable “reasonably easily” and “in a way that respects the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of persons obtaining them”.

10.2 In order to meet this requirement, the Department considers that, as a minimum, products should be made available to ambulatory patients in female, gender neutral and accessible toilets/bathrooms. This allows users ease of access while respecting their dignity, privacy and confidentiality.

10.3 For non-ambulatory users such as those in Ward environments, HSC Trusts should consider the availability of products that respect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of users.

10.4 Likewise for community, day-care and residential premises HSC Trusts should also consider the availability of products that also respect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of users.

10.5 For staff and other ambulatory patients, the Department considers that common sense should be applied and that reasonable distance should be taken into consideration when siting the locations of products.

10.6 In general, a dignified approach should be adopted to ensure that products could be easily accessed in a place where individuals are comfortable doing so, as identified through consultation.

- 10.7 Arrangements must specify the locations of free products and this must include locations in premises across all sites of an HSC Trust. While the Act does not require products to be available in more than one location at each site, it does require that products be available reasonably easily, protecting the dignity and confidentiality of product users. Reasonable ease should include ease of physical access for those with physical disabilities or mobility issues.
- 10.8 In respect of HSC Trust buildings within a site, the Department considers that common sense should be applied and that reasonable distance should be taken into consideration when siting the locations of products. It will be important to ensure that the locations where products are available in such buildings are well publicised in line with the guidance set out under 'Publicising product availability' below.

11. Types of period products

- 11.1 The Act states that arrangements must provide for "a reasonable choice of different types of period products to be obtainable, having regard to articles which are reusable" and further defines types of period products as being "tampons, sanitary towels and articles which are reusable". However, what is required will be determined through the consultation process.
- 11.2 It is important to recognise that there are a wide variety of period products available on the market, and within the different types of products there are further varieties pertaining to the different menstrual flows experienced by product users. Consultation with product users will aid HSC Trusts in establishing the most suitable range of products which should be made available. However, the arrangements must provide for "a reasonable choice of different types of period products to be obtainable". Feedback received throughout the operation of the DfE pilot programme indicates the need for a good mix of product choice. However, specified public service bodies are not obliged to make particular brands of products available, nor every absorbency of a particular type of product.
- 11.3 There is no requirement for the full range of products to be provided in a single, or every location. For example, tampons and towels may be provided in toilets but other products, such as reusable period pants, may be available in another location.
- 11.4 The environmental impact of single use products can also be reduced by opting for reusable or plastic free options, making fewer orders per year, taking the country of manufacture into

account when sourcing products and providing information to product users on correct disposal of period products.

12. Publicising product availability

12.1 The Act states that arrangements must include how the Specified public service body will publicise “(i) the availability of period products; (ii) that period products are obtainable free of charge; and (iii) the arrangements for obtaining those period products free of charge, including in particular how, where and when products may be obtained” in a way which respects users’ dignity, privacy and confidentiality.

12.2 HSC Trusts will already have processes in place for publicising services which they offer on their premises. Examples of how to publicise may include:

- clear signage in reception areas;
- clear signage in toilet/bathroom facilities;
- clear signage in wards and departments
- reference to product availability on the social media platforms of the HSC Trust; and
- reference to product availability on the website of the HSC Trust.

13. When products should be made available

13.1 The Act states that arrangements “must provide for period products to be obtainable by persons in its premises at all times when the specified public service body’s premises are in use, whether or not in use by the public”.

13..2 As the Act defines “person” in this context as being “a person who menstruates (whether that person is a woman, girl or other person)”, it is clearly indicating that all such persons, including staff and visitors, on the premises of the specified public service body must have access to free period products, and HSC Trusts should therefore be clear in their messaging on this point.

14. Requirement to Publish a Written Statement

14.1 The Act specifies that specified public service bodies must, as soon as reasonably practicable following publication of this guidance, prepare and publish a written statement on the

arrangements which have been established to provide free period products on their premises. They may also prepare an updated written statement on its arrangements at any other time.

14.2 HSC Trusts should equality screen their proposed arrangements before publishing with due regard to the Section 75 categories.

14.3 The written statement must include the following:

- details of the consultation and engagement conducted;
- the agreed arrangements (for the provision of free period products) which have been established; and
- how the specified public service body has, in developing these arrangements, had regard to this guidance document and the feedback received through the consultation phase.

14.4 In addition, HSC Trusts may also include any further information which they deem appropriate. This should include a list of those premises (including addresses), along with details of where products will be available on those premises.

14.5 Specified public service bodies must publish this written statement in such a way that the body feels it is appropriate. The concept of what is appropriate will vary between specified public service bodies; however it will generally be appropriate, alongside other modes of communication, to include this statement on the website of the HSC Trust. In light of the expectation that there will be a broadly similar approach across the HSC Trusts, they may wish to use the same content for their written statements.

14.6 Departments are required under the Act to publish information about the locations where free period products are available within one year of making the Regulations and at least on an annual basis thereafter. DoH will ask the HSC Trusts to provide it with a copy of their written statements on an annual basis. The duty for Departments to publicise availability of free period products to product users is a distinct and different duty to the duty of each specified public sector bodies to publish their written statements on arrangements.

15. Monitoring Arrangements

- 15.1 Section 4 of the Act places a duty on The Executive Office to review and report on the operation of the provisions of the Act every three years. Such a report is to include the number of specified public service bodies and an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the exercise of the functions provided for by the Act.
- 15.2 The Executive Office will advise what information it will require in order to exercise this duty. The written statement published by each specified public service body will provide an overview of the arrangements in place; however, it is likely that in assessing the effectiveness of those arrangements and the impact of the legislation, monitoring data in relation to product usage will be required.
- 15.3 DoH Specified public service bodies are required to collect, retain and submit to their Departmental contact, on an annual basis, information regarding the monitoring of usage of the products as set out in **Annex C**.

16. Other Considerations

- 16.1 While the Department does not wish to be prescriptive regarding how its specified public service bodies establish and maintain arrangements to ensure that period products are obtainable, free of charge, on their premises, there are some other considerations on which guidance has been provided by other departments. The following has been developed in order to assist HSC Trusts if required.

17. Considerations around inclusion and barriers to access

- 17.1 Specified public service bodies will wish to ensure that the language used when publicising product availability does not exclude, or create a barrier to, any individual who requires products. As such, the Department recommends that rather than using language referencing females, specified public service bodies should instead refer to "*persons who menstruate*".
- 17.2 Specified public service bodies should consider the profile of the population in their catchment area; the Written Statement should be available in a range of languages and formats as identified through equality screening.

18. Guidance on product safety

18.1 Feminine hygiene products, such as period products, sold in the UK are regulated by the General Product Safety Regulations 2005. To meet those Regulations' requirements, manufacturers must have stringent procedures to evaluate the safety of raw materials, finished product and instructions for use. Further information regarding the safety of these products is available on the Absorbent Hygiene Products Manufacturers Association (AHPMA) website - Feminine Hygiene — AHPMA (external link).

18.2 Instruction leaflets which are included when purchasing these products provide advice on how to use them, and information in relation to Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). The AHPMA provides the following information about TSS.

19. Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

19.1 Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a very rare form of blood poisoning which can affect anyone, male or female, and of any age. TSS can follow localised infections resulting for example from burns, scalds, wounds, surgical procedures and even chicken pox spots and has also been linked to menstruation and tampon use.

19.2 It is estimated that approximately half the cases of TSS, are linked to use of tampons. The causal link to tampons and menstruation is not known, but users of any type of tampon irrespective of its composition, for example viscose/rayon, cotton, organic cotton or a blend, should be equally aware of the signs and symptoms of TSS.

19.3 TSS cases have also been recorded with other vaginal devices such as contraceptive coils, diaphragms and menstrual cups. Anyone who suspects they, or someone they know, is suffering from the symptoms of TSS should immediately seek medical attention.

19.4 If using a tampon, remove it immediately and inform the doctor that you are menstruating and have been using tampons. TSS is treated easily in the early stages but can rapidly become very serious if left untreated. Further information can be found at www.tssis.com

20. Toxic Shock Syndrome Symptoms

20.1 Symptoms are much like a severe flu and usually include some or all of the following: a sudden high fever (usually over 39°C), vomiting, diarrhoea, muscle aches, a sun burn like rash, sore throat, dizziness and/or fainting, severe 'flu-like' feeling.

20.2 HSC Trusts may wish to include reference to product safety and TSS alongside product access points.

21. Effective management/implementation of provision

21.1 The HSC Trust consultation with product users will indicate the types of product which should be made available; however, uptake and stock usage will be unknown until the awareness of the availability of the products has 'bedded in'.

21.2 Trusts will wish to monitor uptake and stock usage for the first few months of the arrangements being in operation in order to reasonably determine the stock levels required to ensure constant availability to product users.

22. Procurement options and value for money

22.1 HSC Trusts are responsible for product procurement (items and quantities, as well as supplier and pricing) and will likely have to work within their own procurement policies and arrangements.

22.2 A review of the first year of the pilot programme operated in the Higher Education Institutions in conjunction with the DfE highlighted wide variations to the cost per unit amounts between different suppliers. In terms of ensuring value for money, HSC Trusts will wish to explore various options, being aware of the important overarching requirement to ensure value for money in their spending as set out in Managing Public Money.

Annex A

Implementation Steps / Process

The Statutory Duty of DoH Specified public service bodies is :

From April 2025, DoH Specified public service bodies must provide period products free of charge on their premises.

Implementation Steps:

Step	Timing	Action	Detail
1	By January 2025	Consult with product users on arrangements	As a minimum, this consultation should include arrangements regarding: (i) the types of different products to be made available free of charge (including the provision of articles which are reusable); (ii) the locations where the products should be made available; (iii) how users can access the products; and (iv) how the availability of the products, and their locations, can be publicised.
2	By March 2025	Prepare, equality screening and publish a written statement	The written statement must include the following: (i) details of the consultation engagement conducted; (ii) the agreed arrangements (for the provision of free period products) which have been established; and (iii) how the Specified public service body has, in developing these arrangements, had regard to this guidance document and the feedback received through the consultation phase.
3	From April 2025	Implementation	Period products to become available free of charge on the premises of each HSC Trust

Annex B

Arrangements Checklist

Specified public service bodies must ensure period products are obtainable free of charge by persons in their premises who need to use them.

Types of product
As a minimum, the following types of products must be made available free of charge:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tampons – for a variety of menstrual flows• Sanitary towels – for a variety of menstrual flows
Locations
Products must be made available free of charge in the premises* of the Specified public service body at the following locations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female toilets/bathrooms• Gender neutral toilets/bathrooms• Disabled/adapted toilets/bathrooms
User access
Users should be able to access the products:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reasonably easily• Respectful of dignity, privacy and confidentiality• In one or another of the locations on larger sites always
Publicising
Specified public service bodies must publicise:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the availability of period products• that period products are obtainable free of charge• the arrangements* for obtaining those period products free of charge
*Arrangements should include, in particular: how, where and when products may be obtained in a way which respects users' dignity, privacy and confidentiality

Annex C

Monitoring Information

On an annual basis, Specified public service bodies should provide the below information and return it to their relevant contact in the Department for the Health.

The template below is for illustrative purposes; information can be presented as the body deems appropriate:

Name of Health and Social Care Trust:

Year covered:

Products	
List the variety of products made available (e.g. tampons regular, tampons super, towels regular, liners, etc)	
Uptake/usage	
From the products listed above, please provide approximate data regarding how many have been used during this year	
Publicising	
Please detail how you publicise the availability of free period products in your premises	