

Policy Brief

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Standardized Menstrual Health Accommodations in Sports

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- Female athletes are more likely to be injured at certain stages of their menstrual cycle.
- There is inadequate support and consideration for individual and gender-based differences in injury risk and recovery rates.

What are the issues?

The menstrual cycle is a legitimate physiological factor that can substantially impact athletic performance, recovery, and mental health. Studies show that the menstrual cycle can have impacts such as increased fatigue, a decline in muscle strength and power, and depression. Most importantly, it was found that female athletes were at higher risk of injury during the Menstrual Cycle.

However, it remains largely unconsidered in the performance recommendations given to athletes. Consequently, many schools' athletic programs lack standardized policies to ensure female athletes have access to appropriate menstrual health accommodations, leaving support inconsistent and largely dependent on individual coaches' discretion. This policy gap may force female athletes to train and compete despite their symptoms, increasing their risk of injury and compromising both their health and athletic performance.

Quotes from Elite Athletes

“(Periods are) something that we don’t really talk about a lot for female athletes, and I think it should be a topic of discussion” - **Amber Glenn**

PMS or playing when you menstruate is not talked about much in sport, and it’s an integral part of competing.” - **Iga Swiatek**

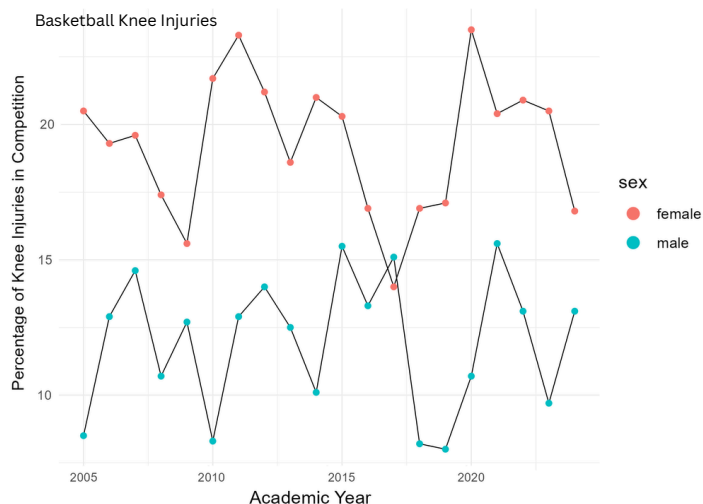
“(Periods are) something more people need to research from a sports science perspective, because it’s absolutely huge” - **Dina Asher-Smith**

“I live by my menstruation tracker especially when I’ve got big races coming up” - **Calli Hauger-Thackery**

Why is this important?

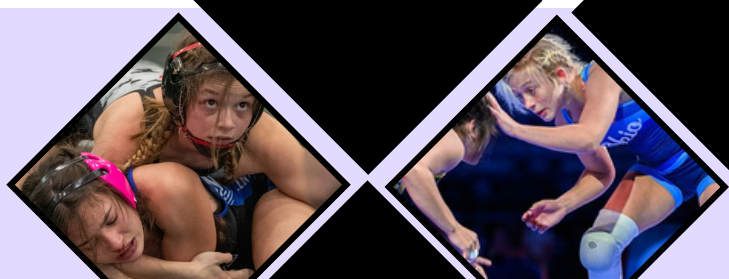
Historically, research on Sports and Exercise Medicine has focused on male athletes, with findings often assumed to apply equally to female athletes—entirely disregarding the various sexual dimorphisms such as body composition and the menstrual cycle. While studies involving both male and female athletes have become more common, female athletes remain underrepresented, and single-sex studies of male athletes significantly outnumber those of female athletes.

This research gap has contributed to a disproportionate rate of injury among female athletes across multiple sports. Most notably, female athletes are (X%?) more likely to suffer knee injuries in soccer and basketball than their male counterparts.



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What should policymakers do?

State Departments of Education and Interscholastic Athletic Associations Should:

1. Establish a Standardized Menstrual-Health Policy | *Require every school athletic program to adopt clear policies for accommodations, privacy, staff responsibilities, and support requests.*

2. Require Reasonable Athletic Accommodations | *Allow modified workouts, restroom breaks, hydration access, recovery time, and temporary flexibility without penalizing athletes.*

3. Provide Free Menstrual Products in Athletic Facilities | *Stock free products in locker rooms, training rooms, athletic offices, competition venues, and team travel kits.*

4. Train Coaches and Athletic Staff | *Require annual training on menstrual symptoms, respectful communication, warning signs, confidentiality, and referrals.*

5. Create a Confidential Support System | *Designate a trained staff member whom athletes can approach privately about menstrual-health concerns.*

6. Protect Athletes From Stigma and Retaliation | *Prohibit punishment, reduced playing time, teasing, or lost opportunities when athletes request support.*

7. Establish Clear Medical-Referral Procedures | *Create clear steps for referring athletes with severe pain, heavy bleeding, dizziness, irregular periods, or missed cycles*

8. Collect Data and Fund Implementation | *Use anonymous athlete feedback to improve policies and fund products, training, education, and SportsCARE pilot programs.*

Sources

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