



DL (2023) 28
31st October 2023

Dear Colleague,

INTERIM NATIONAL MENOPAUSE AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH POLICY FOR NHSSCOTLAND

1. We are writing to notify you of the launch of the Interim National Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy for NHSScotland (Annex). This policy is now in operation and should be implemented immediately across NHSScotland.
2. We ask you to ensure that this is widely publicised to colleagues across your organisation.
3. The development of the policy is in line with the Women's Health Plan commitment to "Develop a menopause and menstrual health workplace policy, as an example of best practice, starting with NHSScotland, and promote across the public, private and third sector".
4. To inform the policy we have been working in partnership with the University of Glasgow on ground-breaking research to establish a new evidence base on women's experience of working in NHSScotland in relation to menstrual health and menopause.
5. The University conducted a survey in October 2022 for NHSScotland colleagues to understand their experiences of menopause and menstrual health in the workplace. Results from the survey and the University's independent report will be published on 31st October.
6. This survey showed that many employees would welcome more support from their line managers and employers to manage their symptoms at work. The workplace can positively or negatively impact someone's symptoms and ability to work.
7. By putting support in place for individuals experiencing menstruation or menopause transition and raising awareness within our organisations, we can help to support good menstrual health and create a more positive experience for our colleagues.
8. A working group comprised of clinicians, academics, NHS HR, a union representative, policy and third sector organisations who have knowledge and skill in relation to

For Action:

NHS Board Chief
Executives,
NHS Board
Directors of Human
Resources
NHS Boards
Employee Directors
NHS Deputy HR
Directors
Nurse Directors
Medical Directors
NHS Occupational
Health Leads
NHS Women's
Health Leads

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the subject matter and/or development and implementation of policy within an NHS setting have collaboratively developed the policy.

9. It has also been cleared through the 'Once for Scotland' Workforce Policies Programme Board and Scottish Workforce and Staff Governance Secretariat.
10. The policy is issued on an interim basis, pending the review of the Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy by the 'Once for Scotland' [Workforce Policies Programme](#). The arrangement will be formally incorporated into the Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy in the Managing Health at Work suite of policies, which are currently scheduled for Autumn 2025.
11. This policy outlines the impact at work and the role of the line manager in supporting employees. Effective management of colleagues with menopausal and menstrual health symptoms can help to improve team morale, retain valuable skills and talent, address inequalities and reduce sickness absence.
12. The policy also supports employees to experience good menstrual health and menopause at work, and provides advice and guidance on how they can be supported when they experience symptoms which affect their work. Each individual's experience of menopause and menstrual health related symptoms will differ and symptoms may change over time. Enabling conversations about the menopause or menstrual health will help create an environment where colleagues feel more confident to approach their manager and seek support, if required.
13. The policy directly links to other relevant [NHSScotland workplace policies](#) namely Attendance, Flexible Work Location, Flexible Work Pattern, Capability, Grievance and Local NHS Board Equality, Diversity and Human Rights policies.
14. Supporting Documentation has been developed by the Working Group and is available on the National Workforce Wellbeing Hub: <https://wellbeinghub.scot/resource/mmhp/>. This includes a Line Manager's Guide and a Workplace Adjustments Guide. The supporting documentation is available for all employers in Scotland.
15. A stakeholder pack will be issued to Health Boards to help them to promote the policy internally.

16. NHS Employers are asked to make their own arrangements for publishing this Director's Letter.

Yours sincerely,



Gillian Russell
Director of Health Workforce



Professor Marion Bain
Deputy Chief Medical Officer



Fiona Hogg
Chief People Officer

ANNEX

NHSSCOTLAND INTERIM NATIONAL MENOPAUSE AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH WORKPLACE PLACE

Aim

The Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy aims to:

- Support employees in their experience of menstrual health and menopause in the workplace and help them to minimise the impact it can have.
- Create an environment where employees feel confident in raising issues about their menstrual health or menopause symptoms and ask for, and receive the support, solutions and any adjustments which can be put in place so they can comfortably work.
- Foster a culture of good menstrual health and positive menopause awareness, underpinned by education, inclusive discussions, and compassionate management.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees. It also applies to workers i.e. bank, agency and sessional workers. References to employees should be taken to apply to workers unless otherwise stated.

This policy complies with current legislation and meets the aims of the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)¹ of the [Equality Act 2010](#).²

Definitions

Menstrual cycle is the monthly process in which an egg develops, and the lining of the womb is prepared for a possible pregnancy.

Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.³

A **period** is part of the menstrual cycle when women, girls, and people who menstruate bleed from their vagina.

Period products absorb or collect the blood that is released during your period.

There are 3 stages of **menopause transition**:

- **perimenopause** is the time from the start of the menopausal symptoms until after the employee has experienced their last period.
- **menopause** is defined as the last menstrual period. Menopause is reached when there has not been a period for 12 consecutive months.
- **post-menopause** is when the employee has not experienced a period for over a year.

Roles and responsibilities

There is a range of standard expectations which underpin all policies. Read more about standard [roles and responsibilities](#)⁴. In addition, the following specific responsibilities apply to this policy.

Manager

The manager should:

- Support the health, safety and wellbeing of staff, recognising their duty of care.
- Support employees who choose to disclose they are experiencing menstrual health-related symptoms, a menstrual health condition, or menopausal symptoms.
- Access appropriate information to increase their own knowledge and awareness of menstrual health and menopause related symptoms.
- Consider which workplace adjustments might be appropriate for the individual and their working environment.
- Review the support arrangements regularly as menstrual health and menopause symptoms can change over time.
- Make sure employees are aware of sources of help support within NHSScotland.
- Refer to occupational health service (OHS), where appropriate, to seek advice and provide support to the employee.
- Appropriately record menstrual health or menopause related absences.
- Support an employee who is absent from work due to menstrual health-related symptoms, a menstrual health condition, or menopause, by following the [Attendance Policy](#).⁵
- Adopt a person centred approach to an employee experiencing challenges undertaking their role due to menstrual health or menopause through supportive conversations and adjustments set out in the [Capability Policy](#).⁶

Employee

The employee should:

- Recognise their personal responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and wellbeing.
- Speak to their manager at the earliest opportunity to make them aware that menopause or menstrual health-related symptoms are affecting their ability at work.
- Consider where support, solutions, and workplace adjustments may help them to carry out their duties.
- Maintain an ongoing dialogue with their manager and review arrangements regularly to check that any agreed workplace adjustments remain appropriate and adequate.

Occupational health

Occupational health should:

- Provide expert, impartial, and timely advice in relation to how an employee's health issues may impact their ability at work.
- Seek, identify, and advise on appropriate solutions and support, including possible workplace adjustments, based on information available and individual circumstances.
- Give guidance on whether an employee may be considered as having a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Procedure

In NHSScotland, 77% of the workforce is female⁷. A significant number of employees will be experiencing menstruation, have menstrual health conditions, and will experience or have experienced menopausal symptoms. NHSScotland is committed to supporting good menstrual health and transition through menopause.

Whilst most of those affected by this policy will be women, transgender, non-binary and intersex employees may also experience menopause and menstrual health-related symptoms.

Every employee's experience of menstruation and the menopause is unique. The impact can range from mild to severe. For some, menstruation, or the menopause, or both, can affect their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and have a considerable impact on their ability to work. The workplace can either positively or negatively impact someone's symptoms and ability to work. This policy outlines how individuals can be supported at work.

Effective support for and management of employees with menopausal and menstrual health symptoms can help to:

- improve team morale
- retain valuable skills and talent
- address inequalities
- reduce sickness absence

Supportive Conversation

When an employee notifies their manager that they are experiencing symptoms which have a negative impact at work, the manager and employee should have a conversation as soon as possible. Trade Union representatives can also provide a role in supporting staff to have supportive conversation with managers.

Menstrual health symptoms can include:

- Heavy menstrual bleeding
- Period pain & cramps
- Irregular periods
- Mood changes
- Tiredness

Menstrual health related conditions⁸ include:

- Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)
- Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)
- Endometriosis⁹
- Fibroids
- Adenomyosis

More information about specific menstrual health and related conditions is available on [NHS Inform](#).¹⁰

Menopausal symptoms can include:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Sleep disruption
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating/memory problems/loss of confidence
- Mood changes including anxiety and depression
- Headaches
- Irregular periods/heavy bleeding
- Sexual difficulties and vaginal dryness
- Bone and joint problems and pains

More information is available via about the menopause is available on [NHS Inform](#).¹¹

Symptoms associated with menopause and menstrual health are often considered a private and personal issue. It may make it difficult for employees to talk openly about how these symptoms are affecting them at work. Individuals may experience the following:

- feel that their symptoms are embarrassing
- think their manager might not understand
- worry that they may not be taken seriously
- fear that it might impact people's perception of their ability to do their job.

The aim of the conversation is to check whether any necessary revisions, amendments or support, such as occupational health, would be helpful. The manager should take a note of the meeting and provide a copy to the employee. This should detail any agreed adjustments and period for review.

Workplace support and adjustments

There are practical adjustments which can support all employees experiencing menopause or menstrual health related symptoms. It is recognised that not all can be implemented in all workplace environments. Reasonable adjustment must be explored for employees who may be covered under the Equality Act 2010.²

Examples of adjustments are:

- access to food and drink

- access to washroom facilities
- flexible breaks, working hours and working location
- access to period products
- access to their own pain medication, and somewhere suitable to store
- availability of fans
- access to an open window
- better ventilation
- lightweight alternatives or additional uniforms may be available with approval from your manager

Absence recording

When an employee is absent from work due to menopause or menstrual health-related issues, managers should follow absence recording procedures outlined in the [Attendance Policy](#).⁵

Absence should be recorded on SSTS as related to menopause or menstrual health related illness.

Resolution of disagreements

Should a disagreement arise, the employee has the right to raise matters under the [Grievance Policy](#).¹³ It may be appropriate for either party to seek advice on resolving the matter from HR colleagues or a trade union representative. They should seek early resolution wherever possible.

Related policies:

- [Attendance Policy](#)⁵
- [Capability Policy](#)⁶
- [Flexible Work Location](#)¹⁴
- [Flexible Work Pattern Policy](#)¹⁵
- Local NHS Board Equality, Diversity, and Human Rights Policy

References

- ¹ Public Sector Equality Duty
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/about/principles-and-values/>
- ² Equality Act 2010
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- ³ Menstrual Health: a definition for policy, practice and research
[Menstrual health: a definition for policy, practice, and research - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31111111/)
- ⁴ NHSScotland Workforce Policies - Roles and Responsibilities
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/about/roles-and-responsibilities/>
- ⁵ NHSScotland Attendance Policy
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/policies/attendance-policy-overview/attendance-policy/>
- ⁶ NHSScotland Capability Policy
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/policies/capability-policy-overview/capability-policy/>
- ⁷ NHSScotland Workforce Data
<https://turasdata.nes.nhs.scot/data-and-reports/official-workforce-statistics/all-official-statistics-publications/06-december-2022-workforce/dashboards/nhsscotland-workforce/?pageid=8102>
- ⁸ NHS Inform – periods and menstrual health <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/girls-and-young-women-puberty-to-around-25#periods-and-menstrual-health>
- ⁹ Endometriosis
<https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/what-endometriosis>
- ¹⁰ NHS Inform – women's health
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health>
- ¹¹ NHS Inform – women's health – later years
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/late-years-around-50-years-and-over#menopause-and-post-menopause-health>
- ¹² NHSScotland National Uniform Policy
[https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/dl/DL\(2018\)04.pdf#:~:text=The%20uniform%20policy%20applies%20to%20all%20staff%20who,staff%20groups%20that%20are%20included%20within%20this%20policy.](https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/dl/DL(2018)04.pdf#:~:text=The%20uniform%20policy%20applies%20to%20all%20staff%20who,staff%20groups%20that%20are%20included%20within%20this%20policy.)
- ¹³ NHSScotland Grievance Policy
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/policies/grievance-policy-overview/grievance-policy/>
- ¹⁴ NHSScotland Flexible Work Location Policy
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/>
- ¹⁵ NHSScotland Flexible Work Pattern Policy
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/>