Puberty and Hygiene
Frequently Asked Questions

Below are questions that we are frequently asked when we talk to students your age on puberty. Remember that it is important to look for reliable sources when you have questions on puberty and the reproductive system. If you do not see the answer to your question below, please seek out information from a trusted adult or one of the recommended internet sites below. As we talked about in class, parents and trusted adults are great resources to help you answer any questions that you may have. I hope that the information we’ve gathered below can answer many of your questions.

Recommended reliable websites:
- For general questions on teen health, and puberty: http://teenshealth.org/teen/
- For questions on getting your period, tampons and pads: https://www.ubykotex.com/get-the-facts
- For information on reproductive health, healthy relationships, substance abuse, mental health, as well as physical health and nutrition: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/

Remember! Don’t stop asking questions!

General Questions

Q: Why are we talking about this?
A: Learning about your body and how it will change during puberty is important for your health and well-being. During puberty your body changes from being a child to an adult. It is important to talk about puberty so you have the knowledge and tools to understand and handle these changes as well as keep yourself healthy now and in the future.

Q: What are hormones? If we already have them, why?
A: A hormone is a chemical released by the body. Hormones act as messengers. They send messages from one part of the body to another. All living things have hormones. There are many different kinds of hormones. Each gives a different signal to the body. The hormones released during puberty are responsible for communicating the changes from child to adult. For girls, there are two hormones responsible for puberty, estrogen and progesterone. For males, there is one, testosterone.

Puberty Questions

Q: Why do we have to have puberty?
A: Puberty is a natural part of growing up. Puberty marks the beginning of the transition from child to adult. It is 100% normal. Everyone goes through it at some point.

Q: How do women have eggs in our body?
A: The eggs that women have in their body are very different than the eggs that you buy at the grocery store. Humans, like other organisms, pass characteristics, like hair color and eye color, on to their children through their genes. A baby gets half of their genes from their mother, and half their genes from their
father. The official name for eggs is ova. Ova are tiny, microscopic cells that contain the mother’s half of the genes. The cells that contain the father’s half of the genes are called sperm. When the sperm fertilizes, or meets the egg, a baby is formed.

**Q: Why do we have hair as part of puberty?**
A: Hair growth is one of the physical changes of puberty. During puberty, hair will begin to grow in places that you did not have it before. For girls, this includes, under your arm pits, on your legs and in your private parts. For boys, this includes under your arm pits, on your legs, arms, chest, face, and your private parts.

**Q: Why do men grow a beard and women don’t?**
A: Remember when we talked about hormones? Hormones act as messengers in the body. There are many different kinds of hormones. Each gives a different signal to the body. The hormones released during puberty are responsible for communicating the changes from child to adult. For males, there is just one: testosterone. In the male body, one of the messages that testosterone communicates is increased hair growth, including growing facial hair or beards.

**Q: Why does your voice change?**
A: Both boys and girls experience voice changes as they grow older, but girls' voices get only a little deeper. A boy's voice, on the other hand, may change quite a bit — from sounding like a little kid to sounding like an adult! This happens because as you go through puberty the larynx, also called the voice box, gets bigger. As the voice box grows, your voice gets deeper!

**Q: Does puberty hurt?**
A: Puberty is a time of changes. Your body is developing both physically and emotionally into an adult. These changes can feel scary or confusing. But, at the same time, they can be exciting-- You are becoming your adult self! This is not a painful process. If you are feeling scared, please talk to a trusted adult.

**Q: What parts of the body change when you are growing up?**
A: This is a great question. During puberty, your body is changing from being a child to being an adult and preparing the body to be able to reproduce, or have a child one day. For both girls and boys, the changes related to puberty are triggered on by hormones. For boys, puberty usually happens between the ages of 10-15 years old. The hormone testosterone causes boys' voices to get deeper, their shoulders to become broader and their hips narrower (smaller). Boys will also start growing chest and other facial hair. Their penis and testicles grow. They may also experience nocturnal emissions, or what are known as wet dreams. For girls, puberty usually happens earlier than for boys, between the ages of 9-13 years old. The hormones estrogen and progesterone cause changes including widening of the hips, enlargement of the breasts, and the beginning of monthly menstruation, or the period. Girls can also experience vaginal discharge during this time. For both males and females, increased levels of hormones in the body can cause growth spurts, oily skin and scalp, increased sweat and body odor, increased body hair and acne. All the changes during puberty can be confusing and it might be easy find yourself feeling lost. It’s important to remember that puberty is only a short time. Talking with friends, family and trusted adults is another good way to stay focused throughout these changes.
Q: Are you going to cry a lot? Are you going to be sad?
A: Many people experience quick changes in emotions during puberty. One minute you feel happy. The next you may feel sad or angry. These changes are often referred to as “mood swings.” Mood swings occur because of the hormones released during puberty. Hormones signal the body it is time to make the physical and emotional changes that come with developing into an adult. It is the emotional changes that come with puberty that cause mood swings. Mood swings are a normal part of puberty. Being aware of how your mood affects yourself and others is important. Learning to be aware of your emotions and how to control them is one of the biggest emotional developments in puberty. As this is a skill you’re learning, and you might not be able to control your emotions 100% of the time. Here are a few great tips on controlling your emotions from http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/body/puberty:

- Remember that you're not alone. Things always seem worse if you think you're the only one who feels bad or is dealing with challenges. Well, you're not. Even people who seem like they have it all together are probably struggling with the same feelings you are.
- Read about it. One of the best ways to get through tough times is to know exactly what you're going through. Read up on puberty. Go to the library for books about puberty, or ask your doctor or school nurse for some pamphlets or booklets.
- Depend on your friends. Talk about what you're feeling with your trusted friends. They may be feeling the same way, or they may know how to help you. At the very least, they might offer support and understanding, or just listen to you so you can get it all out.
- Talk to an adult. It can really help to talk to a parent or guardian who may remember what going through puberty feels like. School counselors, school nurses, and doctors can also listen to what you have to say and give you advice and support.
- Express yourself. If you like to write, draw, paint, sing, or play music -- you're lucky that you have these great outlets for letting your feelings out! Even if it's just spilling your guts in a journal or messing around with a guitar, you might be surprised by how good it feels to vent in some creative way.

Q: At what age will puberty start?
A: For boys, puberty usually happens between the ages of 10-15 years old. For girls, puberty usually happens earlier than for boys, between the ages of 9-13 years old. Remember that these are only a range and both boys and girls might start earlier than their peers or later. Everyone eventually goes through puberty. Because each person is starting and experiencing these changes differently, it is important to be kind and respectful friend to others during this time.

Q: Can our friendships change?
A: Yes, sometimes friendships can change during puberty. As your body develops into its adult self, so does your mind. You may find that as you change, you enjoy hanging out with different people, or maybe you enjoy hanging out with the same people. What is important to remember as you grow and change, is to always be a kind and respectful peer even to individuals that you may not want to be friends with.

Hygiene Questions

Q: What does shaving cream do? Do you have to use a certain kind?
A: The main purpose of shaving cream is to help you get a smooth shave without cutting yourself. There are many different shaving creams available at the store. Picking a shaving cream is a matter of personal choice.
choice. We can however give you some general recommendations. In general, products that are marked “sensitive skin” will be gentler on your skin. It is also a good idea to look for products that contain moisturizer. There are also a number of scents available. Try a few different products and find the one that you like best!

**Q: Do you have to use a certain shaver (razor)?**
A: Much like choosing a shaving cream, finding a razor is a matter of personal preference. We can simply provide some recommendations. There are many razor options out there, from electric to disposable, and each will offer a slightly different shave. No matter what type of razor you choose, the most important quality is that the blade not be dull to avoid cutting yourself accidentally. You should always consult and adult before shaving, they can show you the proper way to shave to prevent cutting yourself.

**Q: How bad is the odor (from sweat)?**
A: If the odor that you are referring to is the increased sweat and body odor that sometimes comes with puberty, it varies. There are some ways to help prevent and control body odor. Shower or bathe on a regular basis. Remember to wash everywhere, including your arm pits, belly button and genitals (private parts). When you are done showering, use a deodorant or antiperspirant to control sweat and odor. Reapply deodorant or antiperspirant after physical activity or if you sweat a lot during the day. It may also be a good idea to keep deodorant or antiperspirant in your locker or backpack to use after P.E.

**Q: Do you have to use floss?**
A: Yes! You should floss at least once a day. Flossing helps to remove particles of food that get stuck between your teeth. This helps to prevent cavities from forming between your teeth. Cavities are caused by bacteria that live in your mouth, and feed off of the food that you eat. When these bacteria eat, they produce an acid. This acid is what causes cavities. If you do not floss, you leave little particles of food in your teeth, meaning more food for the bacteria! This in turn means more acid, and more cavities! So protect your teeth, and floss at least once a day and brush 2-3 times a day.

**Q: What happens if you do not shower every day?**
A: It is difficult to say exactly what would happen if you decided not to shower every day, though we can make some guesses. For one, you probably would not smell great. Depending on how long between showers, you might also find that your skin and hair are oilier than normal. Some people do not need to wash their hair every day, but it is still important to jump in the shower and wash the rest of your body to remove the dirt and oil. Oilier skin can lead to some problems, like acne. Acne is caused when oil and dirt block up your skin. So you can imagine if you don’t wash the oil and dirt off, you may have more acne.

**Q: How do you get pimples? How do you get rid of pimples? Why do you get acne?**
A: Pimples are small red bumps that form when a pore, the tiny holes in your skin, become irritated by oil and dirt. Acne is the skin condition that occurs when you have many pimples. Acne most commonly appears on your face, neck, chest, back and shoulders. There are many products sold at the local drug store that can help prevent or treat acne. Washing your face regularly with a face wash can help prevent acne. There are also spot treatments, like creams, that you can put on pimples when they become inflamed. It is important to avoid picking at your pimples, as this will make them worse. Ask an adult to come with you to the drug store to look at the different products. What works best for some people, may
not work for others, so you may have to try a few products until you find one that helps keep your skin clean and clear.

Q: How do you exercise?
A: Any way that you want! Anything that gets your body moving, raises your heart rate and makes you sweat a little is exercise. There are many different exercise options out there. Some people like to run or walk. Others like to play sports, like soccer or baseball. Other people like to dance. You can also play tag with friends. Or go on a hike with your family. What is important is to find something that you enjoy and to do it every day! It is recommended that you get at least 60 minutes of exercise a day. This can be 60 minutes straight, or it can be spread out over the day. So get out there and get moving!

Period Questions

Q: What is a period? Why do you get your period?
A: The official name for getting your period is “menstruation.” When a girl menstruates, or has her period, a small amount of bleeding takes place from her vagina. The vagina is a small opening that girls have between their legs. The blood that flows from the body each month is called your menstrual fluid. This menstrual fluid is the lining of the uterus that is shed once a month and is made up of blood, and tissue from the lining of a women’s uterus. During a woman’s reproductive years, this lining builds up every month in anticipation of the woman becoming pregnant. If the woman does not become pregnant, the lining is not needed and is discharged through the vagina to the outside of the body each month. Women use pads or tampons to keep their period from getting on or staining their underwear or clothes. Once a woman has her period, it marks the time the she is physically able to reproduce, meaning she can have a baby. Though the body is capable of having a baby, it does not always mean that an individual is physically or emotionally ready to have a baby. Starting your period is a big stage in puberty for girls. Prior to her first period, called menarche, young women will have had earlier developments, such as pubic hair and breast development. Most girls will have their first period between the ages of 11 and 14. But some girls will start as early as 8, others as late as 17.

Q: How much blood do you think some girls will have when they have their period?
A: Every woman’s period is different. How much blood a women has is different for each person. For some girls it can be as little as 4 tablespoons (think 4 big dinner spoons) or as much as a cup. The important thing to remember is that periods are normal and are nothing to be scared or embarrassed of.

Q: How do you know when you will get your period? Is it normal to have your period one month, and the next to not have your period?
A: When you first start your period it can be difficult to know exactly when your period will start. We hear a lot about the menstrual "cycle," which can make it sound as though it happens like clockwork. In fact, most women don't get their periods in exactly the same number of days after the last one. It's not unusual, especially in the first 2 years after you get your first period, to skip periods or to have an irregular menstrual cycle. It is a good idea to keep a tampon or pad in your backpack, just in case.

Q: How long will it last?
A: For most women, their period lasts between 3 to 5 days. Remember, like everything this is only an average. Some women may have longer periods while others may have shorter periods. Remember, your
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period is nothing to be scared of, menstruation is completely normal and all women get their period. Keeping a pad or a tampon in your backpack or purse is a good idea in case you or a friend needs one.

Q: What if you don’t have a pad or tampon?
A: Keeping a pad or tampon with you is a good idea, but there may be a time that you do not have one. If you are comfortable you can ask friends if they have a pad or tampon on them. All women get their period, so they understand. Don’t feel too shy or embarrassed to walk up to another girl/woman and ask them if they have a spare tampon or pad. If you are at school, you can ask to go to the nurse’s office. The school nurse has pads and tampons available. If you are out and cannot get a tampon or pad, you can create a temporary pad with toilet paper. Start unrolling toilet paper, place one end on your underwear right where you would place a pad (if you had one) and start wrapping around and around. Then with the loose ends tie a knot on the underside of your underwear. Repeat a second time. This self-made pad is temporary, but should last long enough to get you through until you can stop by a store or go home for a change. You may also be able to find tampon or pad dispensers in some bathrooms that take coins for purchase.

Q: Does it hurt when you have your period?
A: Every girl is unique. Some girls have no feeling of being uncomfortable when they get their periods, and others experience cramping. Most girls fall somewhere in the mid-range and feel aware of their periods, but continue to pursue their usual activities in comfort. If you do find that you experience cramps during your periods, there are some things you can do to help relieve the discomfort:

- **Try Heat:** Put a heating pad on your stomach. Or take a hot shower or bath.
- **Be Good To Your Body:** When you feel bad it may be tempting to eat unhealthy food. Resist the urge! Stuffing your face with sweets or salty snacks will only make you feel worse. It can make you feel bloated and crampy. It is also important to drink lots of water. Drinking warm water or tea can be comforting as well.
- **Get Moving:** While exercise may seem like the last thing you want to do when you are not feeling well, exercise can help to relieve cramps. This works because exercise releases your body’s natural pain relievers.
- **Take Something:** Pain relievers, such as ibuprofen, can help. Always ask an adult before you take any medication.
- **Talk to Your Doctor:** If you find that nothing helps your cramps, talk to your doctor. They can tell you about different medical treatments that can help relieve your cramps.

Q: How many years do you usually have your period?
A: You may be getting tired of hearing this, but there is no absolute length of time. How long a woman has her period varies from women to women. On average, most girls start their period between 12 and 13 years old, though some girls may start as early as 8 or as late as 16. Most women stop getting their period around the age of 50, when they start what is called menopause. Menopause is a time when a woman’s body starts the changes that mark the end of her reproductive years. If you look at the average age of first period, 13, and the average age of menopause, 50, this means that women usually experience their periods for roughly 38 years.

Q: Do boys have something like a period?
A: Women's bodies have the capacity to become pregnant - to conceive and nurture a baby. The menstrual cycle of men...
cycle is the way that the female reproductive system prepares itself for a potential pregnancy. The ovaries release an egg to be fertilized, and the uterus creates an environment in which a fertilized egg will grow into a baby. When the egg is not fertilized, the period is the way the body "resets" itself so it can begin the process all over again. This usually happens about once a month or so. Boy's bodies aren't designed to become pregnant, so they do not go through this cycle like the female body does.

Q: Can you wear white pants?
A: This is completely up to you. If you have a pad or tampon, and change it regularly you should have no problems with blood getting on your pants. Some women and girls feel more comfortable wearing dark pants during their period, just in case. If you feel comfortable- go for it!

Q: Why do some pads have deodorant? Does a period smell?
A: Some pads and even tampons are made with deodorant, meaning they have a chemical in them that is designed to cover-up menstrual odors. This is unnecessary because if you change your pad or tampon regularly they will not have a bad odor. In addition, some girls and women find the deodorant irritating and it can cause an infection.

Q: Can you get sick from your period?
A: No, you cannot get sick from your period. Some women experience different levels of cramping or discomfort when they have their period, but they are not sick. There are things that you can do, like apply warm compresses, take a shower, or take a pain reliever, which can help if you experience pain or discomfort during your period.

Q: How do pads soak up all the blood?
A: Pads are rectangles of material that you stick to the inside of your underwear. Some have extra material on the sides (called "wings") that fold over the edges of your underwear to better hold the pad in place and prevent leakage. Sometimes, pads are called sanitary pads or sanitary napkins. They are able to soak up all the blood because of the absorbent, meaning it soaks up liquids, material that they are made of. Pads come in different levels of absorbency (light, medium, heavy, super), meaning they can soak up different amounts of liquid. Pick the pad and absorbency that is right for you. If you have a light period, pick a light absorbency pad. If you have a heavier period, a heavy or super absorbency might be right for you.

Q: What is a tampon?
A: A tampon is one way of protecting your clothing from getting blood on them during your period. A tampon is like a small rolled up piece of cotton with a string at one end. A girl pushes a tampon into her vagina leaving the string hanging outside her body. The string is then used to pull the tampon out. Some tampons also come with applicators, either cardboard or plastic, that help you to insert the tampon. Other forms of protection for your clothing are sanitary pads, also called maxi pads or just pads. Sanitary pads are thin pads made of a soft cotton-like material. They are worn inside your under wear. Different girls find different methods work best for them. Asking a trusted adult about pads and tampons is a good way to find out more.

Q: Do you have to wear tampons all the time?
A: When you have your period, you will want to wear a pad or a tampon all the time until your period has stopped. Make sure you change your pad or tampon least once every 4 to 6 hours. Wearing a tampon for
longer wear is associated with problems like irritation and infections. If you need protection for longer than 8 hours, say you are going to sleep, it is recommended that you use a pad.

Q: Does it hurt to put in tampons?
A: A tampon may be uncomfortable the first time you try to insert it, but it shouldn't be extremely painful. You shouldn't feel it once it's in, so if there is pain or discomfort, you may have inserted it incorrectly. That's okay, like any new skill it may take practice to get it right. The key to pain-free tampon application is to relax, which - if it's your first time - is probably the hardest thing to do. Just keep practicing, you'll get it right! And there's no law that says you have to use a tampon. It may take months of trying and trying lots of different kinds before you finally get comfortable enough to use them every month.

Q: If you have a tampon on, how do you pee?
A: Women are able to pee while wearing a tampon, because pee does not come from a women’s vagina. Women have three holes in their genitals (their privates), 1) the vagina, 2) the urethra, and 3) the anus.
   1) The vagina is the muscular tube between the uterus and outside the female body. When a woman is pregnant, the baby is born through the vagina. The vagina is also where period blood comes from. It is also where the tampon is inserted into the body.
   2) The urethra is the tube-like organ which carries urine from the bladder. In females, the urethra is not connected to the reproductive system at all.
   3) The anus is part of the digestive tract. After food moves through the digestive tract, what cannot be digested must exit the body as solid waste (also called feces or poop). Solid waste exits the body through the anus.

Q: What if you have a yeast infection, how do you use a tampon?
A: It is recommended that you do not use tampons if you have a yeast infection. Instead, use a pad. It is best to talk to an adult first if you think you have a yeast infection so you can get proper medical treatment.