

## MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit



### Information and consent form for parents/guardians of female students (or the respective school head teacher or their authorized designate in the absence of a Parent) for the MENISCUS trial.

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Project title:</b>                | Menstrual health interventions, schooling and mental health symptoms among Ugandan students (MENISCUS): a school-based cluster-randomised trial  |
| <b>Funder:</b>                       | UK Joint Global Health Trials (Medical Research Council-Department for International Development-Wellcome Trust) Grant # MR/V005634/1  |
| <b>Research Site:</b>                | Wakiso and Kalungu Districts<br>C/o MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit.<br>Plot 51-59, Nakiwogo Road<br>P O Box 49, Entebbe, Uganda<br>Tel: +256(0) 417 704000; (0)312 262910/1; (0)702 438487  |
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| <b>Trial Manager:</b>                | Dr. Catherine Kansiime,<br>MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit<br><i>Email: Catherine.Kansiime@mrcuganda.org</i>   |

#### Summary (What you should know about this study):

- The aim of the study is to assess whether a school-based intervention focused on improving management of menstrual periods improves education, health and well-being outcomes among girls in secondary school in Wakiso and Kalungu districts in Uganda.
- This document explains the purpose of this study and asks whether you agree for your daughter to participate in the study. We will explain what she will be asked to do if you and she agree to participate.
- Your daughter's participation is completely voluntary. You or your daughter have the right for your daughter to take part in the study or to agree to take part now and change your mind later.
- Whatever you decide will not affect your daughter's regular healthcare and support.

Please review this form carefully. Ask any questions before you make a decision.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep.**

## **Part I: Information about this study**

### **Introduction**

The MENISCUS trial is led by scientists at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, with our partner WoMena Uganda.

We are carrying out research to guide our secondary schools to identify practical ways of helping girls to become and stay healthier and complete studying at school through improved management of menstrual periods. We have received permission to conduct this research from your school administration, the district, the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Research Ethics Committees of the UVRI, LSHTM and Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST).

We invite your daughter to be part of this research. It is optional for you to choose whether or not you want your daughter participate in this research. If you agree to allow your daughter to participate, we shall ask your daughter for approval as well. Both of you have to approve before your daughter can be involved.

Please feel free to ask us questions now or later using our contact information which is indicated below. We will take time to explain to you.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the MENISCUS study is to see whether a health promotion intervention in secondary schools improves menstrual health (i.e. how girls manage their periods safely and confidently). We want to learn whether the package is likely to improve education, health and well-being outcomes among girls, and menstrual health knowledge and attitudes towards periods among boys. If the intervention is successful, it could be introduced in other schools in Uganda.

### **Selection**

We request your daughter to participate in this research because she is a female secondary school student starting Form 2 in one of 60 schools chosen for this study. We are seeking your consent because you are the parent/guardian of your daughter.

### **Voluntary Participation**

It is optional for your daughter to participate in this research. You or she can choose to say no. That decision shall not affect any services that you and your family receive at the secondary school and/or health facilities. You can ask as many questions as you like and we shall be available to answer them. You don't have to decide today. You can think about it and tell us what you decide later. You can agree that the school head teacher or authorized designate shall provide exceptional signed consent on your behalf if you are not available or accessible for documented reasons.

### **Procedures**

There are 60 schools in the trial. Of these, half (30) will be randomly selected to receive the MENISCUS intervention. In these 30 schools, all pupils in Form 2 at the start of 2022 will receive education about puberty and menstruation, improvements to school toilet facilities, and will have the option to participate in a drama skit relating to menstrual health. Your daughter will also sit two independently administered educational assessments covering recently taught curricula. The intervention will be available throughout 2022. The schools which do not receive the MENISCUS intervention in 2022 will have the opportunity to receive it in 2023.

We request your consent for your daughter to participate in the following additional individual activities: two self-completed questionnaires (40-60 minutes); the self-collection of vaginal swabs; and receiving a menstrual management kit. Some girls will be asked to participate in an individual interview with a researcher (about 60 minutes); a group discussion (1-2 hours); and/or completion of a diary on school attendance, menstruation, and pain.

1) Questionnaires among students (40-60 minutes) and use of assessment scores:

Your daughter will be requested to complete a questionnaire at the beginning (~2022) and end of the study (~2023) on her knowledge and experiences of menstruation, which will be conducted using tablet computers. Our trained researchers will explain to your daughter how to use the tablets. If your daughter does not wish to answer some of the questions, she may skip them and move on to the next question. In some cases, your daughter may be asked to answer the questions using a paper questionnaire instead. These data will be entered by trained research assistants into a password-protected electronic database.

We would also like to use her score from the educational assessments in our research. Her performance on these exams will not affect her school standing. Individual scores will be used for research purposes only and will not be shared with students, teachers or anyone else.

The trained researchers and research assistants will maintain safe custody of paper forms with identification data, including contact details in lockable cabinets and/or cupboards. This will be done to preserve privacy and confidentiality of participants. Nobody will be able to identify you from the research reports, presentations and publications.

2) Provision of Menstrual Management kit

Girls in the 30 intervention schools will be offered a kit which contains reusable sanitary pads provided in a bag with knickers, a water bottle, soap and a towel. Your daughter will be asked to participate in a session led by a teacher or a senior girl who has been trained by an expert trainer in menstrual health on how to use re-usable pads. They will show your daughter how to use the re-usable pads, and will discuss any concerns she might have about this. Your daughter will be asked to try using the re-usable pads for the next 12 months, if she feels comfortable doing so. If your daughter is experiencing any problems using the reusable pads, she is encouraged to discuss these with the expert trainer, teacher, peer, parents, guardian, school nurse, or the clinical officer on the project. The kit will also include vouchers for pain relief medication. Each voucher can be exchanged for up to 6 paracetamol or ibuprofen tablets per month from the school nurse or specified teacher. If your daughter agrees to participate in the study, there is no obligation to use the pads, the vouchers or the pain relief medication.

Girls in the 30 control schools will be offered this kit at the end of the study

3) Complete a daily diary on school attendance, menstruation and pain

Some girls who have agreed to participate in the study will be asked to complete a daily diary on school attendance, menstruation and pain. This will be administered for a minimum of 12 weeks starting around the end of 2022. MENISCUS research assistants will guide your daughter on how to complete the daily diaries if she is selected. Data from the daily diaries will be entered electronically at the end of each term when diaries are collected.

4) Group discussions and/or interviews among students (of 1-2 hours):

Some girls in the intervention schools will be asked to take part in a discussion with a small group of other girls and/or individual interviews, on school premises. They will be guided by our trained adolescent-friendly researchers who will be formally introduced to the school authorities and will wear personal identity cards. The researcher will ask about your daughter perceptions of the intervention and how they affected management of her periods. The discussions will take place at an agreed venue or within the school premises. The entire discussion will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be kept securely in lockable cabinets/cupboards at our research office. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except the researchers or other ethical eligible person(s) such as the ethics review committees with regulated access to the tapes will be allowed to listen to the tapes. Nobody's name will be mentioned on the tapes and your daughter will not be able to be identified.

#### **5) Genital symptoms and self-collection of vaginal swabs**

In the questionnaire at endline, your daughter will be asked about how she cleans her genitals and any current urogenital symptoms (like itching in the genital area or burning when urinating). If she reports having these symptoms, she will be referred to an appropriate clinic for management and treatment as needed. If she has symptoms of a urinary tract infection (UTI) (e.g. urinary burning and frequency) we will ask her for a urine sample to be tested for UTI.

She will also be asked to provide self-two collected vaginal swabs at endline that will be tested for bacterial vaginosis and candida. Bacterial vaginosis is not a sexually transmitted infection and she does not need to be sexually active to have it. She will receive training on how to do this from the study staff. The swabs will be sent to our laboratory. One swab will be used to test for bacterial vaginosis. The other swab will be stored for future testing. We may need to ship the second swab overseas for detailed testing about the types of bacteria present. We will not give you the results of these tests but you will receive appropriate treatment for any symptomatic infection from the clinic.

#### **Why might one sample be shipped overseas?**

The second vaginal swab needs detailed testing so we can identify which types of bacteria are present. This testing needs specialist equipment which is not commonly used in Uganda. The samples will have a study number but not your name or other identifying information about you.

#### **Risks and discomfort: Is the study bad or dangerous for your daughter?**

We are asking her to share with us some very personal and confidential information including about her periods and how you manage them. She may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. Your daughter will be taught and/or helped by an experienced team who have experience in helping young girls use re-usable pads. She will also be taught how to wash and dry the re-usable sanitary pad, identify symptoms of infection and whom to report it to. If your daughter does not follow these instructions, there is a risk of infection or irritation when she uses them. However, in case of any adverse events or problems with the reusable pads, your daughter should contact the school nurse for assistance or for referral if the nurse cannot handle the case. We have a clinical officer to whom adverse events which cannot be handled by the school nurse will be referred. Your daughter will be encouraged to report early any challenges she experiences with using the reusable pads.

There is a risk that she may feel embarrassed answering questions about genital hygiene and symptoms or being asked to self-collect vaginal swabs. To mitigate the risk of embarrassment, a self-completed form on a tablet will be used, and we will develop a short, animated video on basic anatomy and anticipated discomfort for her to view before taking the vaginal swab. Taking these swabs is painless and safe and will not harm her in any way, even if she has never had sexual intercourse. The swabs should not cause any discomfort as they are very thin. They will not break or tear any skin near the opening of her vagina.

Your daughter will be encouraged to freely ask as many questions as possible and to discuss beliefs and myths about the female anatomy and menstruation. This information will help her to make decisions on how best to manage her menstruation. your daughter will be given re-usable pads to manage your menstruation.

#### **Benefits: Is there anything good that happens to your daughter from participating?**

She may benefit from having the menstrual kit in terms of managing her menstruation more easily. The pain relief medication can also help with cramps that she might get during her periods. She may find the diary helpful for her to monitor her menstrual cycle and to know when to expect her next period. Answering the questions about urogenital symptoms and providing a urine sample will enable her to be treated for these symptoms. There is no direct benefit to her of providing the swab samples. Her participation in the trial is likely to help us, the schools, the parents or guardians, health facilities and the education and health authorities to

find out more about her health information and service needs. We hope that these will help all the relevant people to meet those needs better in the future. Taking part in this research may also remind her to think deeply about her health and her future.

**Reimbursements: Will your daughter receive anything for being in the study?**

You will be given 10,000 shillings to compensate for your time and effort. Your daughter will not be paid to take part in this research. However, she will be given a pen, a hardcover note book and a soft drink to compensate for her time and effort.

**Confidentiality: Is anybody going to know about this?**

We will not tell other people that your daughter was involved in this research. We shall not share personal information that identifies her to anyone who does not work in this research. Any information about her will have a study number on it instead of her name. However, her data may be seen by auditors.

**Sharing the Findings: Will you be told the study results?**

When this research is completed, we shall inform your daughter, her peers and parents/guardians about the results obtained from the trial. The results will never be reported in a way that allows anyone except members of the research team to know what you specifically told us or any of the individual results we obtained from you. We will also share the research results with authorities at the school, district and national levels, including what we have learnt.

Afterwards, we will be telling other people, scientists, health workers and others, what we found. We will do this by writing and sharing reports and by going to meetings with people who are interested in this work. The research findings will be published in international science journals and electronic websites so that other people may learn from us. Data may also be made available in the public domain via the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. This means that it may be used for further analyses. All data will be anonymised i.e. it cannot be linked to your daughter.

**Who to Contact: Who can you talk to or ask questions about this study?**

You can ask us questions now or later by telephone, e-mail, post or at the physical addresses indicated on the assent/consent form to be given to you. If you are nearby, you can come and see us.

You can contact any of the following about this research

Dr. Catherine Kansiime, MENISCUS Trial Manager

*Email:* Catherine.Kansiime@mrcuganda.org; Phone number +256 702438487

If you have any questions, complaints or concerns about your rights as a person involved in this research, please contact: UVRI Research Ethics Committee: Phone number +256 0414 321962 or +256 716 321962

**PART 2: PARENTAL CONSENT (VERSION 1.4 AUGUST 2022)**



By signing below, I consent for my daughter to participate in the study as described above, including for:

- My daughter to self-complete the two study questionnaires
- My daughter to receive a menstrual management kit
- My daughter to self-collect two vaginal swabs, one of which will be stored and may be shipped overseas
- My daughter to participate in group discussions or interviews and complete a daily diary on school attendance and menstruation, if selected for these activities
- All anonymised data collected to be used as part of the research and shared with other researchers

My questions concerning this study have been answered by .....

| Please read each question below  | Please <b>circle</b> all you agree with: |    |
|--|--|----|
| Have you read (or had read to you) information about this project?                       | Yes                                      | No |
| Has somebody else explained this project to you?   | Yes                                      | No |
| Do you understand what this project is about?  | Yes                                      | No |
| Have you had any questions answered in a way you understand?                             | Yes                                      | No |
| Do you understand that it is ok to stop taking part at any time without giving a reason? | Yes                                      | No |
| Are you happy for your daughter to take part in this study? [CONSENT]                    | Yes                                      | No |

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

School ID number |\_|\_|\_|\_|

Name of Parent/Guardian/  
Authorized Delegate: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of consent: |\_|\_|\_|/|\_|\_|\_|/|\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|  
                          dd / mm / yyyy

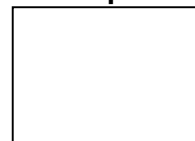
**An Informed Assent Form will be completed by your daughter, if she also agrees.**

**If literacy challenged:** A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team). Literacy challenged parents/guardians should include their thumb print as well.

**Print name of witness** \_\_\_\_\_

**AND left thumb print of participant**

**Signature of witness** \_\_\_\_\_



**Date** \_\_\_\_\_ **Day/month/year**

**To be completed by the researcher:** I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Name of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: |\_|\_|\_|/|\_|\_|\_|/|\_|\_|\_|\_|\_|  
                          dd / mm / yyyy

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_