RCH NATIONAL
Child Health POLL

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne



Periods and pain:
What teens are telling us

Poll report

Poll 43, October 2026

Report highlights

- Two in three teens (63%) say they know nothing or only a little about periods.
- The vast majority of teens with periods say they regularly have period pain (89%), with 36% having moderate pain and 13% having severe pain.
- Half of teens (50%) who have periods have missed out on daily activities because of their period symptoms.
- Two in five teens (41%) with moderate or severe period pain have not accessed health services for their pain, and more than a third (35%) find it hard to talk to their doctor about periods and period pain.

Teen knowledge about periods

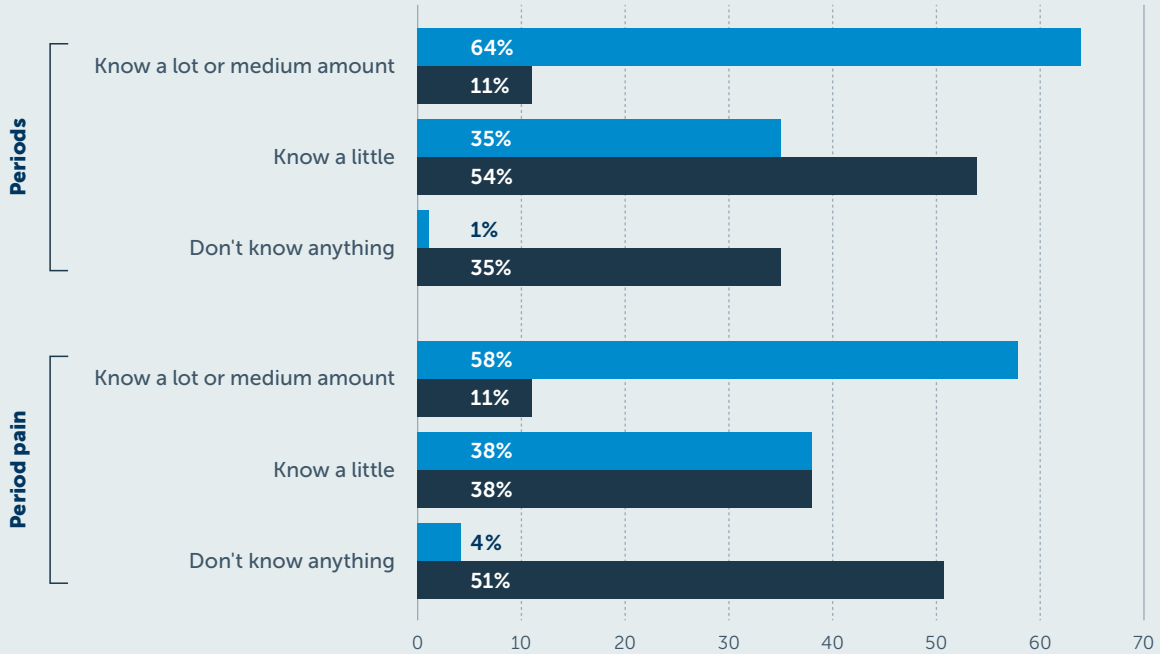
We asked teens aged 12 to 17 years how much they know about **periods and period pain**. Two in three teens (63%) say they only know a little (45%) or nothing at all (18%) about periods, with just over one in three (37%) knowing a medium amount or a lot. Knowledge about **period pain** was lower, with almost two in five (38%) reporting they know only a little and approximately a quarter (28%) reporting they do not know anything. Female and male teens report different levels of knowledge about periods and period pain, with the majority of female teens knowing a medium amount or a lot about **periods** (64%) compared to just 11% of male teens. A third of male teens (35%) do not know anything about **periods**, and half (51%) do not know anything about **period pain** (*see Figure 1*).

Although some teens say they have not learnt anything at all in school about periods (16%), period pain (29%) or how people deal with periods (29%), most teens report having learnt at least a small amount (i.e. learnt a little, learnt some things or learnt a lot): 84% about periods, 71% about period pain and 71% about how people deal with periods. More female teens than male teens report they have learnt at least a small amount on all topics: learnt about periods (94% vs 76%), period pain (84% vs 59%) and how people deal with periods (86% vs 57%). The level of knowledge obtained at school did not differ by age of the respondent.

Half of teens with periods have **missed out on daily activities because of period symptoms**



Teens' knowledge of periods and period pain



Percentage of teens aged 12–17 years (*n* = 1,583)

Female
Male

Note: All proportions are weighted by teens' age, sex, socioeconomic status, regionality and family structure

Figure 1.

41% of teens with moderate or severe period pain **have not accessed healthcare** for their symptoms



Parent knowledge about periods

Self-reported level of knowledge was higher among parents than among teens, with gender differences also evident. Among female parents, 70% say they know a lot about **periods** and 60% say they know a lot about **period pain**. Knowledge was lower among male parents, with just one in ten saying they know a lot about **periods** (12%) and **period pain** (10%).

Age of first period and feeling prepared

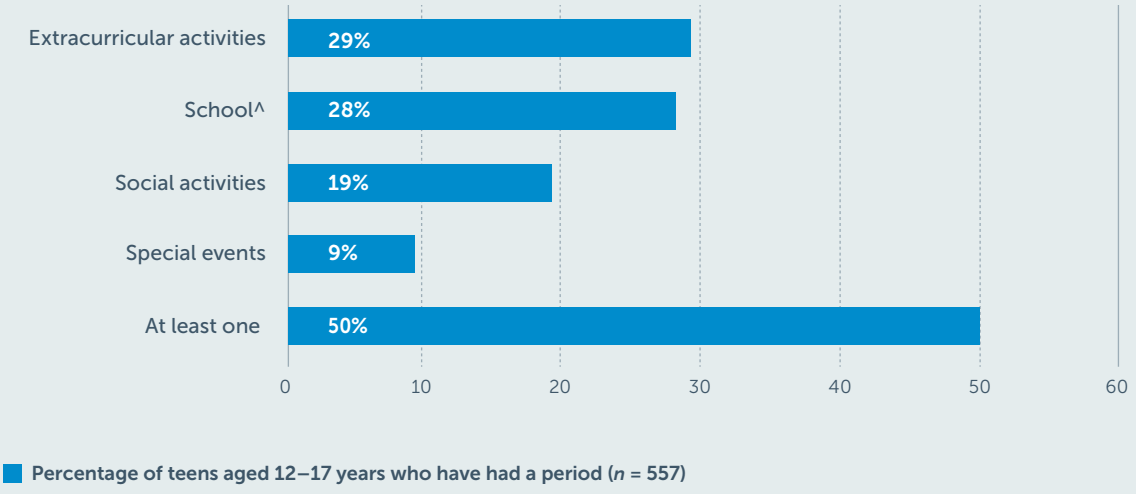
Teens reported the most common age to get their first period was 12 years (33%), with nine in ten experiencing their first period (menarche) between 11 and 14 years of age. One in sixteen respondents (6%) had their first period between 8 and 10 years of age.

Teens were asked how prepared they felt when they got their first period. Almost two in five (38%) felt a little bit prepared, 35% felt somewhat prepared and 13% did not feel at all prepared.

Impact of periods on participation in school and other activities

Half of respondents who have periods (50%) say they have missed out on school or an activity because of their period and related symptoms, including headaches or migraines, fatigue, cramps, bloating, tender breasts, aches and pains, nausea and vomiting, digestive changes, pimples and acne, feeling dizzy and faint, heavy bleeding, changes to mood and trouble sleeping. Almost one in three (29%) have missed extracurricular activities, 28% have missed school, 19% have missed social activities and 9% have missed special events (*see Figure 2*).

Proportion of teens who have **missed school or other activities** due to period*



* period and related symptoms (for full list see text above)
^ respondents who attend school (*n* = 538)

Note: All proportions are weighted by teens' age, sex, socioeconomic status, regionality and family structure

Figure 2.

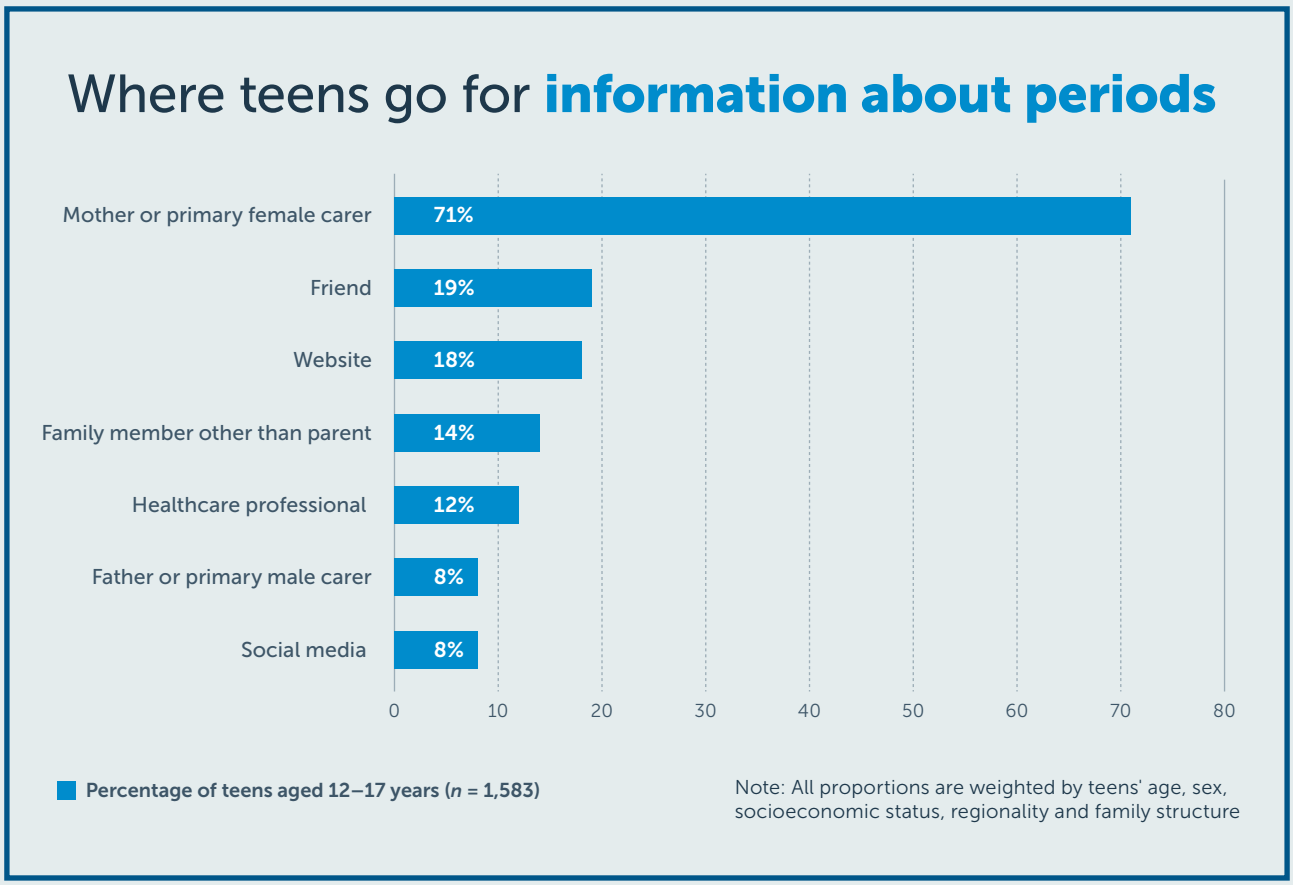


Figure 3.

Teens' experience of period pain

Nine in ten teens (89%) say they regularly experience pain during their period. Two in five (40%) of all teens experience mild pain, more than one in three (36%) experience moderate pain, 12% experience severe pain and 1% say they experience the worst pain imaginable. Among teens who say they have moderate, severe or the worst imaginable period pain, 43% have missed out on school, over three times as many as those with no pain or mild pain, 13%. Seven in ten (69%) of those with moderate, severe or worst imaginable period pain have missed at least one activity such as extracurricular activities, school, social activities and special events.

More than one in three teens (36%) who experience any level of regular period pain say they are not worried about it, while just under half (45%) are a little worried and 19% are moderately or very worried. One in five (18%) of those experiencing pain say their period pain is not a problem for them; over half (56%) say it is a little bit of a problem, 20% say it is somewhat of a problem, and 6% say it is a big problem. Four times as many teens who report their period pain is a problem say they have missed school or activities (63%) compared to those who say their period pain is not a problem (15%).

Healthcare for period pain

Three in five teens (59%) with moderate or severe pain have accessed healthcare. Of those who accessed care, 64% saw one healthcare provider and 36% saw two or more providers. Further, of those who accessed healthcare, 78% saw a general practitioner (GP), 26% saw a nurse (including a school nurse), 13% saw a gynaecologist, 8% went to hospital or emergency department, 7% saw an allied health professional, 7% saw a counsellor or psychologist and 6% saw a different provider such as an acupuncturist, naturopath or Chinese medicine practitioner.

Two in five teens (41%) with moderate or severe period pain have not accessed healthcare. Teens with moderate or severe period pain who had a regular GP were substantially more likely to access healthcare than those who did not (70% vs 38%).

Among teens whose parent reports they have a regular family GP (88%), most (73%) say their doctor acknowledges and supports them with their period pain, but one in six (15%) do not feel supported or acknowledged. More than a third of teens (35%) find it hard to talk to their doctor about their period and period pain.

Teens' information sources and family support

The majority of parents who report their teen has regular period pain say it is a problem (84%) and 32% say they are moderately or very worried about it, with a further 43% reporting 'a little' worry. Despite most parents reporting some level of worry (75%) about their teen's period pain, 64% think that their teen's pain is normal and one in five (19%) think that their teen should tough it out. Slightly more male parents (22%) than female parents (17%) think that their teen should tough it out when they have period pain, as do parents who speak a language other than English at home (30%) compared to those who only speak English (16%). Among those parents who do not have a regular GP, 27% thought their teen should tough it out compared to 18% of those with a GP.

Parents' support of teens

All teens were asked where they would go for information about periods. Almost three quarters (71%) say they would go to their mother or primary female carer, and just 8% say they would go to their father or primary male carer. One in five teens (19%) would seek information from a friend, 18% from a website, 14% from a family member other than a parent, 12% from a healthcare professional, and 8% from social media (*see Figure 3*).

Among teens who experience regular period pain, 92% feel like their family acknowledges and supports them with their period pain. Even though most feel supported, almost one in three (32%) also say that it is hard to talk about their period and period pain with their family.

A third of teens (35%) find it **difficult to speak to their doctor about periods and period pain**



Implications

Period symptoms and pain affect a significant proportion of teens and cause many to miss out on activities of daily life.[1] Findings from this survey show that there is a concerning gap in the knowledge of teens – and to a lesser extent, of parents – about periods and period pain. A substantial proportion of female teens do not know anything or only know a little about these important topics. Although it is expected that female teens will have more knowledge and education than male teens, it is still important to educate male teens about periods to help reduce stigma and give them practical knowledge to support those who have periods.

Half of teens who have periods report missing out on activities and events because of their period and period-related symptoms. It is recommended to seek healthcare if period pain prevents participation in daily life (e.g. school, work, etc.), yet this study reveals that a large number of teens with problematic period pain have not sought healthcare for it.[2] Ongoing period pain can negatively impact quality of life and should be addressed in the same manner as other chronic health conditions.[3]

This study suggests that education about periods may not be sufficient in some schools, with some teens – especially males – saying they had not learnt anything about periods at school. Australian school curriculum mandates education on being 'healthy, safe, and active'; however, topics like puberty and menstruation are not specifically mentioned.[4] Education about periods needs to be directly incorporated into health curriculums, with adequate resourcing and support for teachers to deliver this education.

Reported level of knowledge among female parents was high and most teens say they would go to their mother for information about periods. This highlights the important role of female carers when it comes to period education for their teens. Of note, period-related knowledge among fathers was low and although they are infrequently the preferred information source for young people on this topic, they still play an important role in supporting their teens. Parents need support so that they are equipped to have conversations about periods and period pain with their teens.

Community education initiatives can help parents stay up-to-date with best practice knowledge so they can answer their teens' questions and know when to help them seek healthcare and additional support. Empowering parents and teens with knowledge is key to ensuring that teens feel prepared for their first period and know which products are available to them, how to treat pain at home and when they should seek healthcare for their pain and other symptoms.

Data source and methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively for The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne by the Online Research Unit. The survey was administered from 12 to 21 January 2026 to a randomly selected nationally representative sample of Australian parents aged 18 years or older by age, sex and state of residence. All parents had at least one child aged 12 to 17 years of age who was also invited to participate in the survey. The survey comprised two questionnaires: one completed by a parent or caregiver and the other by their child aged 12 to 17 years. For parents with more than one child in the target population, one child was randomly selected to participate. Parents and children responded to close-ended questions assessing their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to periods and period pain. The response rate among eligible parents was 91%, with 2,285 completing the parent questionnaire. Of these, 1,595 (70%) provided consent for their child aged 12 to 17 years to participate. There was no meaningful difference in the demographic characteristics of parents who consented to their child participating and those who did not. All children whose parents consented agreed to participate and completed the child questionnaire, resulting in 1,595 parent-child dyads. The estimates presented in this report are based on these 1,595 children and the 2,285 parents who completed their respective questionnaires. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic distribution of the Australian population, using figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

References

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