



## Periods During Quarantine

Maya, 10, got her period for the first time right before the COVID-19 pandemic and has been making the best of it. And Maggie Di Sanza, 17, an activist in Wisconsin, is raising funds to support menstruators in need.

**Narration:** This is Feeling My Flo, a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I'm Kamilah Kashanie. My pronouns are she and her.

When we were putting together episodes of Feeling My Flo earlier this year, we were super pumped to bring you all kinds of stories about menstruators and the people in their lives. But just like you, what we *didn't* expect was a global pandemic.

The coronavirus hit the United States—where the Feeling My Flo team is based—really hard.

And of course, your period doesn't stop just because you're in quarantine.

**Maya:** My name is Maya, and I'm 10 years old. My pronouns are she and her.

Right now you have to do everything for school on the computers. And I can't see my friends or play with my friends. I can only talk to them on video.

**Narration:** Maya lives in California. Our producer Mia called Maya a few weeks after her state went on lockdown.

Just a few months ago, before *everything* changed, Maya had gotten her period for the first time.

**Maya:** I was kind of surprised when I saw this red stuff and was like, “What is that?” And then I asked my mom and then she told me that it...was probably my period, so I didn't really feel anything. I was just like, “Oh, this is some red stuff.”

**Narration:** Since that first period, Maya has menstruated a few times. And one *unexpected upside* to the quarantine is that she's been able to try different products while at home.

**Maya:** We've been using pads experimenting a bit. My mom just keeps buying me heavier and heavier pads because it...'cause it see Maya like I need really heavy pads.

**Narration:** In a way, it's *kind of* a low-pressure time to be figuring out what works best for her.

**Maya:** Sometimes I wake up in the morning and then I see this, uh, wet spot on my bed and then I'm like, “Oh no, no. I just had my period and now it's all covering the bed.” And I tell my mom, just, like, “Oh boy, you have to wash it.” My mom likes doing it by hand. My dad gets bloody noses, so she's used to it. [Laughs.]

**Narration:** So far, Maya feels pretty good about her period. She's really getting the hang of it while she's in quarantine.

Almost a year ago, when she was nine, she and her mom Anita had talked about it. They even recorded part of it.

**Anita:** Okay, Maya. So I told you that I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about puberty. Right?

**Maya:** Right.

**Anita:** Okay. So we've already talked about...what have we talked about so far about puberty?

**Maya:** Um, that we have...that I'm starting to get hair on my, um, privates.

**Anita:** Mm-hm.

**Maya:** That I'm going to get smelly armpits. [Laughs.]

**Anita:** Smelly armpits, yep.

**Narration:** At one point in the conversation, Maya asks her mom which period products she should use.

**Anita:** I am pretty open for you to use whatever method you want to use.

**Maya:** But what happens about changing it?

Anita: You have to change it on your own. I'm not going to do it for you.

Maya: Ewww. Okay.

Anita: You're fine. You'll be able to deal with it. I mean, women have been dealing with this for...

Maya: Thousands of years?

Anita: ...thousands of years.

**Narration:** Listening back to that conversation *now*, Maya thought it went pretty well.

Maya: What I...I think it's, sometimes it's funny the questions I asked that seemed so simple. I think it's a good thing that, um, my mom told me about it so that I was sort of thinking about it. She asked me questions and I answered them. Then she changed the way she was explaining it so that it made more sense to me.

**Narration:** We asked Maya if she has advice for others who might be getting their period for the first time ... in quarantine.

Maya: My advice is probably don't worry about it. It's normal. And just tell your parents that you are having it, so they can tell you what you need to get done. I think that if you're still trying to figure out what you should--what you're gonna do--you probably should ask someone who's had their period, who's had a period, so that they can give you a preference of what you should use.

**Narration:** As for the pandemic? Well, it hasn't been easy, but she's finding ways to make it through.

Maya: Um, well, I try to make my own food.

**Narration:** And she's found ways to support her parents, too.

Maya: The first time I made it, I made a barbecue chicken sandwich for them, and then I think another time I made, uh, Mexican street corn and a few other things. Mom liked the street corn a lot. Dad liked the, um, barbecue chicken.

**Narration:** The coronavirus has made life difficult for everyone.

For some menstruators, the pandemic has meant not having the products they need when they start their periods. We spoke to one person who is doing something about that where she lives.

**Maggie DiSanza:** Uh, my name is Maggie DiSanza. I'm 17 years old and I use she, her, hers pronouns. Right now, I'm in Madison, Wisconsin, where I live. [Laughs.]

**Narration:** Maggie is an activist. She works to change laws and rules in her school and in her community.

When Maggie was 15, she started an organization called Bleed Shamelessly.

**Maggie:** Bleed Shamelessly is a youth-run social justice campaign working to not only abolish the stigmas associated with menstruation and period, but also the legislative and legal side of things, making sure that we abolish period poverty and that people are able to get the things that they need for their health.

**Narration:** When quarantine started, Maggie knew people in her community would need help.

**Maggie:** So myself and a few other local members of the Bleed Shamelessly team, we started a group text and we were like, 'Do we know if there are any local initiatives that are making sure that people have menstrual products?' And we did a bunch of research and we really couldn't find any ... let alone any large-scale campaigns that were making sure, at least in Wisconsin, that were making sure that people had access to period products.

**Narration:** Normally, many people can't afford pads and tampons. A national crisis like the coronavirus can make things worse. At the start of the pandemic, you might have noticed that things like toilet paper or paper towels were sometimes difficult to find on store shelves. Well, it wasn't just household goods.

**Maggie:** What it looks like for a menstruator to not have access to the period products they need is empty shelves because people have been hoarding a bunch of pads and tampons.

**Narration:** Empty shelves aren't the only problem. If a menstruator can't access products, they might be forced to use toilet paper or old clothes, cardboard, rags—other items that could be dangerous for their health to use in place of pads or tampons.

During a pandemic, these problems just become bigger.

The first thing to do was to raise money to buy products. Bleed Shamelessly did that by creating a Go Fund Me account.

**Maggie:** And once we got that, we would purchase a bunch of pads and tampons in bulk--being mindful of not wanting to hoard things on Amazon and stuff like that. We got a bunch of bags to bag products and we reached out to a bunch of shelters and food pantries in Wisconsin and asked, "Do you have a need for these products and would you be interested if we were to donate them?"

**Narration:** You might be wondering, why a *food* pantry for period products? Well, shelters and food pantries receive lots of donations of canned food. But they almost never receive donations of pads and tampons. even though people come in asking for them all the time.

**Maggie:** We just had this, like, assembly line of people putting together period packs, putting them in boxes, labeling them, shipping them off to the people who will then ship them off to the different shelters. We had a ton of spreadsheets at the beginning, and it was very confusing, and people didn't know where they were going. But once we got organized and the team was kind of cleared out and everyone knew what they were doing, it's gone pretty smoothly so far.

**Narration:** To keep safe and maintain social distancing, the team had to take extra precautions.

**Maggie:** One person will be putting all of the products together in a box. And then, we'll drive over to another person's house or mail it. If we have to drop it off on someone else's front porch, they'll sanitize the box, bring it inside, maybe leave it outside for three days if they need to. They'll bring it inside, do what they need to do with it, and then we try and limit it to two people or two households per exchange. And then the person who last has it will drive over to a center and they will drop it off at a pantry or shelter or wherever it was going.

**Narration:** At the time Maggie talked to us, [the Bleed Shamelessly team had exceeded their fundraising goal of \\$2000](#). Periods *don't* stop during pandemics...and through all their activism, they're helping support menstruators in their community.

If you'd like to help menstruators in your area, talk to your parents or other adults in your life about donating period supplies to local food banks, shelters, or other organizations that help people in need.

Feeling My Flo wants to help you start important conversations at critical moments, like when a global pandemic changes *everything*, and you want to figure out a way to make a difference in the world.

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This episode was produced by Mia Warren. She's our executive producer. It was mixed by Kojin Tashiro. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Our assistant producer is Emma Forbes. I'm Kamilah Kashanie.



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