

# NEW YORK CITY

## MULTI-CITY “MENSTRUAL FRIENDLY PUBLIC TOILET” STUDY



JUNE 2024

### People around the world lack the facilities they need to manage menstruation in the public space.

Menstrual Friendly Public Toilets (MFPT) enable equitable participation in public life by providing those who menstruate the space and resources to navigate cities with dignity and comfort.

#### WHAT IS AN MFPT?

MFPTs are safe, clean toilets that are accessible to the public and include features that make any toilet functional, such as water and soap, light, and locking doors. Additional menstrual friendly aspects include, but are not limited, to:

- Lidded bins or menstrual product disposal units
- Free or low-cost menstrual products
- Large enough mirrors for checking stains
- Hooks or shelves for hanging bags in stalls

MFPTs are funded or managed by the government and can be standalone, single-use, or multi-stall.

#### WHY MFPTs MATTER

By making public toilets menstrual-friendly, cities can enhance equitable access to the public space. For those who menstruate, a lack of MFPTs in an urban context can hinder the ability to go to work, school, visit the market, or be a tourist. This may create unnecessary stress and anxiety in daily life and prevents full participation in public. Despite growing attention to provide menstrual products in schools, shelters, and government buildings, little attention is given to the need for menstrual-friendly public toilets.

#### THE MULTI-CITY MFPT STUDY

The MFPT study was conducted in six cities globally:

- Barcelona
- Manila
- Osaka
- Kampala
- New York City
- Rio de Janeiro

The study was launched to explore the availability and accessibility of MFPTs in a diversity of urban sites, including in high-, middle-, and low-income countries.

**NYC:** A dense city home to 8.4 million people, with around 60 million tourists per year, it represents an urban context where MFPTs could serve as a valuable resource for millions of residents, workers, and visitors.

In early 2023, study teams from each city assessed the current state of public toilets’ menstrual-friendliness and identified barriers and opportunities to improve public toilets for those who menstruate. This included:

- (1) Conducting toilet audits to explore how menstrual-friendly current public toilet infrastructure is within four areas of each city: business, tourist, residential, transit (*see Fig. 1*).
  - Capturing overall “menstrual friendliness” and key categories related to MFPT (*see Fig. 2*).
- (2) Interviewing key stakeholders to better understand the challenges and possibilities for providing MFPTs. In NYC, this included representatives of public-private partnerships, architects, and staff at local government agencies responsible for transportation, economic development and policy.

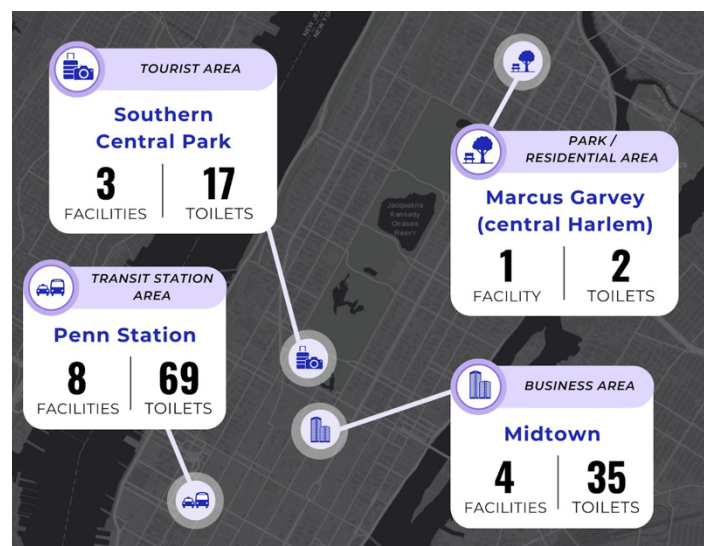
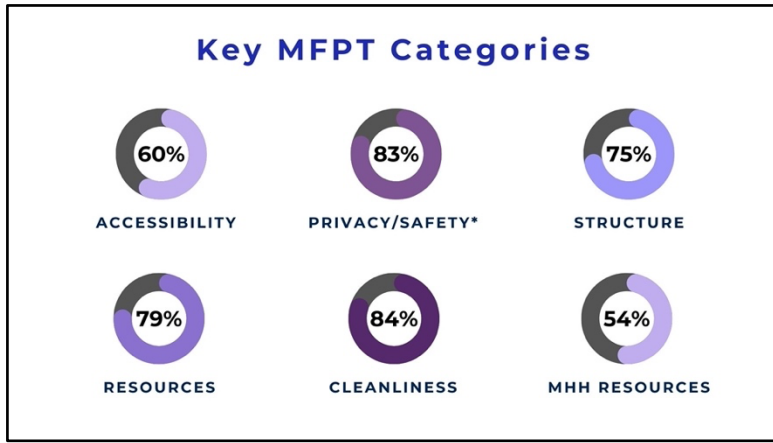


Figure 1. NYC Site Map with Toilet and Facilities Findings

**Figure 2.** Average Calculated Scores for Six Key MFPT Categories<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Study team identified **Accessibility, Privacy/Safety\*, Structure, Resources, Cleanliness, and MHH Resources** as six main MFPT categories that make up MFPT. See *Table 1* for example category characteristics. Averaged scores from 0-100 were calculated for each category. Higher scores indicate relatively higher menstrual friendliness. *\*Note: Privacy/Safety was measured objectively and does not capture the social and/or reported experiences related to safety.*

**Table 1.** Brief Highlights of Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) Characteristics that Make Up the MFPT Categories<sup>2</sup>

DOMAINS	EXAMPLES OF MHH CHARACTERISTICS WE MEASURED
Accessibility	No permission needed to use the bathroom
	Open 24 hours, 7 days a week
Privacy/Safety*	>75% of stalls with functional locks
	Functional electric light
Structure	>75% of cubicles/stalls with functional hooks/shelves
	“Good condition” toilets
Availability of Resources (general)	Available and useable trash cans/dust bins
	At least one functional hand-dryer or stocked towels
Cleanliness	Visibly clean
	No noticeable odor
Availability of MHH Resources	Full-length mirror
	>75% of cubicles/stalls with disposal bins
	Menstrual products stocked or working machine

<sup>2</sup> Only select characteristics shown above for each identified category. Data was collected from the audit tool and then coded to “Met Criteria” (1) or “Did Not Meet Criteria” (0).

## NYC KEY INSIGHTS

- Inadequacy of public toilets is widely recognized.
- Concept of MFPT was novel, but well received, and aligned with existing gender and menstrual equity aims.
- Reliance on commercial facilities excludes users based on appearance, ability to pay, and physical disability.
- Some efforts to build new toilet facilities despite financial and logistical challenges, but no attention given to menstruation needs.
- The complexity of decision-making processes and competing priorities for public toilets and related resources is significant and may pose challenges for including MFPT components.

## NYC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Explore legislative and regulatory changes to include menstrual friendly design features.
- Engage agencies already working on public toilet upgrades such as the MTA and Parks Department to increase public toilet supply and pilot menstrual-friendly features.
- Work with elected leaders to ensure attention to menstruation in public toilet expansion.
- Make provision and maintenance of menstrual friendly public toilets an essential part of urban planning processes while considering toilet deserts and ensuring equitable access to MFPT.

For additional resources, visit <https://bit.ly/MultiCityMFPTStudy>.

### The MFPT Study Team

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This work was generously supported by the Osprey Foundation and the Sid & Helaine Lerner MHM Faculty Support Fund.

