



# Keeping Your Musical Instruments Clean and Safe

A large number of diseases such as chickenpox, measles, and staphylococcus infections can be spread through the saliva. Since there is not always a way of knowing whether someone is carrying disease-causing germs in their saliva, schools can take these steps to reduce the spread of disease.

## **Background:**

The mouthpieces on musical instruments—especially those used by more than one child, as in a music class or band—should be sterilized or disinfected to prevent the spread of disease.

- *Sterilization* destroys all form of life by using physical or chemical agents, such as heat or chemical vapor.
- *Cold disinfection* involves putting an object in a solution of a chemical agent and water to destroy most microorganisms.

The high cost of sterilization equipment, and the fact that some materials such as plastic cannot be sterilized, means that sterilization is not practical for school settings. Cold disinfection, which does not sterilize but removes most germs, is a good alternative for most schools.

## **Avoid sharing as much as possible**

- Whenever possible, schools should provide individual mouthpieces or recorders for students. When this is not feasible, students should be encouraged to purchase their own recorder or mouthpiece.
- Reeds are never to be shared, and do not require sanitizing.
- When mouthpieces must be shared, they should be disinfected using a disinfectant method that will not harm the mouthpiece and also be effective against killing germs.

## **Choosing a disinfectant for musical instruments**

Compounds that can be used on mouthpieces and instruments include:

1. Combination Phenolics (Synthetic), a non-corrosive, and non-irritating, odorless compound that will not hurt most metals and plastics.
2. Buffered chlorine products will disinfect without corroding metals. Both of these products can be found at medical and dental supply companies. Contact the school supplier of products for more information.
3. Quaternary ammonium

Other potential disinfectants, including alcohol, boiling water and bleach are NOT recommended for disinfecting mouthpieces or instruments because of their effect on skin and/or plastics and metals.

- Whichever disinfectants are chosen, it is very important to read the product instructions and follow them closely.
- Disinfectants do not remove dirt, so mouthpieces and instruments must be cleaned well before using disinfectants.

### Steps for disinfecting mouthpieces/musical instruments:

1. Soak in warm water for twenty minutes.
2. Wash with soap and water.
3. Rinse thoroughly with water.
4. Immerse in the disinfectant solution. When using the disinfectant, follow the manufacturer instructions on dilution levels and immersion times to ensure effectiveness.
5. Rinse thoroughly with water and let air dry.
6. In schools where dishwashers are available, mouthpieces can go into the dishwasher on a regular wash cycle.
7. Students with personal recorders or mouthpieces may wish to sanitize them after each use following the same procedure.

### Other guidelines for disinfecting musical instruments

1. Do not allow children with visibly active cold sores, severely chapped lips or upper respiratory infections to use mouthpieces or instruments that will be shared with others.
2. Clean brass instruments with a cleaning snake and warm water before passing to other children, or after a child has had a communicable disease, such as cold or flu.
3. Wipe dry woodwind instruments after every use.
4. Disinfect mouthpieces after use by a child who has had a communicable disease and throw out used reeds.
5. If preferred, a squeeze bottle can be used to squirt the liquid into hard to reach places. **Never use a spray bottle.**
6. All mixed solutions should be stored in a non-metal container, which has a lid. The solution must be deep enough to allow total immersion of the mouthpiece or recorder.
7. Once mixed, the solution is to be covered when not in use. It must be **replaced every week or more frequently** depending on the number of mouth pieces being cleaned.
8. Used solutions can be poured down the drain followed by a one-minute flush of tap water.
9. If the mouthpiece or recorder is to be dried, use disposable paper towels. Air drying is preferred.
10. At the end of the class, the mouthpiece or recorder should have as much of the excess moisture removed as possible. Use swabs or disposable paper towels to remove moisture before immersing the mouth piece or instrument in an appropriate disinfectant solution for one minute.
11. The recorder or mouthpiece should be placed on a disposable paper towel to air dry before being placed in storage.

### To clean whistles:

1. Prepare a bleach solution using 1 teaspoon of non-scented bleach (5.25-6% or 8.25% strength) to one gallon of water.
2. Immerse whistles in bleach solution. If whistles have a wooden ball, limit the time they are in the bleach solution to ten minutes.
3. Rinse well with water, and allow to air dry.

### Reference:

Louisiana Office of Public Health—Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section. Infection Control and Musical Instruments. Revised 10/20/2010. Accessed at <http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/EpiManual/ICMusicalInstruments.pdf> on 07/23/2014.