Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Targeted Disinfecting in the Classroom

Tips for Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Every day dozens of students and staff move in and out of school classrooms, making these environments uniquely prone to the spread of infectious diseases such as colds and the flu. The presence of frequently touched surfaces such as shared desktops and keyboards, as well as other materials, puts students and staff at more risk of spreading bacteria and viruses.

A comprehensive cleaning program with a written protocol for infection control can help prevent the spread of pathogens (germs) that cause infectious diseases in classrooms and throughout the entire school. It also ensures that facilities use the most appropriate products and procedures available for the task to help avoid exposing product users and other building occupants to potential health hazards.

Schools across the country are adopting comprehensive cleaning programs that address the various demands of cleaning in a school environment. These programs include protocols that help prevent the spread of infectious diseases as well as protocols that help reduce asthma triggers and improve indoor environmental quality.

Teaching staff and custodians have been identified as having high rates of occupational asthma. In addition, children's developing bodies are more vulnerable to the effects of toxins than are adult bodies, further demonstrating the need for safe, effective, and comprehensive cleaning programs.

A comprehensive cleaning program should include:

- ✔ An Infection Control Plan (ICP) that presents a clear protocol for routine cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting, including steps to take in the event of an infectious disease outbreak. Specific cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting protocols should be identified by a school stakeholder group.
- ✔ Independent third-party certified cleaning products, such as those certified by Green Seal and EcoLogo or that meet the ChildSafe Guidelines. Certified products do not contain ingredients that are known to contribute to asthma, cancer, respiratory irritation, liver, and kidney disease, or other health conditions.
- ✔ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants or sanitizers for targeted use as specified in the ICP.
- ✔ Best practices and procedures that protect the health of product users and other building occupants.
- ✔ Cleaning equipment designed to reduce the amount of chemicals required. These help prevent injuries, control cross-contamination, and effectively capture dirt, dust, microbes (germs), etc. Examples include: walk-off mats, high-efficiency particulate absorbing (HEPA) vacuum cleaners, microfiber cloths and mops, and time- and energy-saving floor care machines.
- ✔ Training programs for school staff on cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting products and procedures, as well as hazard communications and bloodborne pathogens training.

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Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting — What's the difference?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides the following guidance on the difference between cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting:

- ✔ **Cleaning removes germs**, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.
- ✔ **Sanitizing lowers the number of germs** on surfaces or objects to a safe level as judged by public health standards or requirements to lower the risk of spreading infection.
- ✔ **Disinfecting kills germs** on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

Sanitizing and disinfecting require the use of EPA-registered pesticides or disinfecting/sanitizing water-based devices.

Useful Tips for Teachers and Paraprofessionals

What should teaching staff do if there is an infectious disease outbreak and how can we help prevent one?

Ask for a copy of your school's ICP and be familiar with the sections that cover classrooms.

The ICP should include the following information:

- ✔ Areas considered high-risk (e.g., bathrooms, athletic areas, cafeteria/kitchen, health room/nurse's office) and high-touch points (e.g., door handles, computer keyboards, chair backs, desk tops, tables) that may require sanitizing and targeted disinfecting in addition to routine cleaning.
- ✔ Procedures for cleaning high-risk areas and high-touch points throughout the school, including which school-approved products should be used and which tasks should be completed only after students are excused for the day.
- ✔ A list of products that are approved and supplied by your school's custodial/maintenance department for cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting classrooms.
- ✔ Staff designated and trained to perform cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting tasks.

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What other best practices should we use?

- ✔ Refer to the ICP for special precautions and correct handling procedures if there is a blood or other bodily fluid incident.
- ✔ Use only products that are supplied by your school's custodial/maintenance department and do not bring in products from home.
- ✔ Be familiar with the products used in your classroom. Consult the material safety data sheets (MSDS) which should be readily available in the custodial/maintenance or front office.
- ✔ Read and follow all product label instructions before using any cleaning, sanitizing, or disinfecting product, as directions may vary. When sanitizing and disinfecting be sure to follow the directions regarding the time the product must remain wet on the surface (dwell time) and rinsing procedures, if necessary.
- ✔ Refer to the ICP for a list of which school-approved products should be used and which tasks should be completed only after students are excused for the day.
- ✔ Encourage students to wash their hands with soap and water thoroughly after they play outside and use the bathroom as well as before and after they eat.
- ✔ Have your rooms "ready to clean" to help the custodial/maintenance staff do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.
  - Keep clutter to a minimum and keep unit ventilators clear of books and other items. This will make cleaning surfaces and servicing the units easier.
  - Store paper, books, and other supplies in plastic tubs so they won't collect dust. Stack tubs neatly so custodial staff can easily clean around or move them.
  - Involve your students in the team effort. Ask them to pick up after themselves and dispose of their trash and recyclables properly.
  - Cover your keyboards with plastic keyboard covers to make cleaning easier.

Should my school close for disinfection when there is a flu outbreak?

When cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting are already part of an ICP, it is not necessary to close schools to clean or disinfect every surface in the building to slow the spread of flu. According to the CDC, most studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for only two to eight hours after being deposited on a surface.

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How can I help prevent the spread of communicable diseases?

Cleaning, sanitizing, and targeted disinfecting are part of a broad approach to helping prevent the spread of pathogens (germs) that cause infectious diseases in classrooms. Use these everyday tips to help slow the spread of flu and other infectious diseases.

- ✔ Get a flu vaccination.
- ✔ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue in the trash after use. Cough or sneeze into your elbow if a tissue is not available.
- ✔ Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and wash as soon as possible.
- ✔ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. These provide pathways through which microbes (germs) can enter your body.
- ✔ Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- ✔ If you are sick with a flu-like illness, the CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.
- ✔ While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.

Organizing as a local association and taking action

Health and safety issues, such as the outbreak of infectious diseases, affect everyone in a school making them ideal organizing issues for a local association. They also provide unique opportunities to work collaboratively with school administrators and other school stakeholders to ensure the safest and healthiest environment for students and staff.

Additional Resources

- ✔ **National Education Association Health Information Network**
  www.neahin.org
  - Red Book. Exposure to Blood on the Job: What School Employees Need to Know
    www.neahin.org/educator-resources/red-book-exposure-to-blood.html
  - The Stomach Bug Book
    www.neahin.org/educator-resources/stomach-bug-book-english.html
  - Custodial Leaders for Environmental Advocacy Nationwide (C.L.E.A.N.®) Awards
    www.neahin.org/cleanaward/
  - Organizing as a Local Association and Taking Action
    www.neahin.org/organizing/
- ✔ **CDC**
  - How To Clean and Disinfect Schools To Help Slow the Spread of Flu
    www.cdc.gov/flu/school/cleaning.htm

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