**Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section**
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# Infection Control and Musical Instruments

A large number of micro-organisms, including diseases such as chickenpox, measles, staphylococcus and streptococcus infections can be spread through the saliva. Since there is no simple way of knowing whether an individual is carrying an infectious micro-organism in their saliva (other than diagnosis of disease), schools should take care to reduce the spread of diseases.

The mouthpieces on musical instruments – particularly 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 equipment for sterilization, and the fact that plastics cannot be heat sterilized, usually means that sterilization is not possible in schools. Cold disinfection, while not a substitute for sterilization, is a good alternative for most schools.

## Avoid sharing as much as possible

Whenever possible, schools are encouraged to 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 mouth pieces must be shared, they should be disinfected using a disinfectant method that will preserve the mouth piece and be effective on the microbial agents of concern.

### Choosing a disinfectant for musical instruments

Compounds that can be used on mouthpieces and instruments include:

1. Combination Phenolics (Synthetic), a non-corrosive, a nonirritating, odorless compound that won't 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.

Carry on a web search to find appropriate disinfectants for musical instruments. For example one could use the following keywords: "disinfection musical instruments school".

**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 dry.
6. In schools where dishwashers are available, mouthpieces can go into the dishwasher on a regular wash cycle.

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.
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 a 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. The solution once mixed 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.
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 light bleach solution with approximately one capful of bleach to one gallon of water.

2. Immerse whistles in bleach solution. If whistles have a wooden ball, limit the time to ten minutes they are in bleach solution.
3. Rinse well with water.