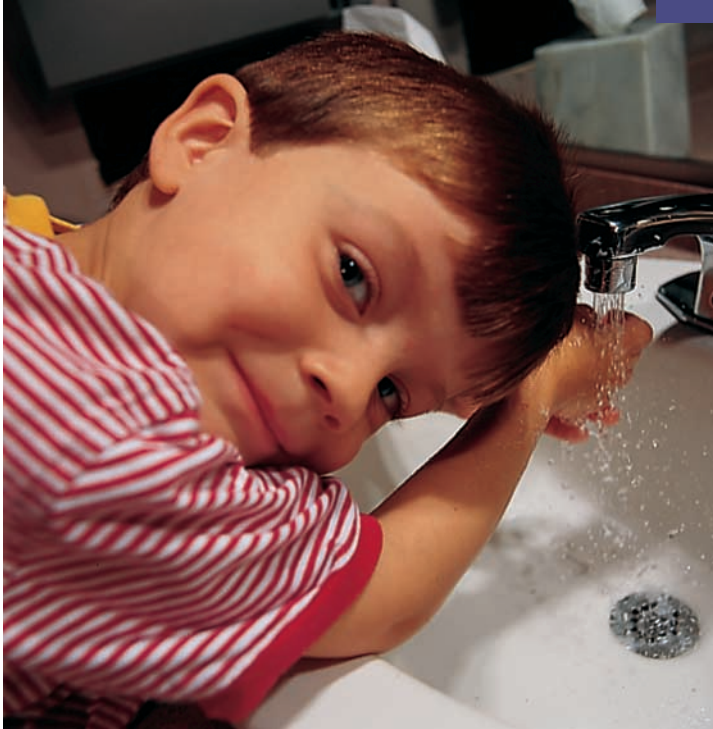


Healthy School Tips

Health
& Hygiene
Web Guide



The demand for clean, healthy school buildings has never been greater. But while the general public is growing more concerned about the threat of germs, schools are facing dwindling resources to apply to cleanliness and hygiene challenges.

Infectious disease accounts for millions of lost school days each year. And teacher illness costs time and money too – not to mention the negative effects that teacher absences may have on student learning.

Maintaining clean, hygienic school facilities is one step toward preventing illnesses among students, faculty and staff. Why is this so important? Dirty restrooms, smelly locker rooms, and unclean classrooms, kitchens and cafeterias can create a negative impression on parents, teachers, staff and visitors as well as inhibit student learning. However, by taking a few simple steps, schools can help to reduce student and staff absenteeism, and create a healthier and safer learning and working environment.

Potty Patrol

Dirty, un-stocked and unsafe restrooms make for a long school day ... so long that in some schools, students leave school grounds during the day just to find a decent place to take care of their necessary biological functions. Or worse, they hold it in all day until they reach home – a scenario not exactly conducive to learning. Raunchy restrooms may also increase the likelihood of accidents, vandalism and other inappropriate behavior. The bottom line? Students won't keep their focus on good hygiene if they feel uncomfortable in the restroom, or if the facilities are dirty.

Here are some tips you can easily implement to turn your student restrooms from nasty to nice:

- **Identify restroom “hot zones” for germs.** The toilet, the floor surrounding the toilet, the sink and counter, and high-touch objects such as handles and levers (found everywhere from water faucets and paper towel dispensers to the door you open on the way out of the restroom) can all harbor germs just waiting for the next pair of clean and unsuspecting hands to pick them up. In fact, according to one of the seminal studies on microorganisms in public restrooms, the hot water tap may be more likely to harbor germs than even the toilet seat! These hot zones should receive extra cleaning attention.

- **Install no-touch systems.** Stop germ transmission in its tracks by using no-touch toilet paper, soap and towel dispensers. No-touch technology is especially crucial for hand towel dispensers, since hand towels are typically used once hands are clean, after having been washed and rinsed. That is the most important time for people to not touch potentially germ-laden surfaces. Keep in mind that there are alternatives to the no-touch dispensers that feature fancy electronic gizmos and infrared technology for dispensing. Instead, look for a simpler solution with a mechanically activated no-touch dispenser, and you won't have to worry about battery power failure or unintentional dispensing. One example is a hygienic toilet paper system that provides single, interleaved sheets which hang down from the dispenser opening. Users only touch the sheets they need and don't need to "fish around" inside a dispenser to find the tail end of the toilet paper – a big plus, especially for younger students.
- **Encourage proper handwashing.** According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Educate students on the importance of proper handwashing. Post reminders in restrooms. And make sure there's always plenty of mild hand soap and soft, absorbent hand towels in every restroom. Nothing is more disconcerting to people who want to "do the right thing" by washing up, only to find no handwashing supplies.
- **Forget the hot air dryer.** Studies have shown that using hot air dryers instead of paper towels to dry hands actually increased the bacterial count in the washroom. Such bacteria are distributed into the environment whenever dryers are running, leading to a risk of inhalation.
- **Establish a schedule for thoroughly cleaning the student restrooms** (and stick to it!). Ideally, restrooms should be ready for service at the start of each school day and should be checked several times a day to make sure they are spot-cleaned. Removing trash from the floor, emptying waste receptacles, checking/filling product dispensers, and disinfecting toilets, basins, and countertops are all key activities during spot-cleaning. If toilet paper, soap or paper towel run-out is a problem, try larger capacity dispensers that don't need to be refilled as often.

Around Campus

According to the CDC, nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone. One of the most common ways people catch colds is by rubbing their noses or eyes after touching someone or something that's contaminated with the cold virus. Think about all the items a child might touch after sneezing during a single school day and then how many other students touch those things, and it's easy to see how illnesses can spread quickly.

The solution is three-fold...proper surface sanitation coupled with good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Proper surface sanitation involves daily (or more, especially during the cold and flu season) cleaning and disinfecting of commonly touched surfaces such as stair railings, door handles, countertops, computer keyboards, classroom equipment, and (for elementary or daycare facilities) toys. Give cleaning staff an easy, portable way to spot clean by using a disposable wiper within a closed dispensing bucket as an alternative to using a spray bottle or open bucket in combination with a rag. As a bonus, the disposable wiper and enclosed bucket help to avoid contamination and exposure to chemical vapors or splashes. Look for a system that can be used with bleach or other disinfectant to kill germs.

The second part of the equation is good hand hygiene, which doesn't always have to mean a sink, soap and water. To help students, faculty and staff keep their hands sanitized and free from germs when a sink and water aren't available, provide alcohol gel hand sanitizers, which can be found in a variety of pump or wall-mounted dispensers for use throughout the school. Studies have shown that hand hygiene programs combining education and the use of a hand sanitizer in the classroom can lower absenteeism.

Third, consider the issue of "respiratory etiquette." Originally developed by the CDC as a way to reduce the spread of SARS in health care facilities, the practice of respiratory etiquette includes some common-sense measures schools can apply to help reduce the incidence of colds, the flu and other infections that can be spread via respiratory droplets or hand contact. Ideas include:

- Instructing people with symptoms of a respiratory infection to cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

- Making hand hygiene products and tissues available. (Tip: If facial tissue isn't covered in your janitorial budget, consider making it part of teachers' instructional budgets so they're always available in classrooms.)
- Providing designated containers for disposal of used tissues.

Another health and hygiene issue that some schools across the country have reported is skin infections in athletic team members who share equipment. The problem? Competitive sports participants might develop abrasions and other skin trauma, which could facilitate entry of pathogens. Even in sports with less direct contact, protective clothing can be hot and might chafe skin, resulting in abrasions and lacerations. Or, shared equipment and clothing that are not cleaned or laundered between users could be a vehicle for *S. aureus* transmission.

Again, proper surface sanitation and good personal hygiene play an important role. The CDC and other health experts recommend a number of steps to prevent infections, including:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water. (Do not add soap to a partially empty soap dispenser, and do provide alcohol-based hand antiseptics.)
- Shower after all practices and competitions. (Schools need to ensure availability of adequate soap and hot water.)
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with a proper dressing (bandage) until healed. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or materials contaminated from wounds.

Establish routine cleaning schedules for shared equipment and practice surfaces (at least once a week, but ideally after each use). A solution of 1 part bleach in 9 parts water or other suitable germicide is recommended.

Mystery Meat?

The CDC notes that foodborne illnesses cause about 76 million cases of illnesses, more than 300,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. The real figures could be even higher since many foodborne illnesses go undiagnosed. In fact, the CDC estimates that the actual number of salmonella infections may be 30 times or more greater than those reported or diagnosed.

First and foremost, schools should follow regulations and guidance from their local health department and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Food Code for proper sanitation and hygiene procedures as well as proper food cooking, holding and storage practices.

Here are some additional hygiene and sanitation tips...

Some foodborne illnesses are spread through lack of hand cleaning. That's why it's crucial to provide proper handwashing facilities for students and cafeteria employees. For cafeteria employees, this means a dedicated handwashing sink in the kitchen or food prep area, with an ample supply of soap and paper towels. Consider posting handwashing reminders near the hand sink, with graphical instructions and/or in multiple languages, if appropriate. For extra hand de-germing (or for initial hand sanitizing), especially when a handwashing sink is not convenient, provide an alcohol gel hand sanitizer rated for food contact.

Surface sanitation is also an issue in preventing foodborne illness. Rotavirus – a germ that causes gastrointestinal illness – can be transferred from a dry, smooth surface to a clean hand for as long as 20 minutes after a surface has been contaminated. Certain strains of *E. coli*, salmonella, and other bacteria can live on surfaces like cafeteria tables and doorknobs for up to two hours.

A suggestion...throw out those cloth towels. A better solution for keeping surfaces clean may be disposable foodservice towels. Use a white towel to wipe tables or countertops, a red towel for use with raw meat or seafood, and a blue towel for use with ready-to-eat foods. This color-coding helps to reduce chances for the cross-contamination of germs from one area to the next.

To eliminate bacteria transfer between dirty rags and surfaces, choose a disposable surface sanitizing wipe system that comes pre-saturated with disinfectant. Each wiping task gets a fresh, clean wipe, and health issues associated with breathing in fumes from a spray cleaner are eliminated.

For more tips on creating and maintaining a clean, hygienic facility, visit www.kcprofessional.com.