

Keep Your Club Patrons Healthy during the Flu Season

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Health clubs and gyms are primarily focused on promoting healthy living, but as the flu season approaches, they become extra adept at harboring a variety of germs and microbes. On top of the regular flu season, leading health experts are projecting that the H1N1 virus could affect as much as 50 percent of the American population this fall.

Each year, an estimated 25 million to 50 million flu cases are reported in the United States, leading to around 150,000 hospitalizations and as many as 40,000 deaths. According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, approximately 25 percent of the entire U.S. population is afflicted with flu-associated illnesses annually. And to think, if people simply took more precautions to prevent getting sick, that number could dramatically decrease.

Whether it is H1N1 or any strain of influenza, responsible gym owners, managers and operators should take significant precautions to help quell the spread of germs in their facilities. So many

perspiring people sharing machines, dumbbells, benches and other exercise equipment leads to the perfect conditions for sharing viruses and bacteria.

Here are steps to promote cleanliness in your facilities:

1. Prepare for flu season. OK, so you have a cleaning crew scouring every nook and cranny of your facility. But what methods are they using? Mops, rags and cloths? Outdated cleaning strategies might make your facility appear neat and clean, but spray-and-wipe tactics often kill germs and spread them, providing a rich food source for new organisms.

Newer, more advanced cleaning programs employ health-based, scientifically developed strategies and technologies to dig through the dirt and eliminate nearly all traces of germs, pathogens and other microbes. These strategies may seem complex and expensive, but increased production rates actually help service providers deliver more value for your money.

An effective health-based cleaning program includes a number of components. For one, hospital-grade virucide/germicide disinfectants are useful in other places besides a hospital setting. These cleansers can kill harmful pathogenic organisms that are visible only under a microscope. Coupling this with a color-coding strategy for avoiding cross-contamination of cleaning tools brings you two steps closer to a healthy workout environment.

From a technological standpoint, cutting-edge cleaning equipment makes a huge difference in the cleanliness of your facility. Cloths and mops with microfiber technology are 99 percent more effective at soil and matter retention than traditional cleaning tools. Lightweight flat mops employ super-absorbent fabric to trap and contain dead germs, improving soil removal and further eliminating cross-contamination.

2. Evaluate your cleaning service. If you're concerned about the job your cleaning service is performing or if you would just like to know how health-based their strategy is, here are a few evaluation criteria:

- Are cleaning processes designed for soil/matter containment and removal?
- Are perfumes or other odors—whether attractive or noxious—still present following the cleaning process? (They shouldn't be.)
- Are cleaning crews using hospital-grade disinfectants?
- Does your service use microfiber technology throughout the cleaning process?
- Are cleaning crews using high-efficiency, multi-filtration vacuums to improve indoor air quality?
- Are hard-surfaced floors being cleaned with color-coded, microfiber flat mops with a single dip method for eliminating mop water contamination?

- Are personnel washing hands properly and changing gloves frequently?
- Are “no-touch” spray and vacuum systems being employed whenever possible?

3. Implement a proactive health approach. Thorough cleanings should be coupled with a continued proactive approach to keeping your customers healthy. Proactive flu safety starts with customers, so as a gym manager, it’s your responsibility to inform your members of the most effective methods for staying healthy—no matter how common sense these steps may be.

Some tips for customers to keep in mind:

- Wipe off machines with disinfecting/sanitizing wipes before and after using equipment.
- Bring your own water bottle. Drinking fountains are germ havens.
- Wash hands or use alcohol hand cleansers after your workout.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth.
- Wear flip-flops in the shower.
- Don’t share towels.
- Bring your own soap for showering.
- Never store damp or wet workout clothes in your locker or gym bag.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick, the Centers for Disease Control recommends staying home for a week or 24 hours after symptoms clear.

Especially with the prevalence of H1N1 this flu season, gym owners and management should keep a heavy awareness of the cleanliness of their facilities. After all, a healthy customer is a happy customer.