

## Germ Prevention in Schools

By Peter Sheldon Sr., CBSE  
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It's that time of year again – back to school. Germs are always a concern for parents, but with the news of increasingly threatening outbreaks, parents are left confused and afraid for the safety and health of their children. In order to wade through the information, it is important to understand some facts about how germs spread and then take some simple steps to minimize risk.

Recent outbreaks of Influenza A (specifically the H1N1 strain), MRSA and other staph infections reveal the depth of issues we have with improper cleaning and lack of hygiene in our indoor environments. A growing population, increased mobility and new treatment-resistant organisms increase the risk level in all areas of our lives, especially in schools where children often forget or don't know proper hygiene practices.

Most infectious diseases are transmitted by direct contact with someone who has one. However, disease-causing pathogens can also be passed along by indirect contact; for example, when touching surfaces contaminated with infectious disease pathogens.

There are many locations where these surfaces are present in our schools and childcare centers, including: locker rooms, mats, restrooms, nap areas, shared toys or equipment. Just about anywhere our children come in close contact with other children increases the risk potential for transmission. There are several things that you can do to help reduce the risk of infection and transmission of pathogenic organisms in your children's environment.

Parents and administrators should demand that their schools employ effective daily aseptic, health-based cleaning programs with hospital-grade disinfectants registered by the EPA to reduce the risk of surface contact transmissions.

If someone in your child's school or care center is diagnosed with a dangerous infection, demand that your school allocate the funds or resources to inform all students and parents, have the entire facility professionally cleaned and decontaminated, then require that all high touch points be cleaned by staff multiple times throughout the day with disposable disinfectant products. If your school or center is not receptive, band together with other parents and demand a clean and safe environment for your children. In the event of an outbreak, school administrators should immediately speak with their building service contractor or commercial cleaning company to discuss implementing a proper cleaning program. Professional cleaning services can assist in reducing the risk of infectious diseases through the use of EPA-registered, hospital-grade disinfectants and ongoing training for their cleaning staffs on their proper and efficacious use.

One thing parents and administrators can look for is a crew that has the right tools. Make sure the cleaning crew is using microfiber cloths – one of the most effective defenses in the battle against the spread of infectious diseases in schools. Microfiber attracts dirt, grease and contaminants with its small angled edges along the fibers that pull in and attract dirt, leaving surfaces truly clean. New microfiber cleaning technology has been shown to be 99% more effective at capturing and removing bacteria and soils than traditional cleaning methods. Strict color-coding methodology in all microfiber cleaning implements is essential to obtain best results in reducing cross-contamination. With a color-coded system, cleaning professionals use several different cloths, each for use in a specific room or area. This method of cleaning ensures that soil and matter from one area is contained in that area and is not spread to other areas in the facility.

However, effective risk reduction must be multi-faceted and ongoing. Effective cleaning of all surfaces daily with the use of proper disinfectants and soil removal systems followed by periodic cleaning of high-touch points throughout the day with disinfectant wipes is the most effective strategy. High-touch germ transmission points, or hot zones, include door handles, light switches, desks and playground equipment.

There are some simple things parents can do too:

Teach your children to practice good hand hygiene. Effective soap and water hand washing followed by an alcohol-based hand sanitizer application.

Ensure your children shower immediately and wash effectively after participation in sports or exercise.

Wrestlers and gymnasts or dancers who spend close contact time on matted surfaces should consider using foam skin sanitizers before entering and after leaving the mat.

Make sure that any open cuts or abrasions your children have remain clean and covered. Teach your children not to share any personal items with others.

Train your children to use some type of personal barrier like a towel between themselves and high-risk areas such as weight benches and exercise equipment or ask their school to provide effective disinfectant wipes for the students' use.

Frequently clean and wipe down children's belongings that have been at school; backpacks, shoes, gym bags can all represent fomites of transmission. Use a hospital-grade germicide with EPA registration to kill MRSA.

These steps will reduce the risk associated with most harmful pathogens in your children's environment. It is important to remember that, while these new strains of germs are in our environments, there is no need to become germophobic and keep your kids in a bubble. Germs are all around us and always will be. While some germs are good, others like MRSA are bad; but a healthy human body has a tremendous immune system and with a little common sense and taking a good defensive hygienic posture, you can substantially reduce your risk of acquiring a community-transmitted infection.

About Peter J. Sheldon Sr., CBSE

**Peter J. Sheldon Sr.**, CBSE brings over 17 years of experience in the Building Services Contracting industry to his position as Vice President of Operations of **Coverall Health-Based Cleaning System<sup>SM</sup>**. Sheldon works closely with the Coverall sales and operations teams to spearhead initiatives that further the Company's strategic objectives and help the Company develop the most efficient and innovative cleaning processes available. In recent years, Sheldon has been fundamental in developing Coverall Health-Based Cleaning System's alliances with Procter & Gamble and Kaivac Cleaning Systems. Sheldon was also a key contributor to the Company's expansion into the Healthcare and Daycare markets and developed many of the processes that make the Company's Health-Based Cleaning System unique to Coverall.

Sheldon is also involved with several industry organizations such as Building Services Contractors International, ASHES, International Executive Housekeepers Association, Cleaning Management and Maintenance Institute, International Franchise Association, and Building Owners and Managers Association. In 2007, Sheldon earned the high honor of being named a Certified Building Services Executive by the BSCAI. Sheldon is among an elite group of building service professionals to qualify for the CBSE designation, which recognizes individuals who meet the highest standards of the profession.