



## **Educate and Prevent: Hygiene in Schools**

*Infection prevention in schools is often ignored until there is an infection outbreak. These basic tips can help schools reduce the spread of infections*

Schools are a good breeding ground for a variety of infections that can endanger the health of staff, students and visitors. It is therefore important to take preventative measures to minimise the risks.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC ) in the USA, 22 million school days are lost due to 'colds' and 38 million lost due to the influenza virus each year. Norovirus, methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), colds (rhinoviruses) and influenza are some of the infections that affect schools. Cutting cleaning budgets can increase the risk of these and other infections for students.

Schools can follow some very simple steps to introduce best practice for infection prevention:

### **1 Create a comprehensive written cleaning schedule**

A cleaning plan should outline the required frequency - some surfaces and objects should be cleaned daily and some weekly but others will require less frequent attention.

The plan should provide direction on identifying the surfaces that need to be cleaned and disinfected at least once a day. These include frequent-touch surfaces such as door handles, lockers in changing rooms, taps, canteen and school desks, computer stations, work surfaces, and telephones.

The plan should explain the appropriate products, equipment and accessories for cleaning. It is important to choose products that can kill the relevant viruses and infections. Cleaning plans should be created to show detailed cleaning and disinfection activities.

### **2 Train employees and measure performance**

To ensure good cleaning performance, it is vital that cleaning staff are trained to follow the plan to the letter. It is also critical to introduce measures that ensure the correct cleaning level. Qualitative measurement systems and innovative data collection and reporting tools are ideally suited to support continuous improvement.

### **3 Don't overdo it!**

During the onset of infection, schools should decide whether or not to close. Such extreme measures are recommended by the CDC for pathogens such as MRSA but are usually not required for infections such as colds and influenza. In some cases it may be necessary to close the school for specialised cleaning and disinfection but this should only be by arrangement with the local authority.

### **4 Invest in cleaning optimisation**

New and enhanced products and processes can contribute to improved hygiene. In schools that are being built or renovated, it makes sense to design the entrance to washroom areas in a Z or L shape to avoid the use of doors. Alternatively, doors and door handles should be "contactless" as should paper and hand sanitiser dispensers and waste bins. These inexpensive options all help to prevent the spread of infection by hand contact.

In addition data collection and reporting tools can be purchased to ensure that staff clean and disinfect students' desks, computer keyboards, door handles and other frequent touch surfaces.

### **5 Proper hand hygiene and proper behaviour**

It is inevitable that students, employees and visitors will touch surfaces that are colonised with pathogens. Clean hands are therefore the best prevention against the spread of infections. Students should be taught the importance of washing hands with soap and hot water, particularly after using the toilet and before eating. Washrooms should always be equipped with soap and paper towels.

To promote a continuous hand hygiene regime, alcohol-based hand disinfection products should be installed at the entrances to cafeterias and halls. It should be made clear, however, that the use of soap and water for hand washing is the basis for good hand hygiene and that the use of a hand disinfectant can assist in reducing pathogens.

In addition to hand hygiene, certain rules of conduct should be followed to reduce the spread of infections. Coughing and sneezing into a tissue or hand rather than the air will help. Schools should provide paper tissues for offices, classrooms, communal areas and washrooms. If someone is ill, they should stay at home rather than come to school to prevent the transmission of germs to other students and staff.

## **6      Desired communication behaviours**

Schools should have a system to disseminate information to target groups (staff, students and visitors) about their roles in reducing and eliminating the spread of infections. Eye-catching displays should be placed where they can be seen and should be updated continuously to ensure staff, students and visitors know the rules and actions. Information materials such as worksheets and letters to home enable staff and parents to ensure each child has the correct vaccinations and behaves correctly while at school.

## **7      Make cleaning a year-round priority**

Cleaning during the summer months and other holidays should not be neglected. It can be difficult because staff members are often not working during these periods. Nevertheless it is important to ensure that all areas and surfaces are fully cleaned and disinfected before the start of each term.