

Fighting the Spread of the Flu in a K-12 Food Service Environment

Cleaning and disinfecting are a critical part of preventing the spread of any infectious disease in a food service operation. To stem the spread of the flu (influenza) the following measures are key important responsibilities for each individual:

- Stay home if are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose during coughs and sneezes
- Wash your hands much more often than normal

Below are a few tips for cleaning and disinfecting that can slow and even prevent the spread of flu in your operation.

1. Understand the differences in cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing a surface.

Cleaning removes some germs. The main task of cleaning is to remove dirt, soil and debris from surfaces. Cleaning involves the use of a properly mixed detergent (or soap) and water to physically remove the dirt and debris. This process is not meant as a germ killer (although some germs are killed). Good cleaning does remove some germs and as result does lower the risk of the infection being spread.

Disinfecting actually kills germs and bacteria. Disinfecting works by using a light duty detergent that has a disinfectant added by the chemical manufacturer that kills germs and bacteria on surfaces. This type product is usually not intended to be a “heavy duty” cleaner however in most cases it will clean a lightly soiled surface and kill germs. The use of this type product can be a big part of lowering the risk of an infection spreading. All hospitals use some form of “Disinfectant Cleaner” as a housekeeping staple throughout.

Sanitizing kills reduces germs and bacteria on surfaces to a safe level. This level is set by public health codes and restrictions. Sanitizer has no significant cleaning properties so it will work best if coupled with either cleaning or disinfecting surfaces, rinsing with water and then applying sanitizer. This “Three Step” process of cleaning and sanitizing will significantly reduce the risk of an infection spreading.

Note that many disinfectant and sanitizers may call for a “dwell time” on the surface in order to ensure germs and bacteria are killed and removed.

If a bucket with sanitizer solution is being used be sure to do the following:

- Test the solution for proper strength before it goes into service and then no less that every 60 to 90 mins once a wiping cloth has been put in the bucket.
- Once wiping cloths get wet, they must remain submerged in the sanitizer solution between uses.
- Change the solution once it gets dirty, regardless of whether it tests properly.
- Using a sanitizer solution does not take the place of proper daily cleaning.

2. Regularly, throughout the day, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

Follow your operation’s standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting. In most facilities this involves no less than daily cleaning and disinfecting all “touch” surfaces such as tables, seats, serving lines (both sides), doorknobs, equipment handles, computer keyboards, touch pads, faucet handles, drinking water coolers, and telephones. Do not overlook the wall areas along the serving lines where customers may lean against or touched while being served along with the staff bathroom and break areas.

Some schools may require daily cleaning and disinfecting of these surfaces.

Disinfecting wipes are an excellent way to wipe down electronic “touch surfaces” throughout the workday. Surfaces like keyboards, touch pads, and telephones get a lot of use during the day and the more convenient it is for staff to wipe these off with a disinfectant, the more it will get done. This small effort can go along way towards stemming the spread of any infection.

During the “flu season” which begins in October, peaks in January and February, ending in the early spring most years, the more often the surfaces touched by customers is cleaned and disinfected the greater the risk of spreading infection is lowered.

The good news is that flu viruses are relatively fragile, so standard cleaning and disinfecting procedures are normally sufficient to significantly lower the risk of an infection spreading.

3. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions

Always follow mixing and use instructions on cleaning, disinfectant and sanitizer products. Check the label or related efficacy information to determine that the product is effective against the flu virus.

Also, adhere to all hazard warnings and use personal protective items, like gloves and eye protection when mixing and cleaning. Note that gloves are always to be worn when using any solutions containing chlorine bleach.

Never combine any cleaners, disinfectants or sanitizers these products are all designed for specific purposes and mixing them together can be hazardous. For instance, there are many cleaning items that if combined with chlorine bleach can result in serious injury or even death.

Ensure that all staff who might use chemical materials have read and understand the manufacturer's instruction labels along with the safe and appropriate use and storage of the products.

4. Dispose of all trash and waste properly

Understand the standard procedures for disposing of trash in your operation. Always have garbage cans in convenient areas so that staff can avoid touching them at all until they are ready to be emptied.

Avoid contact with used tissues and any other trash when closing trash bags or emptying waste baskets. Immediately wash your hands using soap and water after handling any trash.

We hope this is helpful and if we can be of any service or answer any questions please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

Toll Free – 888-455-6411

Find us on the web at: www.schoolfoodhandler.com

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