

School of Music

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Instrument Hygiene

School of Music Instrument Collection

The School of Music maintains an extensive collection of musical instruments for rental and use by members of the music faculty and students enrolled in our courses and performing ensembles. The health and safety of everyone using school instruments is our priority. The possible transmission of communicable diseases is an ongoing concern. To insure that this possibility is as low as possible, each instrument in the school's collection receives a thorough inspection at the conclusion of the academic year. Thousands of dollars are spent annually to clean, adjust, and return instruments to full playing condition.

Antiseptically Clean

More and more our society is pushing for products that are anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and anti-viral. Some even go the next step further aiming to achieve sterile. However, our bodies by design are not meant to live in a sterile environment. As kids we played in the dirt, ate bugs and countless other things and became stronger because of it. Keep in mind that total sterility is a fleeting moment. Once a sterile instrument has been handled or exposed to room air it is no longer considered to be sterile. It will however remain antiseptically clean until used.

Most viruses cannot live on hard surfaces for a prolonged period of time. Some die simply with exposure to air, especially in the very dry climate of Las Vegas. However, certain groups are quite hardy. Therefore, musicians must be concerned with instrument hygiene. Users of school owned and rented musical equipment might be more susceptible to infections from instruments that are not cleaned and maintained properly.

If the cleaning process is thorough, however, musical instruments will be antiseptically clean. Just as with the utensils you eat with, soap and water can clean off anything harmful. Antibacterial soaps will kill certain germs but all soaps will carry away the germs that stick to dirt and oils while they clean. No germs/ no threat.

Infectious Disease Risks

Sharing musical instruments is a widespread, accepted practice in the profession. However, recent discussion at UNLV and in the profession has included concern regarding shared musical instruments and infectious disease, especially HIV. To develop policy and protocols for cleaning instruments in the school's collection, the School of Music consulted with Dr. Mary Guinan, Founding Dean of the UNLV School of Community Health and recognized authority on communicable diseases, and with specialists at the Centers for Disease Control.

In discussion with Dr. Guinan, and confirmed by her colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), it became apparent that there is no risk of transmission of HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), or Hepatitis B (HBV) through shared musical instruments. The reasons for this are that these diseases are passed via a blood-to-blood, sexual fluid or mucous membrane contact. There has been no case of saliva transmission of HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), or Hepatitis B (HBV).

Instrument Hygiene

While the possibility of transmission of the above bacteria and viruses is not a real consideration, it is apparent that there should be a protocol with regard to shared musical instruments. Sharing of instruments is routine in music schools, where students practice and perform on borrowed instruments throughout the year. In our discussion with our consultants, certain basic considerations and recommendations for standard operating procedures regarding shared instruments were recommended as follows:

1. All musicians or students should have their own instrument if possible.
2. All musicians or students should have their own mouthpiece if possible.
3. All students and faculty sharing reed instruments **MUST** have their own individual reeds. Reeds should **NEVER** be shared.
4. If instruments must be shared in class, alcohol wipes or Sterisol germicide solution (both available from the School of Music) should be available for use between different people.

When renting or using a school -owned musical instrument, each user must understand that regular cleaning of these musical instruments is required in order to practice proper hygiene. The student must initial and date the following statement upon checkout of the institutionally owned wind instrument:

Before using the above-mentioned instrument for the first time, I understand and agree that I am responsible for cleaning the instrument. I agree to use alcohol wipes and/or alcohol treated swabs to thoroughly clean both the outside and the inside of the mouthpiece (i.e., flute head joint and blow hole, clarinet and saxophone hard rubber/plastic mouthpiece, bassoon bocal, and brass mouthpiece). I further agree to maintain the cleaning, by means of cleaning rods, swabs, mouthpiece brushes, etc., to the extent necessary to prevent buildup of residue within the instrument.

Similarly, The student must initial and date the following statement upon return of the institutionally owned wind instrument:

Upon returning the above-mentioned musical instrument, I acknowledge that, after my final usage of this instrument, I have used alcohol wipes and/or alcohol treated swabs to thoroughly clean the outside and the inside of the mouthpiece (i.e., flute head joint and blow hole, clarinet and saxophone hard rubber/plastic mouthpiece, bassoon bocal, and brass mouthpiece).

Mouthpieces

The mouthpiece (flute headjoint), English Horn and bassoon bocal, and saxophone neck crook) are essential parts of wind instruments. As the only parts of these instruments placed either in or close to the musician's mouth, research has concluded that these parts (and reeds) harbor the greatest quantities of bacteria.

Adhering to the following procedures will ensure that these instrumental parts will remain antiseptically clean for the healthy and safe use of our students and faculty.

Cleaning the Flute Head Joint

1. Using a cotton swab saturated with denatured, isopropyl alcohol, carefully clean around the embouchure hole.
2. Alcohol wipes can be used on the flute's lip plate to kill germs if the flute shared by several players.
3. Using a soft, lint-free silk cloth inserted into the cleaning rod, clean the inside of the headjoint.

4. Do not run the headjoint under water as it may saturate and eventually shrink the headjoint cork.

Cleaning Bocals

1. Bocals should be cleaned every month with a bocal brush, mild soap solution, and running water.
2. English Horn bocals can be cleaned with a pipe cleaner, mild soap solution, and running water. Be careful not to scratch the inside of the bocal with the exposed wire ends of the pipe cleaner.

Cleaning Hard Rubber (Ebony) Mouthpieces

1. Mouthpieces should be swabbed after each playing and cleaned weekly.
2. Select a small (to use less liquid) container that will accommodate the mouthpiece and place the mouthpiece tip down in the container.
3. Fill the container to where the ligature would begin with a solution of half water and half white vinegar (50% water and 50% hydrogen peroxide works too). Protect clarinet mouthpiece corked tenons from moisture.
4. After a short time, use an appropriately sized mouthpiece brush to remove any calcium deposits or other residue from inside and outside surfaces. This step may need to be repeated if the mouthpiece is excessively dirty.
5. Rinse the mouthpiece thoroughly and then saturate with Sterisol germicide solution. Place on paper towel and wait one minute.
6. Wipe dry with paper towel.
7. Note: Metal saxophone mouthpieces clean up well with hot water, mild dish soap (not dishwasher detergent), and a mouthpiece brush. Sterisol germicide solution is also safe for metal mouthpieces.

Cleaning Saxophone Necks (Crooks)

1. Swabs are available to clean the inside of the saxophone neck. However, most saxophonists use a flexible bottlebrush and toothbrush to accomplish the same results.
2. If the instrument is played daily, the saxophone neck should be cleaned weekly (and swabbed out each day after playing).
3. Use the bottlebrush and mild, soapy water to clean the inside of the neck.
4. Rinse under running water.
5. Sterisol germicide solution may be used on the inside of the neck at this time, if desired (not necessary). Place on paper towel for one minute.
6. Rinse again under running water, dry, and place in the case.

Cleaning Brass Mouthpieces

1. Mouthpieces should be cleaned monthly.
2. Using a cloth soaked in warm, soapy water, clean the outside of the mouthpiece.
3. Use a mouthpiece brush and warm, soapy water to clean the inside.
4. Rinse the mouthpiece and dry thoroughly.
5. Sterisol germicide solution may be used on the mouthpiece at this time. Place on paper towel for one minute.
6. Wipe dry with paper towel.

Other Instruments

1. String, percussion, and keyboard instruments present few hygienic issues that cannot be solved simply by the musician washing their hands before and after use.

