



Five Ways to a Cleaner, Healthier Classroom

By John Rosales

From the first fall sniffles to the advance of flu season, educators and students can't completely avoid being exposed to colds and viruses, but they can take actions to reduce the chances of getting sick.

We asked four, experienced, award-winning custodians—those professionals on the frontlines of keeping schools clean—for their advice on minimizing the spread of germs in the classroom. Here are their top five tips:

Wipe It Down

Fortunately, custodians provide a thorough cleaning of classrooms before and/or after school, but teachers and paras can help contain the spread of germs in between classes by “cleaning desktops, counters, sinks, soap and paper towel dispensers especially during a flu outbreak,” says Pat Nicholson, winner of the [2009 C.L.E.A.N. Award](#) (Custodial Leaders for Environmental Advocacy Nationwide). “Wiping door handles and frames, walls and counters that are touched by hundreds of hands every day with an effective sanitizer and a micro fiber towel will limit the spread of viruses.”

Stock Supplies and Cover Up

“Teachers and paras should keep tissues, hand sanitizer, and sanitizer wipes in classrooms for when kids sneeze or cough,” says Briana Rivera, from Saks Elementary School in Anniston, Alabama, and a runner-up in this year's C.L.E.A.N. Award competition. “As a preventive measure, they should talk to the kids about covering their mouths and washing their hands to contain the spread of germs.”

Steve Brooks of the Maryland State Teachers Association has spent 15 years in school maintenance. He says that classrooms with sinks should have the proper hand sanitizers to take advantage of a quick way to kill germs before they spread.

“When students cough, immediately ask them to go to the sink and wash,” says Brooks, president of the Calvert Association of Educational Support Staff. “Keep disinfectant wipes in stock and continuously wipe off.”

Monitor Students and Send Them Home When Appropriate

When necessary, teachers should send sick kids home.

“Paras can help keep an eye on the kids who are coughing,” says Brooks, a graduate of the [ESP Leaders for Tomorrow](#) program. “Because kids cough and keep going.”

Nicholson confirms that staff should be on the lookout for students as well as teachers with flu symptoms. “Staff with the flu should stay home as well,” he says.

Minimize Objects That Attract Germs

Teachers and paraeducators should also “always work to minimize the number of objects in a classroom that are handled by students and can carry germs,” says Arnold.

[Nicholson](#) says sofas, bean bag chairs, recliners, and rugs are “asthma trigger reservoirs,” providing a home for dust, dust mites, pet dander, and pathogens which can trigger asthma attacks. Nearly one in 10 students has asthma.

“These students will benefit from the removal of these items,” Nicholson says. “This type of furniture also obstructs cleaning in your classroom.”

And while you’re at it, cut down on clutter.

“Uncluttered horizontal surfaces can be cleaned quickly and easily,” says Nicholson. “Desks and countertops collect dust and particulates. It takes custodians longer to clean surfaces covered with clutter.”

Work as a Team

“Dealing with germs is a team effort,” says Brooks, who works at Putuxent High School in Lusby. “We might not get 100 percent of them, but you need to have the teacher and para supporting what custodians do in the morning and after school.”

Other vital members in this team effort include students.

"We teach kids everything else, so we can teach them how to keep from spreading germs," Brooks adds.

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