

COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines

By NFHS, NAFME and the NAMM Foundation on April 24, 2020

[music directors & adjudicators article](#)



COVID-19 and Instrument Cleaning

The NFHS, NAFME and the NAMM Foundation recommend the following guidelines for handling musical instruments during the COVID-19 school shutdown period. These guidelines are designed for use by music educators and educators may use these guidelines when teaching students and parents how to clean instruments.

Sterilization vs. Disinfection

There is a difference between sterilization and disinfection of music instruments. Sterilization is limited in how long an instrument will remain sterile. Once an instrument is exposed to air or handled it is no longer sterile. However, disinfecting an instrument to make it safe to handle will last longer and is easier to achieve. COVID-19 like, most viruses has a limited lifespan on hard surfaces. Users of musical equipment may be more susceptible to infections from instruments that are not cleaned and maintained properly, especially if they are shared school instruments.

If the cleaning process is thorough, musical instruments can be disinfected. Basic soap and water can be highly effective in reducing the number of harmful bacteria and viruses simply by carrying away the dirt and oil that they stick to.

The NFHS, NAFME and the NAMM Foundation received information from the CDC which suggest the COVID-19 virus can remain on the following instrument surfaces for the stated amount of time:

Brass – Up to 5 Days

Wood – Up to 4 Days

Plastic – Up to 3 Days

Strings – Up to 3 Days

Cork – Up to 2 Days

The CDC recommends general cleaning techniques for instruments that have not been used or handled outside of the above timelines. Essentially, if students are picking up instruments for the first time since school has been closed, those instruments will not need more than general cleaning as stated below.

If distributing instruments for the first time since schools have closed, the NFHS and NAFME recommend, out of an abundance of caution, that all cases be sprayed with an aerosol disinfectant.

Additional guidance on general cleaning and disinfection can be found here

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Instrument Hygiene

Before distributing an instrument that has been shared, use of alcohol wipes, swabs, or disinfectant solution to thoroughly clean both the outside and the inside of the mouthpiece is highly recommended. It is also essential to maintain overall cleanliness via the use of cleaning rods, swabs, mouthpiece brushes, etc., as this is necessary to prevent buildup of residue within the instrument.

For wood instruments any excess amount of liquid can be damaging. Please be judicious and sparing outside of the mouthpiece area that needs cleaning. In addition, certain cleaning products that can be used on the mouthpiece should not be used around the pads associated with a woodwind instrument's keys (e.g. flute, clarinet, saxophone, etc.).

Mouthpieces

Adhering to the following procedures will help to keep mouthpieces and instruments clean and safe for continued use.

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 and Ebony Mouthpieces

1. Mouthpieces should be swabbed after each use and cleaned weekly.
2. Select a small container that will accommodate the mouthpiece vertically and place the mouthpiece, tip down, into the container.
3. Fill the container just past the window of the mouthpiece with a solution of 50% water and 50% white vinegar or hydrogen peroxide. Protect clarinet mouthpiece corked tenons from moisture.
4. After the mouthpiece has soaked for fifteen minutes, 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 disinfectant 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. Disinfectant solution is also safe for metal mouthpieces.

Cleaning Saxophone Necks

1. Swabs are available to clean the inside of the saxophone neck. However, many saxophonists use a flexible bottlebrush and toothbrush to accomplish the same results.
2. The saxophone neck should be swabbed after each use and cleaned weekly.
3. Use the bottlebrush with mild, soapy water to clean the inside of the neck.
4. Rinse under running water.
5. Disinfectant solution may be used on the inside of the neck if desired. Place on paper towel for one minute.
6. Rinse again under running water, dry, and place in the case.

Cleaning Brass Instrument Mouthpieces

1. Mouthpieces should be cleaned monthly.

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

Cleaning String Instruments

1. Isopropyl alcohol that's above 70% should only be used on the strings and unfinished finger and fret boards.
2. String, percussion, and keyboard instruments present fewer hygienic issues that can be solved simply by the player washing their hands before and after use for a minimum of 20 seconds.

Other Instruments

1. Plastic recorders can be washed with warm, soapy water and should be swabbed after each use with a plastic cleaning rod and soft thin cloth. Disinfectant solution and alcohol wipes may also be used.

Choosing a Disinfectant for Musical Instruments

1. Sterisol Germicide Solution can be safely used on plastics, hard rubbers, and metals.
2. Mi-T-Mist Mouthpiece Cleanser can be used on most materials. It is **NOT** recommended for use on hard rubber mouthpieces.
3. Isopropyl alcohol wipes are safe for most materials. They are NOT recommended for use on hard rubber mouthpieces.
4. A solution made with 50% water and 50% white vinegar or 50% water and 50% hydrogen peroxide can be safely used on plastics, hard rubbers, and metals.

While other potential disinfectants, including alcohol, boiling water, and bleach can be used as general disinfectants, they are not recommended for use on mouthpieces or instruments due to their potential effect on skin, plastics, and metals.

1. Whichever disinfectants are chosen, it is crucial to read the product instructions and follow them closely.
2. Disinfectants do not remove dirt, so mouthpieces and instruments must be cleaned thoroughly before using.

You can find EPA approved disinfectants for COVID-19 [here](#).

You can find other NFHS COVID-19 Resources [here](#).



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