

Infection Control for Instruments

Starter Guide for PIH (Instrumental)

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hosted by EASTMAN

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Instrumental Hygiene (IH) describes healthy interaction with musical gear. Sanitary hygiene and wellness apply to every person's everything, but terms translate best to bodies, close accessories, and tools. Musical instruments are among the dearest possessions of players, embraced for hours a day, often for life. Most instruments have bodies and some even have names, but IH isn't really about the instruments. It's about their players, and all the handlers who help them. PH applies to a person's self, spaces, and stuff (and endeavors). Instruments are just one example of stuff, used in varied spaces, in endeavors that extend and express the self.

PIH always starts with hand hygiene, because it's the *very best way to keep germs out of the body* [CDC, 2016]. Hands should be cleaned or sanitized often, especially after using the restroom or interacting with others, and before preparing food, eating, drinking, or touching the face or mouth. Players should also perform hand hygiene before and after handling instruments, and mouthed parts should be cleaned every day they are used. However yucky the mouth and teeth would get if they were not cleaned every day, that's how yucky mouthpieces and reeds might get too. People, hands, and close accessories are top transmitters of germs. PIH always begins with care of each person, as a human. Then, instrument and body contact can be reviewed from top to bottom for sources of infection, injury, or irritation. Early attention to friction hotspots, ergonomic discomfort, tension, and economies of motion may help prevent wounds or repetitive stress injuries. Health and comfort also improve confidence and reduce performance anxiety. Sharp edges or pressure points, especially on heavy instruments, can cause wounds or blisters, so those areas should be attended. String instruments that rub the neck may cause irritation, especially if the skin is dirty or if the player scratches with dirty fingernails. The face and neck should be gently cleaned and may need to be protected with a soft cloth while playing.

Fine instrument surfaces must often be handled carefully to avoid upsetting fine adjustments or damaging delicate surfaces, and to reduce the touchpoints that can't be cleaned or polished. Many instruments need professional cleaning, lubrication, and adjustment at least annually. Most instruments have certain ways that are best and safest to hold them while assembling, playing, disassembling, and

even while resting. Touch-pieces like buttons, keys, pegs, fretboards, and fingerboards are often designed to withstand handling, sweat, and oils, and this often makes them more tolerant of cleaning too. Chinrests and fingerboards should be kept free of buildup of dead skin, oil, or make-up.

Wind players should avoid sweets or sodas and should brush and floss their teeth shortly before playing, because residues in their condensate can cause sticky pads and sluggish pistons or slides. It may also promote microbial growth by offering more germs per session and feeding them. Wind instruments, especially the ***mouthed parts, should never be used by others without disinfecting them first, and reeds should never be shared*** at all. Metal instruments with valves often need to be bathed and lubricated, so it's important to get good advice about what to use and how to do that. Wood bore instruments with keys should be swabbed and gently wiped after use, and it's important to use swabs that won't get stuck and can be pulled back out easily. These also need to be dried well, so the instrument and case doesn't get musty and moldy inside.

Some woodwind instruments also use accessories that help vent their keys while drying. Case handles, pencils, ligatures, or other accessories can be cleaned or sanitized, but good HH is the best way to keep their germs out of the mouth. Neck straps, swabs, and case cloths should be cleaned or replaced regularly. Ensemble players should help clean the surfaces they use, stack or rack chairs and stands, and clean up their own litter, including condensates. Some products that are great for cleaning hands or household items are actually harmful to instruments. Hand sanitizer is very convenient, but many chemicals and sprays should be kept far away from gear.

Instrument makers should provide care guides about the maintenance and cleaning that players should do, and videos and books may also support each instrument family. When the instruments don't come with care guides, vendors, repairers, and teachers may recommend resource literature or videos that talk about what players need to know. Some repair schools and some universities with music programs have also prepared basic guides and videos. If the instructions are confusing or if players and parents don't know what to use or how to use it, it's best to find good help right away. Ignoring problems often makes them worse, and can hold back a player's progress unnecessarily. The old saying, "*we don't know what we don't know,*" really speaks to player preparedness with instrumental hygiene. How do

players know they are taking their best care of their instruments and getting the most out of them? Players can create their own best care guides by finding the answers to all these questions about instrument care.

Storage & Rest: How should I pack for storage and transport it safely, with nothing loose? How should I hold it, assemble and disassemble it safely? How do I hold it at rest while I stand or sit with it, so it isn't damaged? What temperature and humidity are best for my instrument? How do I influence the temperature and humidity for my instrument?

Supplies: What kinds of supplies does it need (like oils, tarnish paper, or swabs)? How should I use those supplies, and is there anything I should avoid?

Playing & Function: How does my instrument work to make and move its sounds? What can make my instrument easier or harder to play? Where will it get "sticky" first and how should I "un-sticky" it? Do I need any comfort or ergonomic accessories? Where do players of my instrument have to watch out for playing tension?

Home Maintenance: What cleaning, sanitizing, or disinfecting products are safe for my instrument's body and parts? How and where do I use them? Are there any I should carefully avoid?"

Professional Service: What are some common mechanical failures for my kind of instrument? Do I know my instrument is in its very best tip-top shape right now? Where do I get help with things I can't do for my instrument? How often does my instrument need to be serviced professionally? How do I know when to get help?

Financial Matters: How much money should I save for routine service or maintenance? How long is my instrument supposed to last? Do I need insurance for my instrument?

IH in ensembles is about PIH when playing together with others, just as professional hygiene is about PH when working together with others. In fact, social courtesies and help with environmental cleaning in ensembles are described in professional terms. Ensemble PIH begins with HH when entering to reduce the burden on fomites inside, and when leaving to protect the self. Social courtesy includes helpfulness with set up and strike, being on time, prepared, quiet, attentive, and respectful of the learning and personal space of others. Environmental

cleaning means leaving spaces better than they found them. This includes managing debris, including condensates, and straightening or racking chairs and stands. Participants may even help sanitize or disinfect the frequently touched fomites used in their art. Ensemble means working together. It also means considering many things or many people as one. Great ensemble players know it has to begin before the first notes are ever played, and it lasts long after the last notes are heard.