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← **Protecting the Health of Cleaning Professionals Behavioral Changes**  
By Rich Parillo

Though as many as 6,000 deaths in the United States have been attributed to swine flu (H1N1), according to the CDC, overall it appears the epidemic may have peaked and is now lessening.

Does this mean the worst is over? No one knows for sure. However, one thing is certain: Cleaning professionals have learned a lot from H1N1 (and other recent epidemics), including the value of their services. But there is still much to learn about protecting our own health while we go about our cleaning duties.

### Behavioral Changes

The term "behavioral changes" typically refers to making changes that have long-term effects on how we live and work and on our health. For instance, while we may lose weight dieting, the weight loss is often temporary; unless we make permanent changes in the types and amounts of foods we consume, we likely will not keep the weight off.

Similarly, because of the many public health scares that have surfaced in the past 10 years, it is time for cleaning professionals to make some behavioral changes at work to protect their health and the health of their staff and building occupants. Some of these changes include the following:

- Wear gloves and remove them properly;
- Wash hands properly;
- Use hand sanitizers; and
- Wear masks and follow proper cough etiquette.

### Gloves

Many years ago, few cleaning professionals wore gloves when working. Fortunately, today most do. However, the health benefits of wearing gloves can be lost and the possibility of cross contamination can be elevated if they are not removed properly.

Take the following steps when removing gloves:

- Grab the outer edge of one glove near the wrist with the other gloved hand;
- Peel the glove off the hand; the glove will turn inside out;
- Hold the glove in the opposite (gloved) hand or use it to peel the remaining glove, again from wrist down;
- Be careful not to touch the outer surface of the glove;
- Dispose of the gloves; and
- Wash hands.

### Hand Washing and Hand Sanitizers

It cannot be overstated how important proper hand hygiene is for cleaning professionals. Wash with warm, soapy water for approximately 20 seconds. Also, rub fingernails against the palm of the opposite hand to help remove bacteria lodged under the nails.

In addition to hand washing, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Stock janitorial carts and closets with hand sanitizers. The hand sanitizers selected should be able to kill 99.9 percent of the most common germs and bacteria and evaporate quickly, leaving no residual odor. But remember that hand washing and using hand

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sanitizers are not the same:

- Proper hand washing removes soils and contaminants.
- Sanitizers can kill germs and bacteria, but they are not intended to clean hands. They should be used as an interim measure to supplement frequent hand washing.

Cleaning professionals can recommend to building management an additional way to keep building tenants healthy to help stop the spread of disease: install hand sanitizers outside restrooms. This allows users to sanitize their hands just in case they have been in contact with "high-touch-point" areas such as doorknobs or push plates.

#### **Masks and Cough Etiquette**

Should cleaning professionals wear masks when they work? The answer is yes and no.

In general, in regards to preventing the spread of disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend the wearing of masks except in certain healthcare and possibly school settings where the wearing of respiratory masks is recommended. Also, it is recommended when working with chemicals. However, it is important that the mask fit properly and be worn correctly.

A Nov. 20, 2009 study by the National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan found that masks provide only marginal infection protection if not worn properly.

In most settings, what might be of even greater value to prevent cross-contamination is proper cough etiquette. Serious respiratory illnesses can be spread by coughing or sneezing. To help prevent this, the CDC recommends:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (or handkerchief) when coughing or sneezing;
- If neither is available, cough or sneeze into the upper sleeve of a shirt or blouse, not your hands;
- Throw away used tissue;
- Wash hands, or use a hand sanitizer (as mentioned earlier) after coughing or sneezing.

#### **Hygienic Soap Dispensers**

Although proper hand washing is essential in stopping the spread of disease, our efforts may be jeopardized if the soap we use is contaminated. A recent study by Dr. Charles Gerba, a microbiologist with the University of Arizona, suggests that unsafe levels of harmful bacteria and other illness-causing microorganisms are commonly found with some soap dispensers. These can be passed on to the hands of cleaning professionals and anyone using the soap from the dispenser, increasing the risk of spreading germs to other surfaces and people.

The problem is predominant in manually refilled soap dispensers, according to Gerba. The factory-sealed dispensing systems tested showed no evidence of bacterial contamination, making these systems highly recommended.

Want to learn more? The jansan industry is fortunate because it has many "walking encyclopedias," otherwise known as jansan distributors. An astute jansan distributor has extensive product knowledge and can prove a reliable and invaluable source helping to protect the health of cleaning professionals.

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