



[Down and Dirty]

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Cleaning Frequently Touched Objects For Health

By Skip Seal

Mary did not have to die. When Mary's mom took her to "Family Day" at her office, little did she suspect the visit would end in tragedy. You see, Mary's little hands touched everything: hand rails, door handles, her mom's office door and, of course, she often picked at her skinned knee.

When the knee later showed problems, it was dismissed as inflammation from a fall earlier that week. But the situation escalated. The family thought nothing could be worse after Mary's leg had to be amputated, but MRSA had taken over Mary's body and she eventually succumbed to the infection. Mary's mom had unthinkingly trusted that the Frequently Touched Objects (FTOs) her daughter touched were cleaned...by someone.

Obviously this story is fictional — but its end result is not. Real-life examples occur daily from Community Acquired Infections (CAIs). These infections cause serious illness resulting in doctor's visits, hospital stays, amputations, even death. MRSA is a staph germ that has become antibiotic resistant. But it is not the only culprit. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, MRSA has a lot of company. More and more germs are becoming resistant to even the strongest of antibiotics. MRSA can live on hard surfaces for months — and so can those other germs.

Hand washing is a person's first line of defense

against the illnesses caused by germs picked up from FTOs. However, contaminated surfaces can defeat the best hand washing program. Studies have found that germs can survive, and in some cases thrive, on hard surfaces. Further, germs transfer readily from hard surfaces to the hands and just as readily from the hands to the eyes, ears, mouth or damaged areas of the skin.

This brings you, the building service contractor into the picture.

What is your program for cleaning FTOs? Many of us assume the on-site personnel know to clean FTOs daily because this is common sense. That puts the practice in the "assumed" category and opens the door for stories like Mary's.

There are many reasons why a policy and procedure for cleaning FTOs should be included in the Scope of Work. A janitor has the care of the building and its occupants and visitors in his hands. Often we find ourselves focused on surfaces and complaints and allow our primary mission to slip into the background. Caring for and protecting the health of the occupants and visitors should be our top priority.

Now that we have established the fundamental need to clean FTO's, here's how to address them:

- Define the FTOs in each building that are to be cleaned. Some examples include push plates, door handles/knobs, hand rails, light switches and desk tops. Facility executives may not want you to clean personal items, such as keyboards, mice and staplers. Discuss these on an account-by-account basis.
- Determine your cleaning procedure. Jan/san distributors can be helpful in designing your program. Increased Labor issues will be on everyone's mind, therefore the procedure must be practical.
- Determine cleaning frequency. The FTOs on your list should be cleaned at least daily.
- Create your own Site Specific Written Procedure to facilitate training and to become part of your Site Specific Procedures Manual.
- Engage your employees: Tell them Mary's story, give them the written procedure (physically or digitally), and train them on the process.
- Revisit in 30 days to review and, if necessary, adjust the steps, timing and products.

As you consider the topic of cleaning FTOs, you may want to consider factors beyond the issue of trust, such as due diligence in case of an outbreak, the added value you can bring to your business, and how you can add this to your market basket. 



PUT IT TO USE

A procedures template can be accessed at www.cleanlink.com/16177cp. It is generic and can be customized with your logo, products and procedures.