

Is your child's hobby making him sick?

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Research has shown that playing a musical instrument can help nourish, cultivate, and increase intelligence in children, but playing a used instrument also can pose a potentially dangerous health risk.

Used woodwind and brass instruments were found to be heavily contaminated with a variety of [bacteria](#) and fungi, many of which are associated with minor to serious infectious and [allergic diseases](#), according to a study published in the March/April 2011 issue of *General Dentistry*, the peer-reviewed clinical journal of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD).

"Many children participate in their school's band ensemble and often the instruments they play are on loan," said R. Thomas Glass, DDS, PhD, lead author of the study. "Most of these instruments have been played by other students, and without the proper sanitation, bacteria and fungi can thrive for weeks and even months after the last use."

A total of 117 different sites, including the mouthpieces, internal chambers, and cases, were tested on 13 previously played instruments of a high school band. Six of the instruments had been played within a week of testing, while seven hadn't been touched in about one month. The instruments produced 442 different bacteria, many of which were species of [Staphylococcus](#), which can cause staph infections. Additionally, 58 molds and 19 yeasts were identified.

"Parents may not realize that the mold in their child's instrument could contribute to the development of asthma," said Dr. Glass.

Additionally, the yeasts on the instruments commonly cause [skin infections](#) around the mouth and lips ("red lips").

"Because these instruments come into contact with the mouth, it's no wonder they're a breeding ground for bacteria," said AGD spokesperson Cynthia Sherwood, DDS, FAGD. "As dentists, we see this same growth of bacteria in dentures, athletic mouthguards, and toothbrushes."

Researchers found that many of the bacteria can cause illness in humans and are highly resistant to the antibiotics normally prescribed by general practitioners. This finding makes sterilization of instruments extremely important.

"Instruments should be cleaned after each use to reduce the number of organisms," said Dr. Sherwood. "And cleaning should not be confined to the mouthpiece, since the bacteria invade the entire instrument."

To avoid transmission of bacteria from instrument to player, parents and students should frequently wipe the surface of the instrument that comes into contact with the skin and mouth. The instrument should be taken apart for thorough cleanings on a regular basis. Dr. Glass suggests using cleaning cloths and solutions made specifically for instruments. Most importantly, students are advised not to share their instruments with others. Students should consult with their band instructor for additional ways to disinfect their instruments.

Provided by Academy of General Dentistry

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