The Role of Janitorial Services in Preventing Cross Contamination
Executive Summary

Cross-contamination occurs when bacteria is spread between people, food, surfaces and equipment. A common concern in the food and health care industries, cross-contamination also poses a health threat in any environment including schools, shopping malls, offices and other buildings. This becomes a serious problem when you take into account that Americans spend about 90% of their time inside, yet contaminants found indoors can be five times worse than outdoors.

In addition to negatively impacting the health of building occupants and visitors, cross-contamination and other poor indoor environmental issues cost businesses and building owners billions of dollars every year. Consider these facts:

• Lost productivity costs businesses $60 billion per year.
• 30% of all buildings worldwide have poor indoor air quality problems.
• 50% of all illness is aggravated or caused by polluted indoor air.

There is no doubt that responsible cleaning practices help avoid cross-contamination, thereby minimizing the incidence of illness and disease. Effective cleaning reduces bacteria on equipment and surfaces that people come into contact with every day, such as keyboards, phones and restroom touch-points. While it might sound like a straight-forward solution, health-conscious cleaning actually requires detailed processes, thorough training, and strict quality control.

In addition, janitorial services should be approached holistically: All areas of a facility are interconnected through building automation, HVAC systems and even foot traffic that spreads internal and external pollutants. Employees come to work sick; workers bring food into the building or prepare food in break rooms; cleaning products themselves put contaminants into the air. Dirt, pollutants and allergens cannot be readily seen but can drastically affect cross-contamination and health. Any plan for eradicating cross-contamination should consider all of these factors.

Common Causes

Probably the most common culprits of cross-contamination are hands, equipment, cloths/rags, and door handles, or food that comes in contact with them. Though common sense, many people do not wash and dry their hands before touching or eating food; after touching raw meat, fish, chicken or unwashed vegetables; after using the toilet; after blowing their noses; or after touching a pet. Employees eat at their desks and, even if they clean up afterwards, food particles remain to breed bacteria and attract pests that can further spread disease.
Another common mistake is to clean multiple areas with the same supplies and/or equipment and to store restroom cleaning supplies together with items used in other areas. Cloths, sponges and mops are sources of concentrated bacteria that can cross-contaminate anything with which they come into contact.

**Steps to Avoid Cross Contamination**

You should review (or ask your janitorial company to review) your existing situation, and then consider implementing a plan that contains action items, such as the following.

1. **Capture pollutants and remove them; don’t just move them around.**
   - Focus on entryways. Use special mats that trap dirt and pollutants to prevent spreading throughout the building.
   - Use micro-fiber dusting cloths and flat mops that outperform traditional dusting and mopping materials by capturing dust and dirt. Clean and reuse for minimal waste.
   - For carpets, ensure proper vacuuming, extracting, rinsing and drying. Carpets can be a host for moisture problems and mold growth. Empty vacuum bags at the end of shifts or when half full.
   - Janitorial workers should wash hands frequently and keep equipment clean. Be sure janitorial closets are clean to avoid dirt traveling throughout a building on equipment.
   - Janitorial workers should avoid touching their faces, skin, and hair, or wiping hands on cleaning cloths.
   - Focus cleaning efforts on touch-points: door handles, bright work and other areas where people come in contact with the facility or its fixtures.

2. **Minimize harmful chemicals in the environment while maximizing cleaning power.**
   - Replace traditional cleaning chemicals with Green Seal certified, environmentally friendly and highly effective products.
   - Use course spray for cleaning chemicals, rather than a fine mist which travels farther. Or apply cleaner to cloth instead of spraying directly onto the surface to be cleaned.
   - Use chemical management systems for accurate product dilution. Use according to directions to minimize waste and exposure and to maximize cleaning efficiency.
   - Apply disinfectant in restrooms properly and make sure the chemical has proper dwell time.

3. **Segregate tools, chemicals and equipment.**
   - Use tools and processes that are color-coded according to the cleaning job. This way, workers can see at a glance which products should be used for floors vs. countertops, for example.
   - Store like items together and separated from items used for other purposes, e.g., avoid storing restroom mops with kitchen cleaners.
4. **Implement training and communication programs.**
   - Properly train custodial staff in all healthy cleaning procedures. They must also wear the proper personal-protective equipment when cleaning a facility.
   - Communicate to building employees that you have implemented a healthy cleaning plan for their protection. Ask that they also follow procedures to help prevent cross-contamination (washing hands, cleaning up after themselves in the break room, not taking food to their desks, etc.).

**Green Cleaning Considerations**

To create a truly healthy environment, cross-contamination prevention procedures should go hand-in-hand with green cleaning (defined as “effective cleaning to protect health without harming the environment”). In addition to using Green Seal certified products, your janitorial services company can implement other processes that provide a healthier environment inside while protecting the earth’s environment. Green cleaning programs can reduce costs, provide marketing and employee recruiting benefits, enhance safety, increase customer and employee satisfaction, reduce health threats, and create goodwill.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how clean or attractive your environment is... if it’s not a safe and healthy place. More and more, entities believe that seeking new cleaning methodologies and products should be an ongoing process. A growing trend toward green cleaning means that new alternatives are being discovered and the cost of green products is decreasing. It seems there is no better time to begin ensuring that your building or business offers the best for your employees, customers and community.

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