



Tips from Parents for Keeping Wind Instruments Safe to Play

Our special thanks to those who contributed these ideas!

1. While this advice seems so basic, as a parent I find myself putting this tip on the top of my list. Kids should never share wind instruments, or even allow friends and other players to handle their instrument. Innocently, young friends will ask, “Can I try out your sax? ,” and you should coach your child to an appropriate but definitive response. For years we’ve been telling our children not to share water bottles or soda cans, so this seemingly benign request to play a friend’s instrument can pose serious health issues for both players. *JD, Manchester, CT*
2. Make cleaning instruments as easy as possible. As a parent, one of the first things you need to do is some research. Ask your child’s music teacher, your school nurse, and your local music dealer about the best *disinfecting* agents available for wind instruments. Make sure these products will be easy for your child to use – because if your child has to fuss with solutions that require mixing, he’ll be far less likely to do it on a regular basis. Some wind instruments are more complicated to clean than others, and I suggest you know exactly what’s required to keep his instrument in top form so when it comes time to give him gentle reminders, you know the drill yourself! *WM, Gahanna, OH*
3. The pediatricians I’ve dealt with over the years believe that prevention is as important as any cure. They’ve told me the best way to avoid the spread of germs and bacteria is by getting “in the habit” of precaution. When it comes to her instrument, it means cleaning her clarinet after every practice. This includes school and home practices and may mean cleaning a couple of times a day. Swabbing and drying out her clarinet is not only a good health habit, but has prolonged the life of the pads and helped to keep the instrument odor-free. *DM, Naples, FL*
4. With three kids playing instruments, I quickly learned that old tee shirts proved to be priceless, and the best music “accessory” kids can have. Cut up in pieces (about 1” wide, and twice the size of a cleaning rod in the case of a flute; cut to the dimension of the instrument case with a clarinet; and cut into square foot pieces for a sax), these swatches are perfect for wiping out the inside of instruments. It’s amazing how much dirt can accumulate in a very short time on these strips of cloth, so routine washing is important. Flexible brushes, or “snakes,” are also a good investment. Don’t leave damp cloths in the instrument case, however, as they will transfer moisture back to the instrument! *LL, Atlanta, GA*
5. When washing head joints and mouthpieces, use lukewarm water, and a mild soap, avoiding those with moisturizers. NEVER boil a mouthpiece (my son learned this the hard way!). Use clean paper towels to dry, especially if the instrument needs to go right back in its case. Whenever possible, let a cleaned instrument dry overnight before putting it back in its case. It’s the dark, moist instrument case that provides the perfect environment for bacteria to thrive and grow! *GO, Newport, RI*



6. It's important to understand it's not only what's inside the instrument that counts; it's the outside too. I encourage my kids to use hand sanitizers and wash their hands frequently, especially before picking up their instruments to play. I also discourage them from putting music sheets and other paraphernalia in their cases. I remind them the case was meant for the instrument, and essential valve oils and grease, not to serve as a school locker! I also tell them to avoid eating just before playing. Food can be blown into the instrument and after a while, begin to smell. It's not only unhygienic, but can corrode the insides of these delicate instruments. Sweets and fizzy drinks will make the pads sticky, too! *PC, Jamaica, VT*
7. When I'm buying a brand new instrument for one of our sons, I always ask the dealer a few questions. Who in the store has tested the instrument? Have other kids been "trying it out?" How have the mouthpieces been handled between players? One of the misconceptions that many people have is that new instruments are free from contamination by previous players. The fact is, most are not, even if they've come right from the factory. Many of these instruments have been "human tested" for playing quality and sound before arriving at the music dealer. It's not that they've been played a lot, but it's a good thing to know. And, it never hurts to ask questions! *KV, Manomet, MA*
8. With so many instruments now being purchased over the Internet, I think it's more important than ever to be careful about the health safety of our kids. Not only do we not have any idea of the health history of previous player, but the instrument cases themselves could be harboring bacteria of all kinds. My first piece of advice to parents would be to replace the case right away, and take the instrument to your music dealer for thorough inspection, repair, and if he offers it, sterilization. *DH, Tucson, AZ*
9. For years, I was dragging my daughter to her pediatrician for ongoing sore throats and bouts of strep, until one day I mentioned that she played the clarinet. I don't know why I never thought of saying this before, but since then, we've been a lot more diligent about how she takes care of disinfecting her instrument. My advice is, if your child gets sick for any reason, let your pediatrician know that she plays a wind instrument. There may or may not be a direct correlation to the illness and her playing, but the medical community is becoming aware of the research that exists regarding the potential for cross-contamination through wind instruments. Arming your doctor or medical professional with this information may well inform his prescription for treatment. *BG, Los Angeles, CA*

*Have other ideas for parents?
Send them to us at info@MaestroMD.com!*