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HYGIENE & SANITATION IN SCHOOLS

Children often stay 4-6 hours a day in school and an additional 8 hours a week in school buses – i.e., a total of 12-14 hours a week, 48-56 hours a month and 288-336 hours a year! No wonder then that it has been said that schools are our second home. Across the globe, we strive to keep our homes clean, safe, sanitized and hygienic. But, what about schools - are children really safe in and around the premises of what we call our second home?

Most schools advertise their ‘clean facilities and environment’, but hardly mention anything about sanitation and hygiene and the best practices being accomplished on a regular basis. Do we know if they are actually putting in effort to keep every nook and cranny clean, hygienic and free from pollution and contaminants? Well, this could be an issue. In a news report earlier this year in The National, **Tariq Al Gurg, Chief Executive of Dubai Cares**, said,

“Every year, millions of school-age children fall prey to diseases linked to poor water and sanitation that leave them weakened and unable to attend school on a regular basis or participate to their full potential.” He added, “The tragedy of the situation is that this could be easily prevented by enforcing sound hygiene and sanitation practices.”

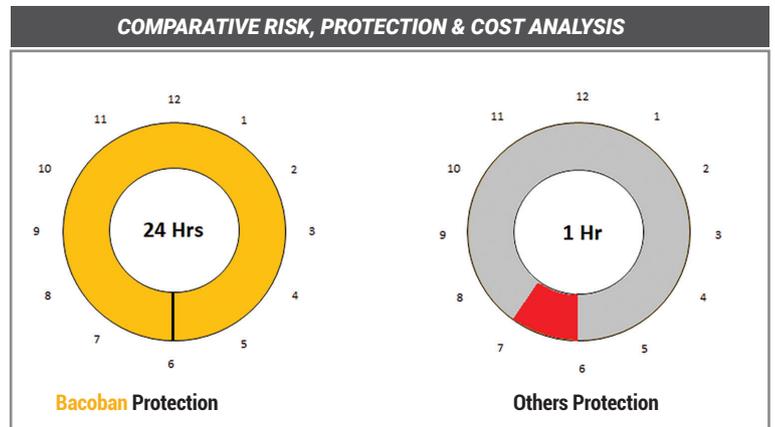


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Dubai Statistics Center recently released data showing the total enrollment both in private and government schools for the school year 2013/2014 at 272,669, increasing by 4.3 per cent at 284,481 in the following school year 2014/2015, and 294,736 (3.6 per cent increase) in 2015/2016. That is a lot of people in schools! The constant use of facilities, people moving in and out of the buildings and regular interaction create the right formula for community-based contamination or infection.

'If school sanitation and hygiene facilities are absent, or are badly maintained and used, schools become risky places where diseases are transmitted. Schools can also pollute the natural environment in such a way that it causes health hazards for the community at large.' (Source: A Manual on School Sanitation & Hygiene, UNICEF in collaboration with IRC – International Water & Sanitation Center).

Statistics regarding community-based contamination or infection in the school environment are not available. Perhaps, no study has been undertaken in the UAE. Regardless, it is, however, incumbent upon all parents to check on hygiene and sanitation in their children's learning institutions. What do we need to look into? Does the school have a hygiene and sanitation programme in place? Does it implement the said programme in a sustained manner? Does the programme consider immediate and long-term impact, and how much and how far reaching is such an impact on the children, their families and the community?



Are school facilities well sanitized and disinfected?

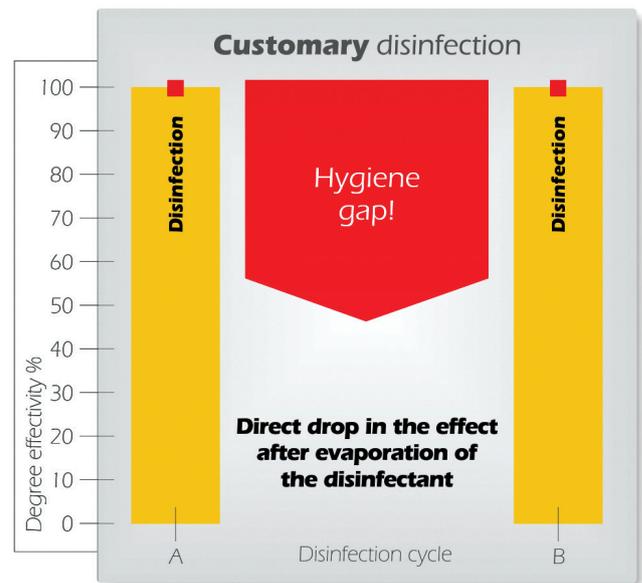
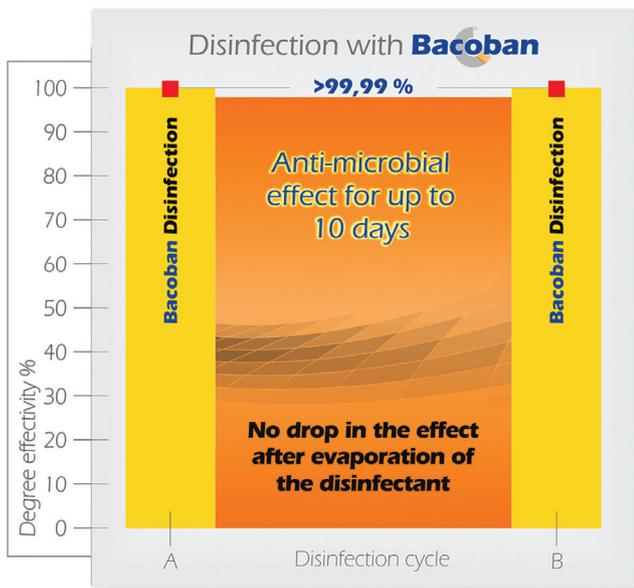
Community-based contamination and infection are impacted by several factors: environment and mode of transmission, intervention & preventive measures such as cleaning & disinfection practices, etc. As mentioned, there are too many people confined in a relatively compact environment in schools. This can result in easy and quick transmission of community-based infections when disease-bearing contaminants are present. Intervention and prevention rely on the kind and quality of cleaning and disinfection solutions available and used, where and how they are used, and who is entrusted to undertake the hygiene and sanitation program.



Jose Felix Martelino,
Head of Sales
ALMADION
International

Most schools outsource their cleaning and sanitation job to facilities management companies. Like any other business, schools aspire to make profits and keep expenses down, hence they normally go for the lowest bidder. In the same token, service contractors also want to keep their profits as high as possible so they opt for the cheapest and more economical way of cleaning. Hence the quality of cleaning and sanitation is often sacrificed. More emphasis should be placed on the quality and effectiveness of sanitation solutions as they are used more particularly in disinfection. Most disinfectants commonly used are effective only for a few minutes to an hour allowing re-contamination. Disinfection practices followed by most schools call for a daily application protocol. This is alright if the disinfectant lasts long enough. However,





since most disinfectant solutions are only good for a few minutes to an hour, there is a wide 'risk gap' of -20-23 hours! There are a few disinfection solutions in the local market today that can claim 24 hours re-contamination risk free including BACOBAN® - a nanotech-formulated disinfection solution that lasts more than 24 hours. Bacoban's Nano technology formulation leaves an active film that stays potent for a long period hence reducing the chances of re-contamination! Its long lasting effect bridges the gap in between applications. BACOBAN® has been tested in laboratory conditions and is found to last up to 10 days with an effectiveness of 99.98%.

What can parents do?

Private schools in Dubai charge fees of anywhere between AED 50,000 and close

to AED 100,000 per year per student with average annual increases from 5 per cent to 10 per cent, depending on the quality of the facilities, staff salaries and how much profit the owner wants to make. Expat residents have little choice as UAE government run schools are restricted to Emirati citizens only (with occasional exceptions - usually for expat GCC or Arab families). Home schooling in UAE is about the only realistic option for expats wanting to avoid paying school fees. ADEC Adviser, Yousuf Al Shiryani, says that most schools are allowed 5 per cent tuition fee annual increase. Some schools however are allowed to go higher for certain special considerations. (Source: The National, KHDA)

With such investments being made by parents, it is only fair that they make sure that their children get the right education and care while they are in schools. Parents must learn to voice their concerns most specially if these involve their children's health and welfare while in the learning institutions. They must and step forward and suggest to school administrations to improve school facilities and more particularly in the use of disinfection solutions that provide the most protection possible. With the kind of investments parents make, they are justified to be heard involving issues regarding hygiene & sanitation in schools. ●



About the Author: Jose Felix Martelino is the Head of Sales at ALMADION International