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GERMS LIVE ON MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND EVERYWHERE ELSE

An enterprising dentist from Andover, Mass., suggests **musical instruments** that parents rent for children ought to be sterilized like medical instruments, and his new company - at www.maestromd.com - offers that service for \$50 to \$90, depending on the instrument size.

We consulted a Central New York doctor and musician.

Do **musical instruments** harbor germs? "If you take a swab and you stick it in something, whether it's your shoes or your mouth or a plate of food or anyplace that hasn't just been sterilized, you're going to get germs. We live in a sea of microbacteria and viruses and fungi."

Can any germs survive all summer until the next school year? "The bacteria that cause staphylococcal and streptococcal infections can live a while - but they're everywhere else, too. Most germs that cause your common colds will die, but there are things like anthrax spores that live a long time.

"The way the (germ) world works is that pathogenic bacteria and viruses have to have a reason to survive. A lot of the worst germs that are out there really need to be inside somebody rather soon. They can't live without people as a host."

Would sterilizing a wind instrument get rid of the germs? "It would kill all the germs, but so what? They would come back as soon as you brought the instrument back into the world."

Is it adequate to swab the mouthpiece with alcohol? "As far as I can tell, the usual practices have never been associated with disease outbreaks.

"Schools are germy places. Your kids are a lot more likely to get germs from touching a doorknob or sitting at a desk where a kid with a runny nose just sat."

How do you clean your instrument? "I take my trombone once a month, and I put it in the bathtub, and I put in warm water, and I put in Palmolive soap, and I brush it out."

Has your trombone ever made you sick? "I've played instruments for more than 40 years, and I'm still standing."

Our mechanic: Dr. James L. Greenwald is an associate professor of family medicine at SUNY Upstate Medical University and an active amateur trombonist in several local groups, including the Syracuse University Brass Ensemble and the Skaneateles Community Band.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO NO CREDIT Dr. James L. Greenwald Tom Schmitt / Staff artist
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