

Rugby Referee Whistle Hygiene Revisited

For referees it is important to ensure that their individual whistle remains in clean and safe condition for reuse.

Some background on whistle contamination. Firstly, most of the germs on and within the whistle will be your own, and they live normally and happily within your mouth. However, where the whistle is not regularly cleaned, then saliva, skin cells, bacteria and fungi, can and will accumulate both within the mouth piece and also within the whistle chamber. This can lead biofilms, odour and a foul taste.

And there are the infectious viruses risks. More people died from Influenza Virus in 2025 than for the past thirty or so years. And COVID is still mutating and killing people. And then there is also Measles Virus. Measles had been eliminated from Australia, but it is making a comeback and is 10 to 15 times more infectious than say COVID or Influenza Viruses or RSV.

All of these viruses produce a large volume of viral particles in your throat, mouth and airways well prior to any sign of illness (some people do not even exhibit many symptoms). If you have a virus, when you blow your whistle, a large number of those nasty little germs will blow out in a fog of potentially infectious aerosol, whereby you and your whistle will become the spreader of infection.

So, consider updating your vaccination status prior to the rugby season. And, if you are feeling unwell, please take a multi-virus related test or stay home.

To remove the biological soiling regularly clean and sanitise the whistle as indicated below:

1. Cleaning the whistle:
 - a. Make sure that the whistle is attached via a string or cord or another lanyard;
 - b. Immerse the entire whistle into a warm soapy solution (normal, manual dishwashing solutions are absolutely ok for this use). The temperature of the solution **should not** be hot (30°C is ideal, but you don't need a thermometer);
 - c. Get a new soft bristled toothbrush and gently rub around and into the inside of the mouth piece, and also the whistle air window (where the air comes out);
 - d. This cleaning should be done for at least 30 seconds;
 - e. Then rinse off the soapy solution under running cold water.
2. Sanitising the whistle:
 - a. Boil some water and whilst holding the whistle using a pair of tongs (so you don't burn your hand or fingers), pour the boiling water over and into the whistle;
 - b. You should pour the water gently over the whistle for at least 15 seconds if possible;
3. Drying the whistle:
 - a. Hang the whistle using the lanyard over a piece of disposable paper for at least an hour or so and allow to dry.

The goal of the process is two-fold. Firstly, a clean and sanitised whistle and secondly, your whistle will last longer.

Kindly

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