

PIANO CLEANING: DO'S AND DON'TS



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Now that we are starting to get back to our lives and are beginning to gather together again after all the COVID craziness, I decided I would take the time to write about some tips on cleaning and disinfecting pianos. I've cleaned probably close to a thousand pianos of all shapes, sizes, and ages over my career so far. There are methods and products that work better than others and there is a lot you can do yourself to keep your piano clean and looking good.

Let's start with the case: the lid, the sides and front, the key cover aka the fallboard, etc. The first thing we should look at is the type of finish the piano has been given. Is it gloss? Is it satin? Is it old and alligatored? For a gloss finish, one that is shiny, I would suggest using Cory *Super High Gloss Piano Polish*. It is easy to use and the results are fantastic. It will remove fingerprints and other grease smears to get the piano smooth and shiny again. I am not being paid by

Cory for this article, but I find that their products perform the best. The method I recommend to apply the polish is to spray it onto a soft cloth or rag and wipe on. If sprayed directly onto a piano, there is a chance droplets might enter the instrument and effect the internal parts such as the strings. If a satin finish, Cory also sells a satin polish that works the same as the high gloss polish. If the piano has a clear lacquer finish (most older instruments have this) I suggest Murphy's oil soap to clean off the grime. The oil soap also works well to rejuvenate the wood. Windex is also a viable option for cleaning the finishes, but it can leave streaks and will most likely not produce a satisfying result. If the finish has dried up and alligatored or cracked, there isn't much left but to use the oil soap and hope for the best; this piano essentially needs to be refinished. Whatever the situation, be sure to dry everything off once the surfaces have been wiped.



Regarding the keys, there are many options for cleaning and sanitizing. Some keys are made of ivory, but most modern pianos have keys made of plastic. Again, Windex can be an effective option, but be aware that you must change spots on the rag frequently, even every few keys, or you will end up just smearing the grime from key to key across the entire keyboard. A product that works better is *Cory Key-Brite*. It works on both ivory and plastic. It is a sort of soap formulated specifically to clean piano keys. It protects the ivory and the plastic and does a fantastic job getting the dirt and grease off of the keys. It lasts longer on the rag than Windex and you may only have to find a new spot on the rag every octave or so. Be sure to wipe the keys dry when finished cleaning off the dirt.

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In terms of disinfectant, there are many safe options. One of these options is NOT Lysol in any form. Lysol has been known to turn plastic piano keys gray. Safe options include: alcohol (91%) on a cotton ball, but not too often as it tends to dry out the keys, especially the ivory ones, and can effect the texture. H₂O₂ (hydrogen peroxide) on a cotton ball is also a good choice. I have tested Clorox wipes without bleach to some extent and they appear to be safe. Again, be sure to dry off any chemical product being placed on the keys. The manufacturer will specify on the package how long it takes to kill various viruses and such once applied, usually around 15 seconds. Therefore, apply the product, wait the amount of time, then dry the keys off. If you have the time and so choose to, you could use a UV-C light wand, but be sure not to look into the light. Using UV-C can take 30 seconds or more just to sanitize one area and the wands are not very long, causing the process to take a several minutes of hovering the wand over sections of the keyboard. There are many companies selling these wands these days for cheap, but do not be fooled, many of them do not work because they are unable to emit a strong enough light to have any effect. You get what you pay for always applies.

Good luck and stay safe! And remember, the best way to keep your piano clean is to wash your hands before interacting with it.