

## Calgary Sport Wash takes grunge out of gear:

### Sanitizing process removes bacteria from equipment

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Owner/operator Craig McLeod pulls out several small baby-food jars at the front counter of his office as a stark image of what his small business is all about.

The jars are filled with a murky liquid with debris floating near the bottom. It is simply disgusting to look at and disgusting to consider the nature of the substance. Inside the jars are dead skin, bacteria, fungus and mould -- all extracted from what McLeod calls "stinky, sweaty, contaminated" sports equipment.

Growing concerns about public health and sports equipment spawned an idea in McLeod to open last fall his Calgary Sport Wash Centre in the city's

"Calgary Sport Wash Centre is a service that cleans, sanitizes and deodorizes all types of sports equipment, primarily for health and safety," said McLeod.

"Cleaning and sanitizing equipment, of course, is quite important. We focus on cleaning hockey equipment, lacrosse equipment, football equipment. All types of recreational equipment such as flak jackets, wet suits, right up to being able to accommodate doing flood damage items such as shoes and cushions -- virtually any type of equipment or items that can't be cleaned in a conventional kind of way."

The Calgary company uses the patented Esporta Wash System developed by a company in Kelowna, B.C. The system uses a machine that takes about three hours to clean and sanitize equipment using scientifically tested chemicals that break down bacteria, fungus, blood and mould.

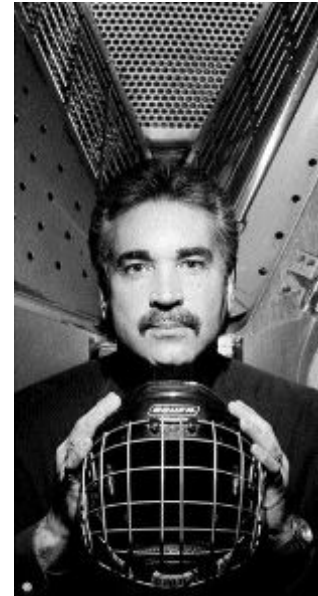
McLeod has played sports all his life and began researching the problem of filthy equipment.

"The more I researched it and the more I talked to people, I found out there was a major need," he said.

One of the emerging concerns in North America is a growing number of infections from methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) -- a bacterium -- which can have serious health consequences. In recent years, the infection has turned up in sports teams in the United States.

According to the Calgary Health Region, staphylococcus aureus (commonly known as staph) commonly live on the skin and in the nose. Generally, the infections result in pimples, boils or infected wounds. However, the bacteria can sometimes cause more serious bloodstream infections or pneumonia, which may be more difficult to treat.

"Staph infections are spread by direct person-to-person contact or through indirect contact by touching infected objects such as towels, sheets, wound dressings and clothes. Proper hygiene, including appropriate hand washing, can help prevent staph infections," according to the CHR.



Tim Fraser, Calgary Herald

Craig McLeod, owner and operator of Calgary Sport Wash Centre, says cleaning sports equipment reduces the risk of staph infections.

McLeod said medical laboratories have found sports equipment covered in mucus, sweat and blood, making them a "breeding ground for bacteria, fungus and mould."

"This serious bacteria can now be causing infections to such a degree that people are becoming seriously ill and in some cases there's been death," he said.

"With research and laboratory tests, they've found that there's a horrendous amount of bacteria that is becoming quite serious and quite dangerous for people, so that is where the major need is now in promoting the awareness."

When parents see the baby jars filled with the murky substance, they are shocked by the contents, said McLeod.

"If any parent ever was able to be shown that, I don't doubt that any parent or school, or anybody, any athletic directors . . . they wouldn't hesitate to have a regular cleaning regime for their equipment."

Calgary Sport Wash Centre cleans and sanitizes an assortment of equipment from many sports as well as a variety of other objects such as patio cushions, moving-company pads and blankets, costumes, mascot outfits and bowling shoes.

Cleaning costs vary depending on the type and volume of equipment. To clean a complete set of hockey equipment, for example, with a 24-hour turnaround for pickup, it costs \$45.

McLeod said the clientele also varies, but parents are becoming more health conscious and aware of possible concerns from equipment.

He suggests people let their noses be their guide for when equipment needs to be washed and sanitized. A foul odour is a definite sign the equipment needs cleaning. In general, McLeod said, equipment should be cleaned at least once a year, but it depends on use.