



Risk Management

by Jesse Denton

Reducing the spread of contagious illnesses between employees and guests

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It is no surprise that the Winter months bring an increase of cold, influenza, and other communicable illnesses to the workplace. But hotel employees are perhaps more susceptible than most workers to these transmitted illnesses because of the transient nature of the environment in which they work.

Every day travelers from around the country, and perhaps from across the globe, arrive at hotels and interact with staff members and other guests. Many of these travelers have flown long distances aboard airplanes which, as you are probably aware, recycle the majority of the breathing air in its compressed environment while in flight. Thus, air travelers are more susceptible to succumbing to and even spreading respiratory illnesses and germs throughout their journey. Think of how many times an afflicted guest can potentially leave germs behind when residing in your hotel. Door knobs, room keys, registration cards, menus, toilet handles, signed guest checks, glassware, car keys in valet parking situations, cash gratuities provided to employees, etc. The list of potential areas where germs can be unwittingly transferred to hotel employees is extensive, and something that most employees rarely consider.

Because of the public nature of the hotel business, it is impossible to work completely in a sterile environment. But there are prudent and guest-friendly steps that hotels and their associates can undertake to reduce transmission of communicable illnesses between guests and employees through these various common contact points.

Sanitize hard surfaces

Not all surfaces can be sanitized with commercial disinfectant cleaner. But most hard surfaces such as doors and drawers (to include knobs, pulls, locks and latches), telephone receivers, television remote controls, light switches, elevator call buttons, toilet handles, faucets, in-room directories, and menus and guest check folders can be disinfected on a daily basis. Returned guestroom card keys should also be placed in a separate bin for disinfecting before being recycled for use.

All glassware, china and eating utensils must be thoroughly washed with hot water and detergent before being reused or placed back into service. Improperly sanitized glassware and utensils can transmit mononucleosis, herpes, E. coli, salmonella, hepatitis A, influenza and even staph infections. The acceptable standard here is quite straightforward. All eating and drinking utensils can only be properly sanitized through a dishwasher where it is exposed to a minimum temperature of 110 degrees Fahrenheit and using the proper cleaning chemical. Alternatively, glassware and utensils may be hand-washed in a three-compartment metal sink using dishwashing detergent combined with a minimum water temperature of 140 degrees F. for the first stage, a hot water rinse stage of at least 180 degrees F., and then immersed in a sanitizing bactericidal solution for at least thirty seconds for the third stage.



Hand washing

With the exception of guestroom and dining linens, it is not practical to wash or disinfect soft surfaces that

can serve as transmission points for germs and bacteria. Hence, it is important that hotels train employees to frequently wash their hands to eliminate contamination. Hand washing is a simple habit, something most people do without thinking. Yet hand washing, when done properly, is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick.

Unfortunately, despite the proven health benefits of hand washing, many people don't practice this habit as often as they should — even after using the toilet. As a result, throughout the day an employee may accumulate germs on his or her hands from a variety of sources, such as direct contact with people, contaminated surfaces, foods, even animals and animal waste. If they don't wash their hands frequently enough, they can infect themselves with these germs by touching their eyes, nose or mouth. And they can spread these germs to others by touching them or by touching surfaces that they also touch.

Infectious diseases that are commonly spread through hand-to-hand contact include the common cold, flu and several gastro-intestinal disorders. Inadequate hand hygiene also contributes to food-related illnesses, such as salmonella and E. coli infection.

Good hand-washing techniques include washing your hands with soap and hot water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Antimicrobial wipes or towelettes are just as effective as soap and water in cleaning your hands. The combination of scrubbing your hands with soap and rinsing them with water loosens and removes bacteria from your hands.

Follow these instructions for properly washing with soap and water:

- Wet the hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds.
- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of hands, wrists, between fingers and under fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry hands with a clean disposable towel or warm air hand dryer.
- Use a disposable towel to turn off the faucet and open the restroom door to prevent recontamination.

Hand sanitizer

Frequent hand washing can take time away from serving the guest or may require an employee to leave their work station. A supplement to frequent hand washing is to use hand sanitizer.

Most sanitizers are effective at killing germs, evaporate shortly after applying onto the hands, and typically leave no noticeable residue. However, some brands of sanitizers, especially those that are alcohol-based, may dry an employee's skin or result in chapping. Since not all hand sanitizers are equal in effectiveness, when purchasing, look at what percent of germs a sanitizer will kill and the duration of its effectiveness, as well as its ability to moisturize the skin. One brand that has been effective for hotel employees is SkinWear™ hand sanitizer. It kills 99%+ of germs and continues to kill them for up to 8 hours. The base moisturizes and prevents dry skin. SkinWear provides protection for staff members who cannot put on protective gloves for their normal duties.

To encourage use of hand sanitizers by both employees and guests, place hand-sanitizer dispensers throughout a property including at the front desk, restaurant areas, back offices, and near elevators. These can be wall-mounted, pedestal-mounted, or placed in a free-standing motion-activated dispenser. Check and refill the dispensers daily and don't forget to make sure the dispenser is labeled as "hand-sanitizer", otherwise guests and employees will be hesitant to use it. ✧

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