



Hotel drinking glasses must be properly sanitized...or else!

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Ten and fifteen years ago the safety-related major concern for prospective guests when deciding which hotel brand or individual property to select was typically related to security issues. Some hotels were quicker to respond than others, but ultimately the lodging industry managed to arrive at a consensus that involved the standardization of certain security features. These steps included installing electronic or reprogrammable door locks on guestrooms, installing two-inch deadbolts as well as security chains/clasps and viewfinders on guestroom doors, locking down secondary entrances so they could only be opened from the outside with a guestroom key, and placing informational cards with hotel security tips on guestroom beds. Of course, many hoteliers were motivated to perform these steps as a result of the negative publicity generated by the press due to an increase of violence and theft that had increased in hotels at that time.

First it was beds and linens

About five years ago, the press again responded to a surge in guest complaints about questionable sanitary practices in hotel rooms, especially related to linens, blankets, bedcovers and bedbugs. A slew of investigative journalism teams ranging from primetime television news shows to local news stations rented hotel rooms and searched for filth and vermin. And, they easily found it in many of the properties they visited, ranging from luxury hotels to budget motels. Again, as a result of the negative publicity, lawsuit settlements, and even a few courts awarding damages for bedbug claims, the lodging industry has steered towards a direction of more sanitary practices for beds and linens. Many hotel brands and independent properties have swapped out the more unsanitary blankets and bedspreads for washable duvet bed covers. Others, who have kept the blankets, such as Holiday Inn hotels, have adopted a practice of triple-sheeting all beds. And of course nearly every major brand has taken steps to deal with the resurgence of bedbugs.

And now its glassware

Now, in present day, a new guest concern is sweeping the industry – guestroom drinking glasses. This past year has revealed numerous exposés by investigative journalists about the glassware cleaning practices employed by room attendants. Hotels at all price points, brands, and service levels have been targeted. The results are quite disturbing.

Using hidden cameras, Inside Edition found instances of housekeepers

Pictured below: For sanitary reasons, some hotels has chosen to replace guestroom drinking glasses with disposable plastic cups wrapped in plastic.



just rinsing out dirty cups and glasses, without using soap, and wiping them dry with dirty towels or chemical-laden rags and then placing the glasses back on the bathroom counter. Also using hidden cameras, Fox 5 TV in Atlanta found room attendants using commercial window cleaner and disinfecting agents (that weren't meant for human oral contact) to clean guestroom drinking cups. In one interaction caught on tape, a room attendant washed the guestroom drinking glasses by hand while wearing the same protective gloves she had just cleaned the toilet with! A former hotel manager from one of the properties that was investigated even asserted the hotel's guestroom drinking glasses had not been properly sanitized for six years. ABC 15 News in Phoenix, in a joint investigation with its sister news stations in Maryland, Ohio, Missouri and Kansas, found that 11 of the 15 hotels tested did not take the dirty glasses out of the room to be cleaned and sanitized.

In nearly every one of the aforementioned investigations, the drinking glasses and coffee mugs clearly appeared used and dirty when the room attendants found them. Yet, few swapped them out with properly sanitized replacements. The percentage of hotels that failed to follow proper sanitation procedures for guestroom glassware was staggering.

The health considerations

Aside from the bad publicity to the hotel profession generated by this latest round of investigative journalism, there are significant health risks at hand. Improperly sanitized glassware can transmit mononucleosis, herpes, E. coli, salmonella, hepatitis A, influenza and even staph infections. To fail to adequately clean a commode or vacuum a guestroom carpet is one thing – but to improperly sanitize a guestroom amenity that a guest will place their lips on? This is unconscionable by any guests' or health inspector's expectations!

The most amazing part is it actually takes a room attendant more time to rinse out and dry a glass than to replace it with a properly sanitized one from the housekeeper's cart. Yet, rarely are replacement glasses or cups seen on housekeeping carts today. So, what should guests think?

Proper procedure

The acceptable standard here is quite straightforward. All glassware can only be properly sanitized through a dishwasher where it is exposed to a minimum temperature of 110 degrees Fahrenheit and the proper cleaning chemical. Alternatively, glassware may be handwashed in a three-compartment metal sink using dishwashing detergent combined with a minimum water temperature of 105 degrees for the first stage, a hot water rinse stage of at least 105 degrees, and then immersed in a sanitizing bactericidal solution for at least thirty seconds for the third stage. Clearly, neither of these options can be performed within the guestroom.

In other words, it is necessary for the hotel to sanitize replacement glassware in the kitchen and then transport it to the guest floors where room attendants can swap them out. This will require housemen or room attendants from the housekeeping department to wheel racks of clean glassware up to the floors. Given that a stack of glassware on wheels is not as heavy as a fully loaded housekeeping cart, this is really not a monumental task – but it is an important one!

And if not completed dutifully, don't be surprised when either the local health inspector comes to inspect and re-inspect regularly or the local television news station targets your hotel for their next sting operation. Local sanitation codes are quite clear when it comes to glassware; even if that glassware is located in a hotel guestroom. There is just no excuse for noncompliance. ✧

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