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HOUSEKEEPING TAKES ON NEW URGENCY IN FIGHT AGAINST SPREAD OF COVID-19

While the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic continues claiming lives and livelihoods around the world, hoteliers are finding themselves in a unique position: Some have had to temporarily close their businesses while others are remaining open on a limited basis, offering respite and accommodation to essential workers and in some cases, those who are sick.

Whether staying open on a limited basis or performing maintenance in hopes of a prompt reopening, hoteliers must protect both guests and their housekeeping teams, making sure everyone takes extra precautions to not just clean spaces, but thoroughly sanitize them.

NEW NORMALS

Most large hotel companies probably were not prepared necessarily for such an extreme

situation as this one, said Jan Louise Jones, professor of hospitality and tourism in the College of Business at the University of New Haven in West Haven, Conn., but will adapt quickly and likely already are developing and adapting training sessions for team members. Smaller hotels that operate on tighter profit margins, however, may face more of a challenge when it comes to changing the types of detergents or disinfectants used, or even increasing the frequency of washing bed linens, she cautioned.

In the current situation, said Glen O'Connor, SVP/risk control director of technical services at Sompo International Global Risk Solutions, housekeepers need to be prepared for three different scenarios when cleaning guestrooms. While a guest is staying in a room,

a housekeeper may simply replace some linen and tidy up a little bit, if at all. “And that’s the extent of the cleaning,” O’Connor said, noting that it is safer for cleaning teams to minimize contact with both guests and potentially infected areas unless they can take the time to thoroughly disinfect the space.

Then a guest checks out, and a new scenario comes into play. “That’s where you’re going to see the more detailed cleaning,” O’Connor said. “And then the third one is called the deep clean, and that’s when you’re moving furniture around and you’re really going into a deeper type of cleaning process ... and those are done

Prevention guidelines and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment—“which they should be [doing] already from a [workers’ compensation] perspective,” O’Connor noted. Another small detail that can make a big difference is not shaking linens out when changing beds. “When you’re shaking linens, you’re actually releasing particles and now they become airborne,” he said. In terms of what chemicals to use when cleaning, O’Connor recommends checking the websites for the CDC, the local department of health and the Environmental Protection Agency to see what the most current recommendations are.



Langham Hotels & Resorts’ properties worldwide are offering disposable face masks for guests and staff.

less frequently.” This deep-cleaning process, he said, should be corner-to-corner, making sure no spot in the room is missed, because if the previous guest was exposed to any pathogens, the room becomes dangerous for anyone else until it is sanitized.

A big part of keeping rooms clean involves following the Centers for Disease Control and

Suppliers like Ecolab, he added, can help determine which disinfectant products are right for different spaces and surfaces.

PUBLIC SPACES

In a pandemic, every member of a hotel’s team becomes a housekeeper in one way or another. “Everybody’s on the clean team

here,” said Kenja McLeod, general manager at the Hampton Inn & Suites Tucson Marana in Arizona. “We’ve got our gloves, got our masks, and touching up all these areas is pretty much a constant. We’re constantly cleaning and disinfecting.” Public spaces are cleaned every 30 minutes following a checklist to make sure all high-touch areas are kept sanitized using the same disinfectant the property was using before the pandemic: a peroxide-based multisurface cleaner from Ecolab.

Langham Hotels & Resorts is headquartered in Hong Kong, and Global Director of Rooms Mina Vardar Aicher said that the company learned valuable lessons from the 2003



SARS outbreak and has been sharing these lessons with the rest of the hotels within the portfolio. “Everywhere that you can pass through the hotel, you will find hand sanitizer dispensers,” she said. Disposable face masks are readily available for guests and staff, and more stringent equipment is available for any high-risk areas or spaces that may have been contaminated. Since the SARS outbreak, many buildings in the region place protective coverings over all elevator buttons,



but Langham now is mandating that these protective layers be installed on all of its hotels worldwide.

High-traffic areas like entryways and elevators are sanitized every two to three hours rather than late at night when few guests are around, and high-touch areas (door handles, elevator buttons, handrails, telephones and remote controls, among others) also are sanitized regularly, according to Aicher. All workers drop off their business-use phones to be disinfected at the end of each shift so that the next shift begins with a fully sanitized device.

Management company McNeill Hotel Co. has only had to close two of its 25 hotels (one was undergoing a renovation already and the other has an adjacent sister property that is remaining open), and is likewise implementing stricter cleaning procedures for the properties that have remained open. While public spaces in the hotels have been shut down to encourage social distancing, housekeepers still are cleaning them every hour on the hour — “as well as all public restrooms,” said Travis Murray, McNeill’s regional director of operations. Even if people don’t use the public spaces for their normal functions, he explained, the act of passing through to get to a guestroom could put other people in danger: “When you have someone walk in the front door, you never know what they could touch,” he said. As with Langham, McNeill’s housekeepers are sanitizing high-



touch points like elevator buttons regularly, and some also wear disposable shoe-coverings as well as the standard gloves.

GUESTROOMS

When cleaning a guestroom, Murray said, housekeepers at McNeill's hotels spray an EPA-approved antiviral disinfectant (supplied by Ecolab) on all surfaces. "And once the chemical is on the surfaces, they wait at least 45 seconds and then they wipe it off," he said. Every piece of the bathroom and every hard surface in the guestroom is cleaned with the disinfectants, he said, and the company is taking advantage of reduced occupancy to do longer, deeper cleans on hard-to-reach areas. "So basically, all touchpoints are being disinfected in the room so when [it needs to be used again], you'll be ready to go."

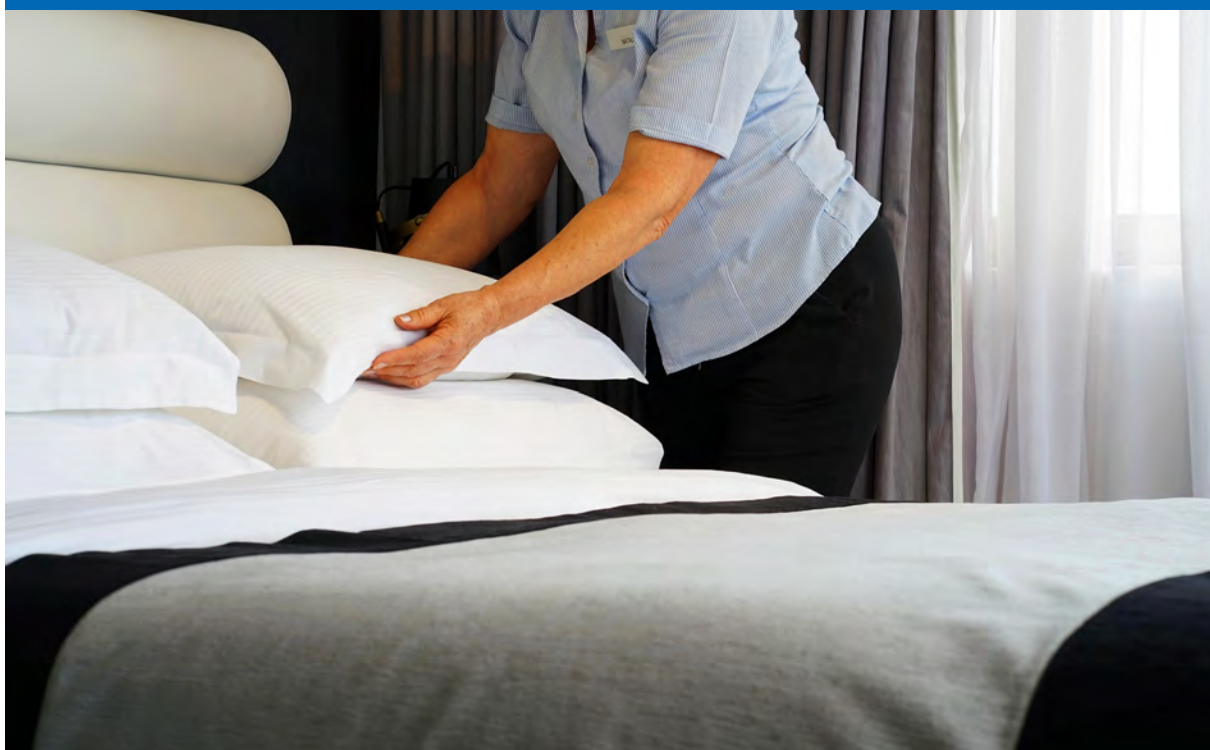
To make it easier for housekeepers and guests to follow social distancing guidelines, McNeill's hotels are limiting normal cleaning sessions to rooms that have been vacated. For occupied rooms, Murray said guests bring their trash to the doors to be collected. Clean bed linens and towels are dropped off at the doors as needed, as are any amenities—but housekeepers avoid going inside and any close contact.

Linens and towels coming out of the rooms are divided into plastic bags where they can be

sealed away en route to the laundry room. "Prior to coronavirus, the housekeepers would just gather linens and send them down a laundry chute," Murray recalled. "We're actually bagging the linens, taking them directly to the laundry facility and then the bags are emptied directly straight into the washing machines."

Housekeepers at the Hampton Inn & Suites Tucson Marana also have curtailed entering occupied guestrooms as much as possible. When cleaning recently vacated guestrooms, the housekeepers spray every hard surface with disinfectant and let it sit for an extended time to thoroughly kill any germs that might be on those surfaces. "Everything is taking us a lot longer to clean," acknowledged McLeod, "but we want to make sure that the rooms are [sanitized]. They have to be disinfected."

Anything a guest may have touched in a room must be sprayed with disinfectant, Aicher said, from the hair dryers and towel racks to the coffee makers, teapots and ice buckets. Water glasses, cups and any other food-and-beverage equipment in Langham rooms are all sanitized in between bookings whether the equipment was used or not. Across the brand, housekeepers are using hospital-grade disinfectants like Oxivir TB from Diversey to clean public areas and guestrooms. "We need to be surgically clean," she said.



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HOW TO APPROACH PEST CONTROL IN LIGHT OF HOTEL CLOSURES

Fortunately for hotels, pest control is one of aspect of hotel operations where they should not need worry about preventing the spread of COVID-19. According to both Judy Black, VP of quality assurance and technical services at Rollins, and Shannon Sked, manager of innovations and continuous improvements at Western Pest Services, there has been no research or evidence showing the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is spread through pests.

“We can’t say that it doesn’t happen, but there is no evidence out there right now,” said Sked.

Putting the lack of proof aside, Sked added it’s highly unlikely the virus could spread through pests—or pets, he added—simply because respiratory viruses like SARS-CoV-2 don’t work that way.

“They don’t work like foodborne pathogens do,” explained Sked. “[Foodborne pathogens are] pretty strong and resilient outside of the

body, whereas these respiratory viruses are relatively weak and fragile when they’re not being held by mucus or moisture or anything like that.”

PEST CONTROL FOR CLOSED OR ‘SHRUNK’ HOTELS

As travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders halt travel across the United States, many hoteliers have been forced to either suspend operations within a portion of the hotel—or temporarily close their hotels.

With profits down and empty rooms, Sked recognized that hoteliers may need to limit the scope of their pest-control contracts. He brought up bedbugs as an example. With the transient population no longer bringing in the pests, he explained, this could be an area for hotels to save.

By contrast, Sked stressed the importance of

maintaining vigilance toward public-health pests, such as cockroaches and rodents. While they have not been shown to spread COVID-19, he said they are linked to pulmonary and respiratory illnesses such as allergies and asthma.

“What we know, what the medical community has documented pretty strongly, is that this COVID-19 pandemic is at a much higher risk for people that suffer from underlying health issues,” Sked said. “And so, by just at least controlling those public-health-related pests, we can actually help to ensure that—not saying that pest control has anything to do with managing the pandemic, it doesn’t—but it definitely can help with these public-health issues. And by doing that, we can keep people healthier and hopefully that’ll help reduce the impact of the pandemic.”

While Sked acknowledged the financial issues hoteliers currently face, he said getting these public-health pests “back under control once you’re ready to open up is going to be much more expensive than having some type of program, even if it’s a limited program, to try to continually deal with these public-health pests.”

EMBOLDENED PESTS

Sked said these types of pests—cockroaches and rodents—will be more likely to thrive in this new environment where hotels are relatively empty and restaurants are closed down or only offering delivery or take-out.

“They like it when it’s very quiet, dark, undisturbed,” said Sked. “So, by closing down the hotel, it becomes actually a more conducive environment for things like cockroaches and rodents.”

Furthermore, Sked said these types of pests will be more likely to spread to hotels because their traditional food sources have been impacted.

“A closed hotel in a neighborhood that’s

full of restaurants that have been shut down or limited services to only take-out and things like that—those hotels are at a higher risk for rodents, in particular, coming in if they weren’t there already,” said Sked.



WHAT HOTELS SHOULD DO

Black said the preventive actions hotels should take now are the same as those they should take when they are in full operation. “These include ensuring the building is well sealed and that all doors remain closed,” Black said. “Additionally, do not leave open food out, clean up food spills and take the trash out regularly.”

Sked recommended hotels continue bringing in pest-management professionals, preferably on a weekly basis. “If you wait too much longer than weekly service, at least for just inspecting and making sure that products are fresh ... then you’re likely to end up in a situation where you’re kind of getting behind the ball and you’ve got the cart before the horse,” said Sked.

Black noted that it is important for hotels to ensure that their regular waste-removal service remains in effect. Items in dumpsters, for example, should not sit there for more than a week, she said.

“Furthermore, take this opportunity to deep clean any kitchen or breakfast service areas, as well as dumpster pads,” Black continued. “This unique time is also an opportunity to have your pest provider do a comprehensive bedbug inspection in vacant guestrooms.”



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS THAT REQUIRE HOUSEKEEPING ATTENTION AT HOTELS

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting a greater focus on housekeeping and cleaning in general, but there are some items that might not be top of mind. Here's what you need to know about beds, ice machines and air-cleaning technology.

MATTRESSES AND PILLOWS

While sheets and other bedding items can be washed to prevent the spread of illness, mattresses and pillows are another story. One way to keep them sanitary is through the use of encasements.

Protect-A-Bed mattress protectors and encasements feature the patented Miracle Membrane, a moisture barrier that prevents any liquids, including bodily fluids, from passing through the protector and onto the mattress, according to Nicole Pasik, director of marketing for Focus Products Group, Protect-a-Bed's

parent company. The company's AllerZip Smooth encasement has been certified Asthma and Allergy Friendly by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America for its ability to keep out small particles that could irritate those with asthma and allergies.

COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets, and unprotected mattresses and pillows can soak up these droplets as well as other bodily fluids. "By protecting both the mattress and the pillow a hotel property can quickly sanitize a room without having to wash or steam clean the mattress or pillows," Pasik said. "They can remove the pillow or mattress protector just like they would a regular linens and wash, but the protector would have prevented any bodily fluids from entering the fibers of the pillow or mattress."

Normally hotels wash the protector when

soiled after a spill, but because many hotels are being used to house health-care workers or even being used as overflow medical facilities, Pasik recommends washing upon check-out.

“It’s an extra layer of protections for your guests. Think of it as a face mask for your mattress,” she said. “The protector will prevent any guest’s bodily fluids from seeping into the mattress or pillow. This moisture barrier protects the next guest from the past guest.”



According to Bill Purdy, CEO/co-founder of Spry Therapeutics, one problem with most pillows today is it is impossible to clean their cores. With stitched seams with large holes and perforations for breathability, he said these pillows easily can absorb pathogens housekeepers can do nothing about.

“When they compress, they have the potential to aerosolize everything within them and if COVID easily aerosolizes, it could well aerosolize it,” said Purdy.

By contrast, Purdy said his company’s Spry Pure pillow is hermetically sealed to keep viruses and allergens out. A filter near the surface of the pillow ensures it maintains breathability, he explained, while also preventing any pathogens from entering the pillow and then later aerosolizing out.

“Any of the pathogens, such viruses and bacteria, are trapped at the surface where they

can be effectively cleaned, in this case by hotel personnel, because they can actually get to it,” Purdy said.

Though Purdy said Spry is focused largely on supplying hospitals for now—the company announced in March it would be donating 10,000 filtered health-care pillows to hospitals across the United States to combat the spread of COVID-19—he said the company has seen interest from hotel wellness centers and remains open to assisting the hotel industry.

ICE MACHINES

John Mahlmeister, COO of Easy Ice, places ice machines lower on the spectrum of potential COVID-19 problem areas. “The things I worry more about are the restaurants in hotels because it’s a communal space and it involved you getting near your mouth and your face often,” said Mahlmeister. “I think health and exercise equipment, same kind of thing. Get on an elliptical, get all sweaty and you start wiping your face, your eyes.”

Even though Mahlmeister said he thinks ice machines represent a very low rate of transmission, he added, he did not discount increased cleanings—traditionally, he said he’d expect staff would clean the ice machine exterior two or three times a day—if only for the message that would send.

“I think setting a practice of more frequent



cleanings, perhaps the cleaning themselves may help, but what it probably does a better job of is communicating and keeping the message out in the marketplace that practicing good hygiene is better and safer,” Mahlmeister said.

For a similar reason, he also suggested placing a hand sanitizer stand near the ice machine and vending machines. Just having that presence there, he said, would help remind guests to be more conscious and practice good hygiene.



AIR-CLEANING TECHNOLOGY

Aura Air is another company working to promote cleanliness. According to CEO/co-founder Aviad Shnaiderman, the air-management platform—already in use in a medical center in Israel—can remove flu viruses such as H1N1 and H5N1 from the air. Though he said the device is not yet certified when it comes to COVID-19, he said there’s a “high possibility” it also can remove that virus as well.

In addition to disinfecting the air, Shnaiderman named another way Aura Air can help hotel operations. Since Aura Air acts as an air filter, he said, hotel guestrooms with the device do not need their packaged terminal air conditioner filters replaced as often.

HOTELS EVALUATE CLEANING SOLUTIONS

Hotel housekeeping departments are putting cleaning solutions under the microscope, making sure the best, most effective options are

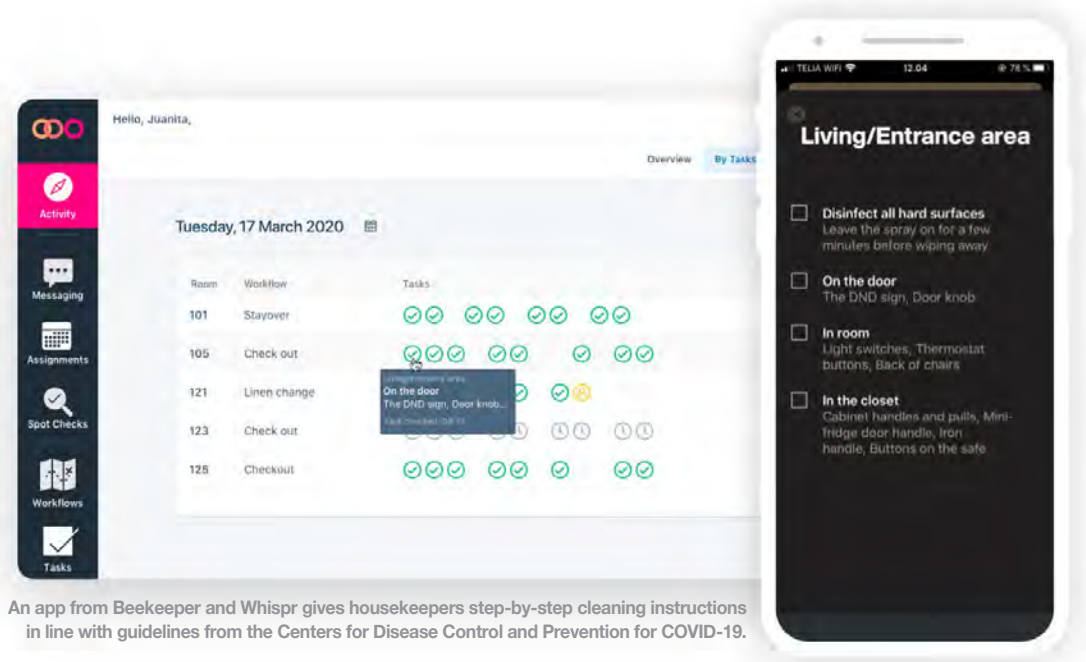
being used. One offering for the hotel industry and other public spaces is NeoSan Labs’ nontoxic broad- spectrum disinfectant.

Appropriate for daily use, NeoSan Labs 01 is formulated and manufactured specifically for commercial applications. The company’s products are registered with the United States Environmental Protection Agency as an antibacterial, cleaner, mildewstat, decontaminant, disinfectant, deodorizer, fungicide, algacide and virucide. They are nontoxic and not harmful to people, animals or plants.

According to the company, NeoSan Labs 01 disinfectant has a kill rate of 99.99999 percent and is effective within minutes to eradicate germs, bacteria and viruses. It provides complete microbiological sterilization, in noncorrosive, noncarcinogenic formulas that do not produce toxic fumes or residue. They are fragrance free, biodegradable, nonflammable and certified by the Green Clean Institute.

“NeoSan Labs products are more than cleaning. They protect lives by exceeding disinfection and decontamination standards, leaving treated areas and surfaces not only cleaner, but less toxic than when they were brand new,” said CEO Greg Charillon. “Cruise lines, airlines, hotels and restaurants can disinfect their porous and nonporous surfaces and the air quickly with hospital-grade sterilization without formalin, chlorine, carbolic acid or heavy metals.”

Housekeepers can use the disinfectant with NeoSan Labs 02 Air Detox and NeoSan Labs 03 Carpet to sanitize all hospitality areas. The 02 Air Detox sterilizes and purifies the air and counters airborne chemical toxins and volatile organic compounds. The 03 Carpet destroys stains and odors at the molecular level, cleaning, deodorizing, detoxifying and sterilizing with no residues or byproducts left behind.



HIGH-TECH SOLUTIONS HELP HOTELS FOLLOW APPROPRIATE CLEANING STEPS

To help hoteliers and housekeepers keep track of all the little steps they must take in order to properly sanitize and sterilize a guestroom or public space, several companies have launched checklists—both digital and print—that facilitate cleaning practices to keep guests and workers safe.

In late March, Beekeeper and Whispr launched an app that gives housekeepers step-by-step cleaning instructions in line with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for COVID-19. Beekeeper users can activate the “Cleaning Task Lists” from the Whispr app for free. The goal, said Whispr CEO/co-founder Hugh O’Flanagan, was to make sure the most vital information reaches the right person at the right time. “It converts those guidelines into smart checklists and makes [them] available to any worker across a hotel, so that they know what step to take and also that they’re taking it in the right order,” he said.

Using the app, a housekeeper can “check in” to each task as the process begins. “And within that room assignment, what they will find is a COVID Clean checklist,” O’Flanagan said. The assigned tasks for each room will guide housekeepers through the bathroom to the bedroom to the entrance or living area, making sure they pay attention to areas they might not otherwise think of—“like, disinfect the keys on the safe or disinfect the light switches or the [air conditioning] controls ... We take them through the room in a nonordinary way, apart from the things that they would regularly find in their standard operating procedure and make sure that that rooms disinfected and ready for a new guest.”

Supervisors can see a real-time dashboard, showing them every room and every public area and letting them see every step being completed by workers. “And we give them a compliance score so that they

could motivate their team,” he added. The checklists can be customized depending on each area’s unique needs.

The app is being used by Marriott International and Hilton hotels in the U.S., and Beekeeper expects to extend it to further properties in Ireland, Germany, the U.K. and



China soon.

At the same time, hospitality tech company Alice launched the COVID-19 Recovery Checklists Software, which provides a range of printable and mobile-enabled checklists to help hoteliers operate (or cease operations) as needed through the pandemic. Among the checklists for any given situation is one for housekeeping during a pandemic, outlining more than 50 elements of a guestroom that need to be sanitized in between uses.

“There hasn’t been a unified guidance on what to do,” said Alice co-founder Dmitry Koltunov. “The CDC does say exactly the kind of cleaning equipment that you should be using, but how to do it in a way that is really kind of best practices, sanitationwise, we’re still figuring it out.”

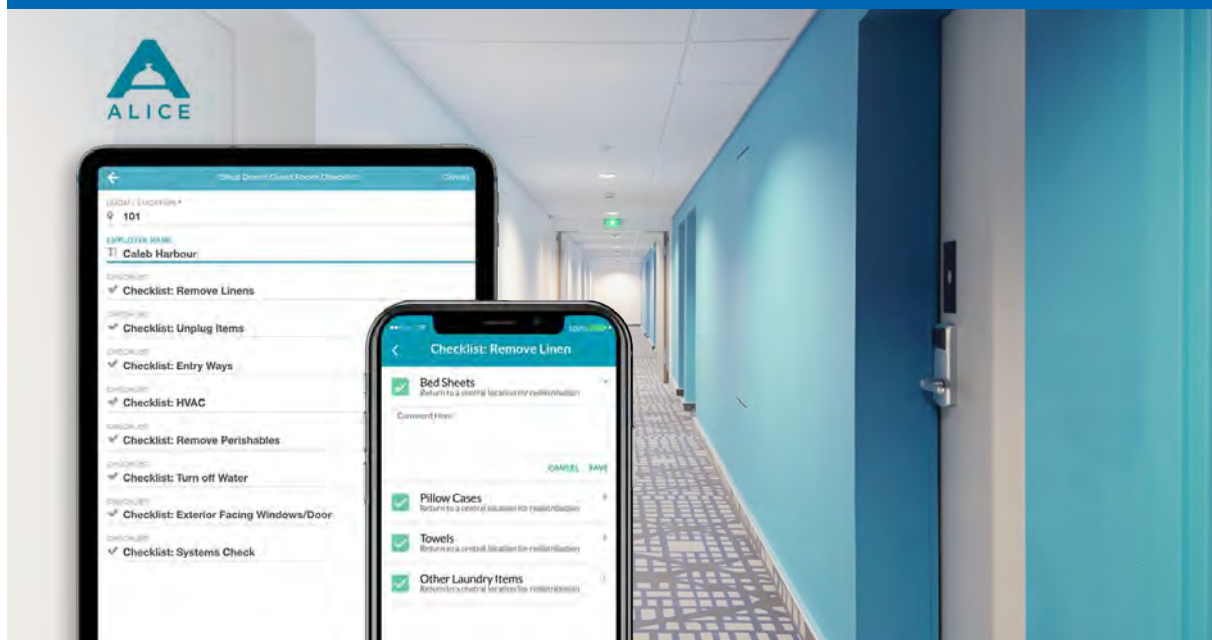
“The CDC standard is fantastic,” said Jeff Parker, Alice’s hotel operations expert.

“However, if you follow it strictly, it voids the warranty of some electronic equipment like credit card terminals. Credit card terminals have been said to be one of the great vectors of passing on germs because nobody cleans them or sanitizes them.” For cleaning public spaces, the checklists encourage focusing on door handles, touchscreens and even the lever for pouring coffee at the grab-and-go station. “People don’t think about that very often, right?,” Parker said. “But if you go get a coffee, the next person goes and gets a coffee—has that been cleaned and sanitized?”

Likewise, the checklist factors in things that may not normally be cleaned in between room occupations, but potentially could pass infection from person to person, such as clothes hangers in the closet. The checklists are available in the Alice app, and managers can verify that each room has been cleaned and by whom, improving accountability.

Koltunov and his team are regularly checking in with experts to update the company’s checklists as new information becomes available. “The checklists that we’re focusing on are less about hygiene for both the staff and the guests and more about looking at the hotel as an asset and making sure that that asset can come back online when the hotel is ready,” he said.

And when the hotels do reopen, said Jan Jones, a professor of hospitality and tourism in the College of Business at the University of New Haven in West Haven, Conn., a new level of transparency when it comes to housekeeping may well become standard. “Typically, you would never think to [ask at the front desk], ‘How did you clean my room?’ And I think [hoteliers] have to be prepared for that,” she said. “People are going to really be very mindful and very critical of procedures they’re taking.”



ALICE'S GUESTROOM SANITATION LIST

Guestroom door locks/
handles/card swipe/tap
 Guestroom door jams
 Guestroom security lock
(slide/hook/chain)
 Guestroom deadbolt
 Guestroom door handles
(bathroom, closet, etc.)
 Faucet handles bathroom
sinks
 Faucet handles vanity sink
 Faucet handles kitchen
 Faucet handles wet bar
 Faucet handles shower
 Faucet handles bathtub
 Handheld shower wand
 Shower head
 Sink stopper lever -
bathroom
 Sink stopper lever - vanity
sink
 Sink stopper lever - kitchen

Sink stopper lever wet bar
 Bath stopper
 Microwave handle/open
button
 Microwave keypad/buttons
 Microwave interior
 Remote control
 TV power button
 Alarm clock
 Smart speaker
 Charging station
 Lamp turn-ons
 Light switches
 HVAC control
 PTAC control lid/door
 Do-no-disturb sign/hanger
 Amenities
 Replace glassware
 Water bottles
 All countertops

Coffee pot
 Coffee maker
 Clothes Hangers
 Remove bedspreads/color
sash/ornamental pillows
from bed
 Drape pulls
 Window levers and locks
 Sliding/patio door and lock
 Telephone, receiver, buttons
 Any countertops
 Credenza/dresser drawer
pulls
 Wardrobe handles/pulls
 Iron handle, dial, cord, plug
 Ironing board
 Luggage rack
 TV bevel
 Literature in room (or remove it)
 Ice bucket/scoops
 Coffee mugs