

Practice Update

# ‘Clean and Safe’ Certification: The Future for Hotels After COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic caused many jurisdictions to enact orders imposing additional requirements on hotels and even shutting some down. As people return to everyday life — and even once COVID-19 is behind us — the hotel industry may not return to business as usual in terms of hygiene, cleanliness, and distancing. Hotel owners and operators will likely need to adapt to a new reality where a much larger percentage of guests are what would have formerly been referred to as germaphobes. Luckily, there are countless steps that hotel operators may take to assuage their guests’ elevated concerns.

Hotel operators can look to various sources for hygiene and cleaning tips. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued interim guidance on the “Operational considerations for COVID-19 management in the accommodation sector.” The Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) has begun a “Clean and Safe” campaign, where hotels can become certified as “clean and safe.” The Singapore government has gone a similar route, offering establishments the opportunity to be certified as “SG Clean.” Marriott International also launched its Global Cleanliness Council to “elevate its cleanliness standards and hospitality norms and behaviors to meet the new health and safety challenges.” Whether or not any of these types of programs apply to your hotel brand, or are available where your

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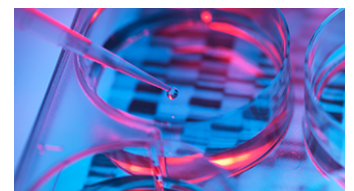
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establishment is located, hotel owners and operators will need to adhere to higher levels of cleanliness — and publicly promote those efforts — to continue to attract guests in this new climate. Below are some suggestions that hotels may consider putting into place to convince guests that the establishment is “clean and safe.”

### Appoint a Cleanliness Manager

The cleanliness manager will be responsible for developing a cleanliness plan, implementing the plan, updating the plan, training employees and ensuring that guests’ hygiene-related questions are immediately answerable. This individual will also ensure that your establishment remains in compliance with any governmental orders, and is the point of contact for any health department questions or inspections. Having one clear point of responsibility for a hotel’s cleaning and disinfection procedures maximizes the chances that any health department questions or inspections will end favorably, and will decrease the chances that a guest will receive incorrect information or information that otherwise paints your hotel in a negative light.

### Develop a Cleanliness Plan That is Available to Guests

The cleanliness manager is ultimately responsible for developing, implementing and updating a cleanliness plan. This is the blueprint for the elevated efforts being made to convince guests that a hotel is safe and clean. This plan should address all steps being taken to sanitize or otherwise modify the hotel to minimize the chances of an outbreak or contagion event in the establishment. The plan should be updated regularly based on changing governmental reports, information or events in and around the hotel, and other relevant circumstances. Ensure that this plan is available to all prospective guests to provide a sense of security so that they can feel comfortable in their choice to stay at your hotel. When people begin to travel again, hygiene may become one of the biggest factors in hotel selection,

and making this information public and readily available could distinguish your establishment from many others.

The cleanliness plan, of course, should include a course of action when a guest or worker is diagnosed with coronavirus or another infectious disease. In such cases, immediately minimize the ill person's contact with all other guests and staff. Request that the ill person wear a mask and practice respiratory and hand hygiene, and designate a bathroom for use solely by that guest or employee. Work with local health officials to develop a plan to relocate the guest. Identify and notify those who may have been in contact with the guest or employee, and thoroughly disinfect any areas impacted by the infected individual in accordance with CDC and health department guidelines.

### Screen Guests and Employees for Signs of Respiratory Infection

Have employees visually screen guests for respiratory infection. This is most easily accomplished by front desk employees, concierges and housekeeping workers. If allowed by law where your hotel is located, consider additional guest screening, such as by taking temperatures at check-in. Also screen your employees for respiratory infection, especially for employees who work in locations with frequent guest contact such as the front desk, restaurants and casinos.

### Increase Frequency of Disinfection and Cleaning

Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection throughout your hotel, but especially in high-traffic areas such as the lobby, front desk, stairs, elevators, escalators, bathrooms, entrances/exits, casinos, restaurants, bars, lounges, business/computer centers, gyms, spas and children's areas. This also includes encouraging your employees to wash their hands more frequently. Your guests will notice when

these procedures are increased. Keep detailed records of these efforts. Also install additional locations where guests and workers can wash their hands or apply hand sanitizer throughout your hotel. Provide disinfecting wipes near frequently touched surfaces like desks, doors, bathrooms and elevators.

### Place Physical Barriers Between Guests and Employees

Consider placing a physical barrier such as plastic or plexiglass between employees and guests at highly frequented locations such as the front desk, concierge and casinos. Alternatively, place a physical divider such as a rope or signage encouraging guests to keep their distance from these employees and other guests.

### Enhance Food and Restaurant Safety

When individuals begin to travel again, restaurant and food safety will likely be a main concern. Perform additional cleaning in kitchens, restaurants and bars, and provide additional food hygiene training to foodservice employees. In the near term, provide additional grab-and-go restaurant options as opposed to sit-down restaurants. Also consider eliminating buffets in the near term, and consider ways to make buffets more hygienic in the long term. Consider proudly demonstrating and promoting a clean bill of health from the health department. In bars, ensure that bar tops, bottles and glassware are cleaned often. Eliminate public snack/bar mix dishes. Guests may also be more apt to order room service than go to a restaurant, so ensure that your room service procedures minimize human-to-food contact and human-to-human interaction. Make these policies clear to your guests before and at check-in, and on any room service menus.

### Implement Safe Distancing

Once COVID-19 has passed, guests may still feel the need to distance from others for some time. Consider using signage or other methods to

encourage distancing in public places such as the front desk, lobby, lounges and bars. Arrange the seating in lobbies, restaurants, bars and lounges in a way that promotes distancing. In casinos, limit the chairs at each table and disburse any crowds that form. Also consider suspending any promotional activities that may draw larger crowds.

### Prohibit Employees, Guests Who Have Recently Visited High-Risk Areas

Ensure that all employees inform you of their travels to any high-risk areas. Consider requiring guests to certify that they have not recently traveled to any high-risk areas.

### Utilize Technology to Enhance Cleaning, Especially in Guestrooms

Various technologies are available to improve the cleanliness of your hotel. Electrostatic sprayers with hospital-grade disinfectant may be used to sanitize surfaces throughout the property and in guestrooms, and ultraviolet lights in guestrooms could allow guests to check cleanliness. In public spaces, install touch-free doors, sinks, soap dispensers, hand dryers and paper towel dispensers. While not practical in many hotels, companies now manufacture germ-killing and disinfecting robots. You may also consider eliminating the option to forgo room cleaning each day, to enhance overall cleanliness.

### Reconsider Amenities

Hotels may need to reconsider whether to offer certain amenities that for years seemed commonplace. Hotels that had been shifting away from single-use toiletries may need to consider returning to such items to prevent human-to-human transmission. You may also consider removing drinks and snacks from the in-room minibar, and eliminating in-room coffeemakers. Eliminating or changing the format of free continental buffet breakfast is another option. In guestrooms, it may be

wise to eliminate decorative pillows and bedding, and otherwise reducing or eliminating magazines, pamphlets and menus. Consider including any menus or informational materials on a TV and, of course, increase the sanitation of the TV remote. In public outdoor areas, you may need to eliminate, reduce and/or better sanitize lounge chairs and cabanas.

### Utilize Contact-Free Check-In Procedures

Many hotels have for some time offered some form of mobile check-in, but these procedures may become more commonplace in order to reduce human-to-human contact. Hotels could offer mobile check-in and digital keys via a smartphone, and then simply charge a credit card that is already on file, without a visit to the check-in desk.

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