

# Hotel Hygiene: Is Your Hotel Making You Sick?



[MRSA: The Superbug Slideshow](#) 

[Infectious Mononucleosis Slideshow](#) 

[Strep or Sore Throat Slideshow](#) 

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As a physician and pathologist, I have a pretty strong stomach. But even I was overcome with a wave of [nausea](#) when I watched a hidden camera expose of hotel hygiene practices by investigative reporters. In brief, for the report I saw, teams of journalists placed hidden cameras in hotel rooms in a range of randomly-chosen hotels in the Atlanta, Georgia area (the study, and similar observations, have also been carried out in other locations). Hotels ranged from the mid-priced business hotels to the top of the line luxury establishments (5 star). A blatant disregard for hygienic practices that could lead to serious infection was observed in numerous hotels when housekeeping staff cleaned (or didn't clean, as the case may be) the drinking glasses in the hotel room.

Housekeeping staff was caught on film either rinsing the drinking glasses (in preparation for a new guest) with water only, or washing them with industrial cleaner labeled "do not drink." In other cases, dirty bath towels - from the previous guest - were used to dry the glasses after their perfunctory rinse in tap water. Another film clip showed a woman wearing latex gloves cleaning the guest toilet and then proceeding to rinse the drinking glasses, without removing or changing the gloves.

We all know that some of the principal routes for spread of infections include contact with infected persons or contact with articles of bedding or clothing that have been contaminated by an infected source. Numerous infections are spread by respiratory secretions, like those that may contaminate a drinking glass. Other serious diseases are spread by the fecal-oral route, in which contaminated fecal matter (think about the toilet-cleaning gloves or drying the glasses with bath towels) comes in contact with something (for example, a glass) that enters the mouth.

While not all viruses and bacteria are hardy enough to live for extended periods of time on contaminated surfaces such as glass, many of them - including those that can cause serious or even deadly infections - are. A limited list of common infections that could be spread by these incorrect hygiene practices includes:

- Cold viruses ([common cold](#))
- [Influenza](#) (flu)
- [Rotavirus](#)
- [Norovirus](#)

- [Diphtheria](#)
- [E. coli](#)
- [Hepatitis A](#)
- [Staphylococcus](#) (staph infection)
- [Streptococcus](#) (for example, skin infections, sore throat, strep throat, cellulitis, impetigo, scarlet fever)
- *Hemophilus influenzae* (H. flu, Hib)

It's important to keep in mind that this is a limited list of infections that might reasonably be found in the U.S. population. Consider the infections that may be brought in by foreign, including third-world travelers, and the scenario is even scarier.

Understandably, hotel management sources condemn these practices and state that these behaviors violate standards and policy for their establishments. One executive claimed that the behavior caught on film represented an isolated, single event (the reporters were very lucky with their camera placement, it appears). Clearly, based upon these observations, there is a need for greater education and monitoring of hygienic practices in many hotel housekeeping departments.

Like many travelers who may have seen the report, I'll be packing plastic drinking cups from now on.

References: [www.abc15.com](http://www.abc15.com), "[Dirty hotel drinking glasses -- What we discovered across the Valley](#)," February 11, 2008. [www.myfoxlanta.com](http://www.myfoxlanta.com), "[I-Team: Dirty Hotel Secrets](#)," December 17, 2007.

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