

Good Security Practices are Key to Becoming Covid Secure

The Hotels Sector has proved remarkably resilient in recent years but now faces its most daunting challenge. Having coped with the worst impacts of the financial crisis of 2007/08 by demonstrating imagination, innovation and outright determination the sector has achieved considerable growth over the past decade despite facing continued commercial and operational challenges ranging from the fast changing trends in the travel market to the increasingly sophisticated threat from criminals and terrorists.

No sooner than we witnessed the dawn of 2020, hotels were confronted with a new and most unwelcome intruder onto their premises – Covid 19, an invisible threat which knows no bounds as to how it finds ways into a hotel, or anywhere else for that matter.

The very nature of hotels means they, in common with the wider hospitality sector, are amongst the worst impacted by the global Covid-19 epidemic. Hotels are where people come together for business and leisure, but they do so expecting to be safe and secure. Now their definition of safety and security is changing quickly, and with a greater emphasis on hygiene and health security.

Those hotels which have an embedded security culture and a risk-based approach to their business are likely to prove most effective in creating the protective health environment that travellers, and those with a duty of care for them, will now expect. The disciplines of security mirror the disciplines of health protection:

- Understanding the threat – in this case Covid-19 and its transmission characteristics
- Being conversant with evidence based preventative strategies and tactics
- Designing, testing, and implementing standard operating procedures (SOP's) to deliver the strategy and tactics
- Learning from experience, and that of others and refining current procedures
- Training staff and testing performance through exercises and supervision
- Leading and managing the health security operation with commitment and diligence so that it becomes part and parcel of service operation

Many hotels throughout the world utilise these disciplines to counter a range of physical and other threats to their guests and their staff. These hotels have cleverly identified how actions and procedures associated with high standards of service overlap with actions and procedures which deter and disrupt those who are intent on causing harm or loss.

The challenge for hotels is to adapt these very same disciplines to stop Covid-19 entering the hotel where possible and detecting or eliminating its presence should the virus cross the 'health security perimeter' of the hotel.

As with any effective security posture, hotels will need a 'rapid response' capability to deal with a suspected or identified case where one or more guests may be affected - rapid isolation and internal 'contact tracing' to facilitate both the alerting and protection of others and targeting cleaning effort.

Sadly, there have been cases reported of members of the public 'weaponising' Covid-19 through threats and attempts to infect others. Just as hotels have had to deal with a variety of threats and hoaxes in the past, managing new iterations of an old phenomenon will be required in the repertoire of Covid-19 plans and procedures.

The notion of a 'health security perimeter' is an important focal point for the fight against infection and a number of measures can be taken to reduce the risk of the virus entering the environs of the hotel. This will include communicating with staff and guests to ensure they are aware of the requirement not to come to the hotel if they know or suspect they have symptoms of the virus or have been exposed to an infected person. Dependent on local circumstances, individual health or temperature screening might be required. It will also include screening of staff, contractors and individuals delivering goods, and where necessary cleaning or disinfecting physical items intended to be brought into the building. Staff health monitoring regimes need to be designed and implemented to ensure immediate isolation or exclusion of staff who are suspected of being infectious with Covid-19. Do current staff employment contracts require the disclosure of sensitive health information e.g. about a 'failed' COVID-19 test?

For the foreseeable future, hotel management and staff will need to operate on the assumption the virus has found its way into the building. This requires a full assessment of the physical environment to identify the risk levels of all surfaces in the hotel being home to the virus (stair rails, door handles, lift buttons, check-in counters, bar counter and table tops etc.) This will help identify the cleaning and disinfecting regime required in the hotel with a general and more targeted approach according to risk. Rooms will need to be deep cleaned after each occupancy.

Social distancing requirements need to be specified and tailored to the physical environment and then communicated and managed. This will include restricting only same room occupants to elevator cars, having policies to exclude staff from rooms at all times (except emergencies) and potentially alternating rooms so rooms can be left unoccupied after use for a period to allow for decontamination. Where it is advised by Government that restaurants and bars can be opened, the seating and movement in restaurants and bars will need to be carefully planned and managed to ensure compliance with government social distancing rules and/or best infection prevention practices.

Procedures will be required to be developed to ensure the response to suspected infection incidents is quick and effective and these may need to dovetail with government advice or regulatory requirements in respect of testing, tracing, isolating and disinfecting.

The response to Covid-19 is evolving as more is learned of the characteristics of the virus and its transmission, together with the effectiveness of different tactical interventions. Therefore, the ability to learn and adapt quickly is of paramount importance, as with any good security operation. By applying well established and proven principles of good security to expert scientific advice about transmission risk and methods, it is possible for hotels to create safe environments where the risk of infection is substantially reduced.

However good a hotel's stated approach to the virus, guests will need reassurance that the approach is thoroughly and reliably implemented and the hotel as safe as it can be.

Bob Quick – Executive Director – Global Secure Accreditation - Bob is a highly respected and well-known figure inside and outside of policing in the UK and overseas. Since leaving the police he has worked extensively with both the government and private sectors internationally, more recently helping to develop policing and security capability and solve security related problems.

