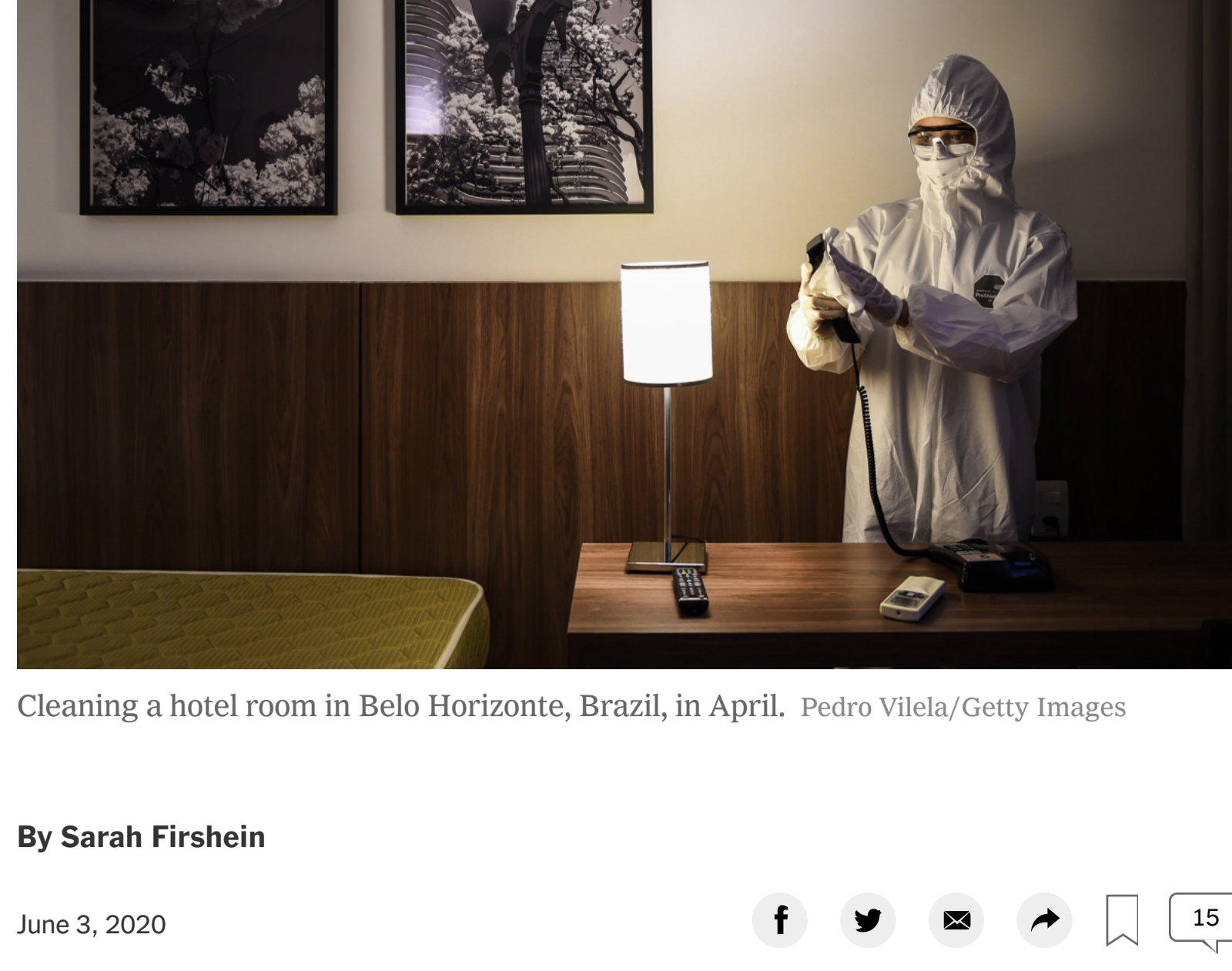


The Most Important Word in the Hospitality Industry? ‘Clean’

The world’s largest hotel companies have all come forward in recent weeks to announce new cleaning playbooks.



Cleaning a hotel room in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in April. Pedro Vilela/Getty Images

By Sarah Firshein

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In February, news from the [Wynn Las Vegas](#) included plans for Valentine’s Day (among the offerings: a “Lover’s Menu for Two”) and National Margarita Day (four new cocktails).

What a difference a pandemic makes.

Three months later, the casino resort [announced](#) a much more sober initiative, the “Wynn Las Vegas Health & Disinfection Program.” The 28-page [memo](#) lays out how the 2,700-room property will address health and hygiene when it reopens. Out with mezcal and barhopping; in with thermal cameras, elevator capacity limits and disinfection protocols for the Chipper Champ, a chip-sorting machine.

According to the [American Hotel & Lodging Association](#), an industry group, the coronavirus outbreak has cost hotels in the United States more than \$23 billion in room revenue since mid-February. As these properties prepare for a new operational reality — one that must balance federal, state and local laws and consumer anxiety about getting sick — the world’s largest hotel companies have all come forward in recent weeks to announce new cleaning playbooks.

“The first question that comes to mind when someone’s making the decision to book is: ‘Am I going to be safe?’” said [Suzanne Markham Bagnera](#), Ph.D., assistant clinical professor and chair of the undergraduate program in the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University. “Cleaning has traditionally been a back-of-the-house or behind-the-scenes tactic, hotels are now needing to bring that to the center stage.”

Program names riff on the hottest word in hospitality right now: clean. There’s [Hilton CleanStay](#), Choice Hotels’ [Commitment to Clean](#), Best Western’s [We Care Clean, Omni Safe & Clean](#) and [IHG Clean Promise](#). Four Seasons has [Lead With Care](#), Wyndham has [Count on Us](#), Mandarin Oriental has [We Care](#), Rosewood has [Commitment to Care](#), Marriott launched a [Global Cleanliness Council](#); Hyatt, a [Global Care & Cleanliness Commitment](#). Topping it off is the American Hotel & Lodging Association’s [Safe Stay](#), a list of general industry recommendations.

“It’s not about what these names say outright — it’s about what they signify,” said [Anthony Shore](#), a linguist who helps name products and companies. “We used to take a clean hotel room for granted and hope that hotels would deliver. But now, because we associate the word ‘clean’ with something that is virus-free, it has become more loaded than it used to be.”

Although there are no hotel-specific disinfection guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control, the agency’s general Covid-19 resources — including [everyday steps for employers](#) and [best reopening practices for businesses](#) — has offered a foundation for hotels as they’ve sought to create their own. Many of the new cleaning plans include a consultancy with a leading medical organization, products and technologies from Ecolab (a major hygiene and safety company), some element of social distancing, increased disinfection of guest rooms and public spaces, and a commitment to procure and test new technologies like robots and ultraviolet light.

Guests will immediately notice the disappearance of the breakfast buffet, the decluttering of nonessential room items like throw pillows, and the wearing of masks and other personal protective equipment by the staff.

The “Hilton CleanStay,” directive, developed in partnership with Mayo Clinic and RB, Lysol’s parent company, suggests a deeper cleaning of 10 touchpoints in the hotels. Will Newton

More cleaning, more jobs?

Mr. Shore said the new batch of nomenclature from hotel marketing teams doesn’t suggest a higher degree of cleanliness or a significant departure from the pre-Covid era. But these measures, if implemented fully, will substantially alter how hotels operate.

“This is completely going to change the role and realm of housekeeping,” Dr. Bagnera said. “With occupancy rates so low, now is the perfect opportunity for hotel general managers to work with their teams and make sure they’re mapping out how they’re going to clean the rooms, how they’re going to be efficient and how they’re going to keep their employees safe.”

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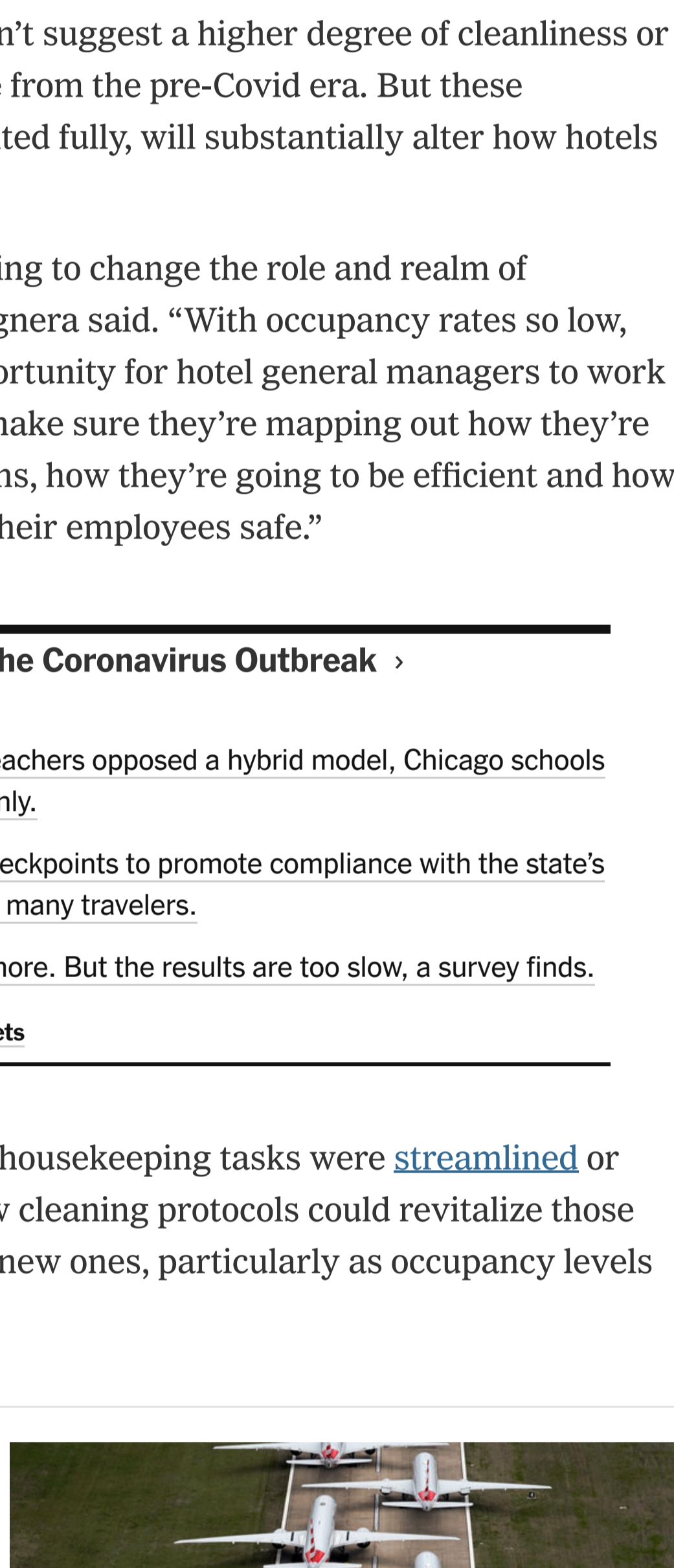
- After parents and teachers opposed a hybrid model, Chicago schools will reopen online only.
- N.Y.C. will set up checkpoints to promote compliance with the state’s quarantine rules for many travelers.
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In recent years, many housekeeping tasks were [streamlined](#) or [replaced](#). Complex new cleaning protocols could revitalize those jobs, and perhaps add new ones, particularly as occupancy levels rebound.

The Future of Travel

Perhaps no industry has been as hard hit by the pandemic as tourism. As restrictions on companies and travelers ease, what will the new world look like?



For [Unite Here](#), a hospitality workers’ union with 300,000 members in North America, the new guidelines raise questions about what will happen when hotel workers clock back in. More than 95 percent of its union members are not working as a result of the pandemic.

“These new measures — and the reality that they must be adhered to well into the future — point to a need for more workers across the board,” said D. Taylor, Unite Here’s international president.

Best Western predicts that its “We Care Clean” program — which includes more disinfection of touchpoints like faucets and door handles — will increase the time it takes to clean each room by 50 percent. Industrywide, the use of new disinfectants — which must sit on a surface for a certain amount of time in order to be effective — will force an adjustment to the flow in which rooms are serviced.

Playbooks, not strict rules

Whereas Wynn’s lengthy memo gets into the weeds about what will happen at one stand-alone casino-resort — “Addition of inserts into golf hole cups to allow easy removal of balls” — companies with thousands of hotels can’t offer that level of detail. Rather, their new cleaning guidelines are meant as overarching navigational tools. They’re guidelines and best practices, not strict directives.

“CleanStay” will begin rolling out to all Hilton brands worldwide in June. Marriott is taking a phased approach to its rollout over the next 30 to 90 days, and to all 30 brands, including The Ritz-Carlton.

But most big chains do not usually own, and often don’t operate, the hotels bearing their names, meaning it’s up to individual franchise owners to fund supplies, training and marketing.

The Coronavirus Outbreak >

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated August 4, 2020

I have antibodies. Am I now immune?

As of right now, [that seems likely, for at least several months](#). There have been frightening accounts of people suffering what seems to be a second bout of Covid-19. But experts say these patients may have a [dramatic reduction of infection](#) with the disease, and a [slight increase](#) in the number of antibodies they produce.

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That makes oversight a challenge. Best Western will have a system of self-auditing for its 2,200 North American hotels; general managers will be asked to keep a “We Care Clean” checklist on file. Wyndham will kick-start “Count on Us” by financing and shipping the first round of masks, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes to more than 6,000 hotels and allow them to defer repayment until September. All of Hyatt’s managed and franchised hotels — more than 900 globally — will appoint “Hygiene Managers.”

Hygiene gets personal

Boutique hotels could face additional hurdles as they seek to marry cleanliness with individual expression.

[Quirk Hotel, Charlottesville](#), in Virginia, opened in early March only to temporarily close less than two weeks later. As it preps for a June reopening, its leadership is considering ways to adhere to Hyatt’s global guidelines (Quirk is part of Destination Hotels, a Hyatt brand) without losing the identity suggested by the hotel’s name. Employees will wear light-pink masks — a nod to the hotel’s logo and lobby décor — custom tailored by a local garment maker; no-touch restaurant menus will double as clever, artistic table centerpieces.

“We are doing everything possible to go beyond simply complying with the new requirements from our parent brand, Hyatt, and the governing state of Virginia to ensure the heart and soul of our property stays intact,” said Matthew Brink, the hotel’s general manager.

Personal touches go even further at fully independent hotels. At [Old Edwards Inn & Spa](#) and [Half-Mile Farm](#), sister luxury hotels in Highlands, N.C., staff members are undergoing eye-expression training to decipher the needs and emotions of guests wearing face masks. The [Inn at Little Washington](#), in Virginia, is using life-size mannequins to fill out the state-mandated socially distanced seating at its Michelin-starred restaurant. [Ocean House](#), on the Rhode Island coast, is supplanting its nightly happy hour at the bar with a canape-and-cocktail cart that pushes from room to room.

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The New Responsibilities of Guests

These visual cues will be paramount as hotels big and small rebuild consumer confidence. [Data](#) from the U.S. Travel Association and MMGY Travel Intelligence suggests that Americans right now consider [vacation rentals safer than hotels](#). In a recent survey of nearly 4,600 respondents, the management consulting firm [Oliver Wyman](#) found that improved health and cleaning is the chief factor impacting the decision to stay at a hotel. That’s why most of the new guidelines encourage public-facing elements like social-distancing signage, seals identifying that a room has been

disinfected, Plexiglas partitions and more.

“Guests will be interested to know how their room is cleaned, how often it’s cleaned and who is responsible for maintaining a safe environment within the hotel,” said Tim Chatfield, the founder and chief executive of [Jitjato](#), an online hospitality industry platform.

But in order for any of these new programs to work, industry experts and hospitality worker activists believe that health and hygiene must become give-and-take.

“Hotels are asking guests to wear masks, distance themselves, wash their hands and use sanitizer or wipes before going into the elevator,” Dr. Bagnera said. “It’s like: ‘Come in and we’ll take care of you at a hundred percent — but you’ve got to participate in the new process as well.’”

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