This is Actually the Dirtiest Part of Your Hotel Room

If you're a frequent traveler, you might think you have the clean room routine down. You inspect the bedsheets, wipe down the bathroom sink, and drop half a can of disinfectant spray on the TV remote.

But what if we told you you've been overlooking the dirtiest item in your hotel room all along? Hint: it's the first thing you touch upon entering and the last before calling it a night.

Light Switches Are Your Hotel Rooms' Biggest Dirty Secret

At first glance, hotel rooms generally appear spotless. Housekeeping services do a commendable job tidying up and making things look warm and welcoming. However, one high-touch area frequently gets overlooked — the light switch.

Research from the University of Houston tested several hotels and rooms across three states, unearthing alarming results. The light switches tested positive for coliform bacteria — AKA fecal matter — and contained 112.7 colony-forming units (CFU) per square centimeter, along with 122.7 CFUs of aerobic bacteria like E. coli and Staph.

By these standards, light switches score higher on the gross-out scale than the average toilet seat. A study of environmental cleanliness in hospitals recommended a top limit of 5 CFUs per cubic centimeter squared for comparison.

So, where the remote controls in hotel rooms once reigned supremely disgusting, more recent findings indicate that light switches have taken over that dubious honor.

This doesn't mean it's cool to let your toddler go fishing in the toilet bowl or use the room's remote control as a chew toy. A joint 2012 study by various university researchers found that remote controls harbor an average of 67.6 colony-forming units (CFU) of bacteria per cubic centimeter squared.

How Do Light Switch Germs Keep Outsmarting Cleaners?

Even in places like universities, where cleanliness is a top priority, it's surprising how some spots, like light switches, can still harbor bacteria. These hard-to-reach areas get overlooked, and it only takes a tiny amount of bacteria to spread illness-causing pathogens.

Brad Evans, the General Manager at OptiSolve, points out a few critical issues with cleaning these high-contact surfaces. He puts it plainly: "If there are pathogens still present, as soon as someone touches the switch, they start spreading potentially harmful contamination around the facility." Evans also states that many facilities are using the wrong cleaning chemicals, not cleaning thoroughly enough, and following improper procedures. Hotel rooms are no exception.

Pack Some Spray for Your Next Stay

What's the moral of the story? Pay attention to the light switch next time you check into a hotel room. While it might seem insignificant, it could be the dirtiest item you'll touch during your stay. So, before mindlessly flicking the switch, give it a quick blast from an EPA-registered multi-surface cleaner and disinfectant.

By taking a few extra minutes to clean this looked-over surface, you can give yourself a chance at a much more hygienic environment for your travels. A little bit of caution goes a long way in keeping germs at bay.