

Restful Sleep

As rates of asthma and allergies continue to rise, hoteliers accommodate guests by offering allergy-free rooms.

by MEGAN SULLIVAN

Dust mites, mold spores, and pet dander are microscopic, but they can cause big problems for guests who suffer from allergies and asthma. Hotels entice travelers with the promise of a comfortable and peaceful night's sleep, but this becomes harder to fulfill if steps aren't taken to accommodate guests with sensitivities to airborne allergens and irritants.

According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, an estimated one in five Americans suffer from allergies. With rates of asthma and allergies on the rise, many hotels are responding by offering hypoallergenic rooms. Thirty-four percent of hotels have allergy-free rooms

Pure Solutions' medical-grade air purifier provides a defense against airborne irritants.

available, according to the American Hotel & Lodging Association's newly released 2012 Lodging Survey, conducted by STR. While this shows a decrease from the 2010 Lodging Survey, which indicated 38 percent of hotels had allergy-free rooms, it's an improvement from 2008, when only 24 percent of hotels offered this option to guests.

Hotels can accommodate guests with allergies and asthma by installing air purifiers, using hypoallergenic mattress and pillow encasements, and deep cleaning carpets and upholstery.

BREATH OF FRESH AIR

For allergy sufferers, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts places filters in the guestroom prior to arrival to ensure it is free of irritants, and air circulation in all rooms and public spaces is kept at a minimum of 15 cubic feet per minute. Fairmont Vancouver Airport, Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, Fairmont Waterfront, and Fairmont Chicago offer "featherless floors" or hypoallergenic guestrooms that substitute feather pillows and duvets with hypoallergenic gel counterparts or polyester fiber (foam) options.

Fairmont Vancouver Airport's floor has a filtration system to further purify the air and water and a central vacuum system to dramatically reduce dust in the rooms. At Fairmont Hotel



“Air does not penetrate the interior of the mattress—it’s a perfect place for dust mites, mold and fungus to grow.”

— SANDRA DIVITO, VICE PRESIDENT OF HOSPITALITY, PROTECT-A-BED

Vancouver, the property uses Blueair purifying units to circulate clean air, as well as to conduct regular ozone treatments.

Hyatt has 2,088 hypoallergenic rooms in North America across 118 properties. The purification process for "Respire" by Hyatt guestrooms includes installation of medical-grade air purification systems and treatment of all fabrics and surfaces. The rooms are installed and maintained on an ongoing basis by Pure Solutions NA. The average additional cost to stay in a Respire room is \$25 per night.

Brian Brault, CEO of Pure Solutions NA, says approximately 300 hotels nationwide have Pure rooms installed. In addition to Hyatts, the allergy-

friendly rooms can be found in select Hilton, Marriott, Starwood, Wyndham, and Inter-

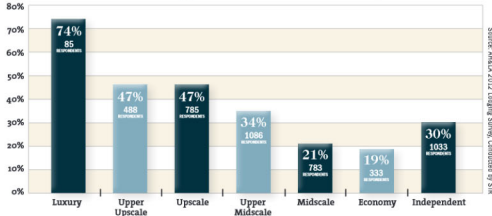
continental properties, as well as a number of independents. The company typically converts approximately 5 to 10 percent of a hotel's inventory

into hypoallergenic rooms.

"[Hoteliers] need to feel confident they are going to get a solid return on their investment," Brault says. There is a built-in need for hypoallergenic rooms, he adds, but demand is a product of

raising awareness. This can be achieved by featuring information about hypoallergenic guestrooms on hotel websites, making sure they are listed as a room type in the reservations system, and training staff to share the value of

Hotels with Allergy-Free Rooms Available by Chain Scale



Source: HMAA 2012 Lodging Survey. Conducted by ENR



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Fairmont Vancouver Airport's hypoallergenic floor has a filtration system to further purify the air and water, and a central vacuum system to reduce dust in the guestrooms.

allergy-friendly rooms with guests.

In a 2012 survey conducted by Cornell University and commissioned by Pure Solutions, 329 hotel patrons were interviewed about their behaviors toward allergy-friendly facilities. According to the survey, two out of five of the respondents had allergy issues or shared hotel rooms with others who have asthma or allergies. Fifty-five percent of respondents said the availability of allergy-friendly rooms would cause them to choose a particular hotel over comparable options without such rooms. And more than three out of five (62 percent) of respondents said they would be willing to pay a premium of at least \$10 or more to stay in an allergy-friendly room. The average premium for Pure rooms is \$24.19 a night.

"It's certainly a market-to-market differentiator for a significant and growing population," Brault says, "but also there's the opportunity to generate additional premiums and affect RevPAR with the program as well."

HEALTHY SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

Sandra DiVito, vice president of hospitality for Protect-A-Bed, works with hotel owners and operators across the country to develop and implement healthy sleep environments. Mattress and pillow encasements ensure protection from dust mites, moisture, mold, fungus, and bacteria, creating an allergy-free sleep environment. DiVito says mattress pads still absorb human skin cells, perspiration and human contaminants.

The average person loses up to 2 pints of moisture and a million skin cells per day, she adds. Accumulated particles can cause a mattress to double in weight in less than four years. "Air does not penetrate the interior of the mattress—it's a perfect place for dust mites, mold and fungus to grow," she says.

Independent laboratory studies conducted by Protect-A-Bed have shown that within two weeks of a person sleeping on an unprotected mattress, there are enough skin cells and moisture

developing inside the mattress to pull fibers out, put them in a Petri dish, and see mold, fungus and bacteria growing, DiVito says. It's estimated that the life of a mattress is shortened between 25 to 35 percent or more simply due to human contamination. "It's kind of like buying a Mercedes and not buying car insurance," DiVito says of unprotected mattresses. More and more hoteliers are encasing mattresses to receive the maximum value of their investment, she says, especially now that a significant amount of renovations are taking place in the industry.

Protect-A-Bed originally created its encasements to assure hygiene from one sleeper to the next, but encasements also protect against pest contamination. Guests need to be educated that encasements don't mean the room previously had bed bugs, DiVito stresses. "An encasement means your sleeping on a clean mattress every night," she says. "That's an education process."

PILLOW TALK

Harris Pillow Supply, a Beaufort, S.C.-based pillow manufacturer, has experienced a substantial increase in sales of hypoallergenic options. Vice President Patrick Harris says hypoallergenic pillows have little likelihood of triggering an allergic response.

The company's hypoallergenic pillows feature 100 percent cotton covers and are filled with hypoallergenic polyester cluster fiber, microfiber or a special blend. "Pillows that are not hypoallergenic are often made with synthetic ticking (covers) and are filled with allergen-attracting materials such as down and feathers, which are often considered to be problematic," Harris says.

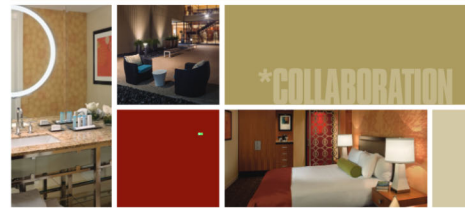
Harris notes that a down/feather pillow is not as "allergenic" as many people think. "People are usually not allergic to the actual feathers and down but to the dust that becomes a by-product of it over time," he says.

Robin Wilson, a Manhattan-based eco-friendly and healthy space interior designer who suffers from asthma and allergies, recommends that hotels provide multiple pillow options or a down alternative to ensure that their guests have a restful sleep. "Many hotels have transitioned to down-alternative pillows or poly-filled pillows, but some hotels have down pillows and those are often a trigger for those who have allergic or asthmatic conditions," says Wilson, whose privately held company, Robin Wilson Home, sells licensed hypoallergenic bedding and bath products.

Wilson serves as an ambassador for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, and works to increase awareness of indoor air quality issues that affect wellness in residential and commercial spaces. Hypoallergenic amenities are another step hoteliers can take to ensure the health and wellness of guests, she says. Wilson recently partnered with hotel supplier Concept Amenities on a low-allergen spa collection, NEST, which uses an antioxidant, vitamin-infused, paraben-free and mineral-oil free formula.

"Where you sleep is where you spend one-third of your life," Wilson says. "The ecosystem where you sleep should be influenced by non-toxic products." ■

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