



## Article Title

**The role of the hotel industry in the response to emerging epidemics: a case study of SARS in 2003 and H1N1 swine flu in 2009 in Hong Kong.**

## Citation

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## Abstract

**Background:** The global travel and tourism industry has been rapidly expanding in the past decades. The traditional focus on border screening, and by airline and cruise industries may be inadequate due to the incubation period of an infectious disease. This case study highlights the potential role of the hotel industry in epidemic preparedness and response.

**Methods:** This case study focuses on the epidemic outbreaks of SARS in 2003 and H1N1 swine flu in 2009 in Hong Kong, and the subsequent guidelines published by the health authority in relation to the hotel industry in Hong Kong which provide the backbone for discussion.

**Results:** The Metropole Hotel hastened the international spread of the 2003 SARS outbreak by the index case infecting visitors from Singapore, Vietnam, Canada as well as local people via close contact with the index case and the environmental contamination. The one-week quarantine of more than 300 guests and staff at the Metropark Hotel during the 2009 H1N1 swine flu exposed gaps in the partnership with the hotel industry. The subsequent guidelines for the hotel industry from the Centre of Health Protection focused largely on the maintenance of hygiene within the hotel premises.

**Conclusion:** Positive collaborations may bring about effective preparedness across the health and the tourism sectors for future epidemics. Regular hygiene surveillance at hotel facilities and developing coordination mechanism for impending epidemics on the use of screening, swift reporting and isolation of infected persons may help mitigate the impact of future events.

Preparedness and contingency plans for infectious disease control for the hotel industry requires continuous engagement and dialogue.

## Summary

The epidemic preparedness and infection control measures mounted against SARS and H1N1 swine flu demonstrated a role that needed to be filled by the hotel industry. During SARS, late recognition of the environmental contamination of hotel facilities and the failure of timely

intervention on the hotel guests with close contact contributed to the spread of the disease internationally. While the appropriateness and best method of quarantine in future pandemic influenza warrants further research, the 2009 swine flu hotel quarantine exposed gaps in the partnership with hotel industry. Health authorities in Hong Kong had since provided guidelines mostly in the area of disinfection and hygiene, and focused on educating hotel workers on basic hygiene to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The potential to establish traveller screening, timely reporting and isolation for the infected guests during epidemics could be explored. The capacity of the hotel industry in controlling infections should be recognised not only in Hong Kong but also in other parts of the world.