

Hospital routine blamed for SARS outbreak

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Poor hospital infection-control procedures led to the deadly 2003 SARS outbreak in Toronto, a commission investigating the epidemic found.

The outbreak occurred in February 2003, when a Toronto-area woman contracted the virus on a trip to Hong Kong and returned to Canada, where she died, The New York Times said. Her son went to the hospital with an undiagnosed condition, later identified as severe acute respiratory syndrome. While in the emergency room, the man transmitted the virus to others and it continued to spread, the commission said.

Forty-four people died. Of the 375 SARS cases identified in Ontario Province, healthcare workers accounted for 45 percent, the commission said.

"Systemic problems ran through every hospital and every government agency," Doug Hunt, commission chief counsel, said Tuesday when findings were released.

The commission recommended new legislation and changes to hospital practices and health surveillance. It also urged the province's labor department play a larger role in protecting workers from disease outbreaks.

SARS was reported first in Asia in early 2003. By July, 774 deaths of 8,000 infections worldwide were attributed to it, the World Health Organization reported.

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