Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Case Study

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a newly identified respiratory infection caused by a novel coronavirus. The SARS pandemic is believed to have originated in the Guangdong Province of China during the fall of 2002. A SARS patient from this region traveled to Hong Kong on February 15, 2003, and may have infected several guests at a hotel where he resided. One of the hotel guests was a resident of Hong Kong. By February 24, the hotel resident came down with a fever, chills, dry cough, runny nose, and malaise. Over the next several days, his symptoms worsened to pneumonia, leading to his hospitalization at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong.

The Prince of Wales Hospital is a large medical teaching hospital of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. By March 12, a large-scale outbreak of SARS occurred inside of the hospital. During the initial outbreak, March 15 through 25, 2003, 44% of the SARS cases (68 of 156) admitted to the Prince of Wales Hospital were hospital workers. SARS is a contagious disease that spreads from person to person primarily through contact with respiratory droplets containing the SARS virus. Chinese University researchers and the Hong Kong Hospital Authority conducted studies to determine why hospital workers were so vulnerable to SARS at this hospital.

* *Can you think of what factors contributed to the high rates of SARS transmission seen among hospital workers?*
* *What precautions would you take in caring for SARS patients?*