

Library Frontiers: Disasters, Emergency Preparedness and Emerging Diseases IFLA conference side event 18 Aug 2007

Title

**Learning from SARS and Planning for a Bird-flu Pandemic: Hong Kong
Case Study from the Front Lines**

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Abstract

The good news: Hong Kong's libraries lived through SARS and learned how to survive a medical disaster. The bad news: Hong Kong's libraries are surrounded by incidents of bird flu among birds and humans catching it from birds. Both are happening in China to Hong Kong's north and west and in Vietnam to its south. We are supposing that the question of human to human transmission is a question of when, not if it happen. In this presentation I will review what happened during SARS in our libraries and in the University, what we learned from this experience, and what our plans for bird flu when and if it happens.

We found that being the "heart of the University" during SARS meant that while the rest of the university was incapacitated and out of operation, we were expected to stay open and continue to support the teaching and learning needs of our students and teachers. We had to confront issues and make policies related to staff absenteeism, patron and staff use of surgical masks and rubber gloves, do we screen for fever, stepped up cleanliness of toilets and wash basins, availability of hand disinfectants, liability should a patron claim she/he caught it from a sneezed upon book, disinfecting books, communicating with patrons, etc.

I will also discuss the role we played in enabling teachers and researchers to carry on with their work even though they were not in as much face-to-face contact with their students. With this experience and several years of IT development, I will discuss what we are doing to prepare for the future.