

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

WHAT IS SARS?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. According to the World Health Organization, a total of 8,098 people worldwide became sick with SARS during the 2003 outbreak. Of these, 774 died.

In the United States, only eight people had laboratory evidence of SARS-CoV infection. All of these people had traveled to other parts of the world with SARS. SARS did not spread more widely in communities in the United States.

As of May 3, 2005, there is no known SARS transmission anywhere in the world. The most recent human cases of SARS-CoV infection were reported in China in April 2004 in an outbreak resulting from laboratory-acquired infections. CDC and its partners, including the World Health Organization, continue to monitor the SARS situation globally.

HOW IS SARS SPREAD?

The main way that SARS seems to spread is by close person-to-person contact. "Close contact" means having cared for or lived with someone with SARS or having direct contact with respiratory secretions or body fluids of a patient with SARS. Examples of close contact include kissing or hugging, sharing eating or drinking utensils, talking to someone within 3 feet, and touching someone directly. Close contact does not include activities like walking by a person or briefly sitting across a waiting room or office, or eating in a chinese restaurant.

The virus that causes SARS is thought to be transmitted most readily by respiratory droplets (droplet spread) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplet spread can happen when droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled a short distance (generally up to 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, or eyes of persons who are nearby. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eyes. In addition, it is possible that the SARS virus might spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread) or by other ways that are not now known.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SARS?

The illness usually begins with a high fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]). The fever is sometimes associated with chills or other symptoms, including headache, general feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms at the outset. Diarrhea is seen in approximately 10 percent to 20 percent of patients. After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry, nonproductive cough and have trouble breathing. In 10 percent to 20 percent of cases, patients require mechanical ventilation. Most patients develop pneumonia.

WHEN IS A PERSON WITH SARS INFECTIOUS TO OTHERS?

It appears that people are most likely to be infectious when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. Patients are most contagious during the second week of illness. To date, no cases of SARS have been reported among individuals who were exposed to a SARS patient before the onset of the patient's symptoms.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AGAINST SARS?

You can prevent the spread of SARS with the same common sense measures that apply to many infectious diseases. Most important is frequent hand washing with soap and water or use of alcohol-based hand rubs. In addition, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands and encourage people around you to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SARS

- ✓ Visit the CDC's SARS Website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars
CDC's Travel's Health at www.cdc.gov/travel/

- ✓ Call the CDC at: English 800-CDC-INFO
Español 888-246-2857
TTY 888-232-6348