

Fact Sheet: SARS

What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a severe respiratory illness caused by a corona virus. Major outbreaks of SARS occurred from November 2002 to July 2003 and spread to more than two dozen countries. SARS was first recognized in February 2003.

What are the symptoms?

In general, SARS begins with a high fever (greater than 100.4°F/38°C) an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches.

- Respiratory symptoms include a cough, followed by a shortness of breath a few hours later.
- About 10% to 20% of patients have diarrhea.
- Symptoms may worsen for several days.

How is it spread?

SARS seems to spread from person to person by close contact. The SARS virus may be transmitted when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus also can spread when a person touches an object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eyes.

What does "close contact" mean?

Close contact is defined as having cared for or lived with a person known to have SARS or having direct contact with respiratory secretions and/or body fluids of a SARS patient. Examples include kissing or embracing, sharing eating or drinking utensils, close conversation (within 3 feet), physical examination, and any other direct physical contact between people. Close contact does NOT include activities such as walking by a person or briefly sitting across a waiting room or office.

How long is a person with SARS infectious to others?

Persons with SARS are most likely to be contagious only when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. However, as a precaution against spreading the disease, the CDC recommends that persons with SARS limit their interactions outside the home (for example, by not going to work or to school) until 10 days after their fevers and respiratory symptoms have gone away.

How is it treated?

CDC recommends that a patient with SARS receive the same treatment that would be used for a patient with any serious community-acquired atypical pneumonia.

What if I must travel to a country where SARS cases have been reported? What precautions can I take?

As with all infectious illnesses, the first line of defense is careful and frequent hand washing. It is a good practice to clean your hands often using either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. CDC does not recommend the routine use of masks while in public areas. Guidance for persons traveling to areas where SARS cases have been reported is provided at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel_advice.htm

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.