

SARS Fact Sheet

1. **What is SARS?** - Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. SARS was first reported in Asia in February of 2003 and quickly spread to over two dozen countries in a variety of continents including Asia, North America, South America and Europe. During the SARS outbreak of 2003, there were a total of 8,098 people worldwide who became ill and 774 deaths.

2. **What are the symptoms and signs of SARS?** - The illness usually begins with a fever (measured 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 that might be accompanied by or progress to a condition in which the oxygen levels in the blood are low (hypoxia). In 10 percent to 20 percent of cases, patients require mechanical ventilation. Most patients develop pneumonia.

3. **What is the cause of SARS?** - SARS is caused by a previously unrecognized coronavirus, called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV).

4. **What are coronaviruses?** - Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that have a halo or crown-like (corona) appearance when viewed under a light microscope. These viruses are a common cause of mild to moderate upper-respiratory illness (colds) in humans and are associated with respiratory, gastrointestinal, liver and nervous system disease in animals.

5. **If coronaviruses usually cause mild illness in humans, how could this new coronavirus be responsible for a potentially life-threatening disease such as SARS?** – There is not enough information about the new virus to determine the full range of illness that it might cause. Other coronaviruses have occasionally been linked to pneumonia in humans, especially people with weakened immune systems. The viruses also can cause severe disease in animals, including

cats, dogs, pigs, mice, and birds. SARS-CoV is genetically different than other coronaviruses and this is likely the reason for the more severe disease.

6. How is SARS spread? - The primary way that SARS appears to spread is by close person-to-person contact. SARS-CoV 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 eye(s). In addition, it is possible that SARS-CoV might be spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread), especially after procedures that have the potential to generate aerosols (such as inserting a breathing tube or suctioning respiratory secretions).

7. What does "close contact" mean? - Close contact is defined as having cared for or lived with a person known to have SARS or having a high likelihood of direct contact with respiratory secretions and/or body fluids of a patient known to have SARS. 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.

8. If I were exposed to SARS-CoV, how long would it take for me to become sick? - The time between exposure to SARS-CoV and the onset of symptoms is called the "incubation period." The incubation period for SARS is typically 2 to 7 days, although in some cases it may be as long as 10 days. In a very small proportion of cases, incubation periods of up to 14 days have been reported.

9. How long is a person with SARS infectious to others? - Available information suggests that persons with SARS are most likely to be contagious only when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. Patients are most contagious during the second week of illness. However, as a precaution against spreading the disease, 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 fever has gone away and their respiratory (breathing) symptoms have resolved.

10. Is a person with SARS contagious before symptoms appear? - To date, no cases of SARS have been reported among persons who were exposed to a SARS patient before the onset of the patient's symptoms.

11. How is SARS diagnosed? – SARS can be diagnosed in several ways. These include finding the virus in respiratory secretions, finding genetic evidence of the presence of the virus in respiratory secretions, and looking for the body's immune response to the infection. These tests are not routinely available because of the rarity of the infection. Therefore, the health department should immediately be contacted if this disease is suspected.

12. What medical treatment is recommended for patients with SARS? - CDC recommends that patients with SARS receive the same treatment that would be used for a patient with any serious community-acquired atypical pneumonia. SARS-CoV is being tested against various antiviral drugs to see if an effective treatment can be found.

13. If there is another outbreak of SARS, how can I protect myself? - If transmission of SARS-CoV recurs, there are some common-sense precautions that you can take that apply to many infectious diseases. The most important is frequent hand washing with soap and water or use of an alcohol-based hand rub. You should also 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.

14. How long can SARS-CoV survive in the environment? - Studies in some research laboratories suggest that the virus may survive in the environment for several days. The length of time that the virus survives likely depends on a number of factors. These factors could include the type of material or body fluid containing the virus and various environmental conditions such as temperature or humidity.

15. Will SARS return? – The last known cases of SARS in the world were in 2004 due to a laboratory accident in China. However, surveys have shown that the virus is present in animal hosts in Asia, raising the possibility of additional cases or outbreaks in the future.

16. For more information about SARS: <http://www.cdc.gov/sars/index.html>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.

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