

SARS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. Coronavirus infections are common in many animal species and may provide a reservoir for introduction of new strains to humans. SARS was recognized as a global threat in March 2003, after first appearing in southern China in 2002.

How is it spread?

SARS is transmitted through close person to person contact. Close contact includes living or caring for someone with SARS, hugging, kissing, sharing eating or drinking utensils, or being within three feet of someone with SARS. One mechanism of transmission is by breathing respiratory droplets expelled into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can also be spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets then touches his mouth, nose or eyes. Most people become ill 2-10 days after exposure.

How is it treated?

The CDC recommends that patients with SARS receive the same treatment as those patients with serious pneumonia. This may include medications, rest and nutrition. There is currently no vaccine available to help prevent SARS infection, but vaccine research and development studies are underway.

How can we prevent SARS?

Frequent hand washing with soap and water, or use of an alcohol-based hand rub is very important. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands. Covering and controlling coughs and sneezes is essential. Avoid settings where SARS is most likely to be transmitted, such as health care facilities caring for SARS patients.

SYMPTOMS OF SARS

- Fever greater than 100.4 F
- Chills
- Headache
- Body aches
- Overall feeling of discomfort
- Dry cough may develop 2-7 days after illness onset
- Possible shortness of breath
- Diarrhea possible but uncommon
- Most patients develop pneumonia

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