



SARS

(Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)?

SARS is a respiratory illness that has affected Southeast Asia, specifically the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong), Hanoi, Vietnam and Singapore.

When was SARS first recognized?

SARS was first reported among people in the Guangdong Province of China, Hong Kong and Vietnam in March 2003. It has since spread to other countries.

What are the signs and symptoms of SARS?

People are suspected of having SARS if they have traveled to an affected area in Southeast Asia within ten days of symptom onset or had close contact with a SARS patient within ten days of symptom onset.

The following are the usual symptoms:

- Fever greater than 100.4°F
- One or more respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, hypoxia (low oxygen level), or a chest x-ray showing findings of pneumonia.

The illness usually starts with a fever and is sometimes associated with chills, headache, fatigue, body aches and an overall feeling of discomfort. After 3 to 7 days, the person may develop a dry cough and have trouble breathing.

What causes SARS?

SARS is a newly recognized disease. There is early evidence to suggest that SARS is caused by a virus, but the exact cause is still unknown.

How is SARS spread?

As SARS is a new disease, we do not yet know for sure exactly how it is spread but it seems to require close contact with a SARS patient. Scientists believe that SARS is usually spread when someone with SARS coughs or sneezes droplets into the air and someone else breathes them in. This more often occurs when people are in close contact, like people who live in the same home as a SARS patient or a healthcare worker who takes care of a SARS patient. SARS may also be spread by touching something that has been contaminated with the secretions (from the nose or mouth) from a SARS patient.

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How can I help prevent SARS?

The Center for Disease Protection and Control (CDC) has issued guidelines for how to prevent SARS from spreading to family contacts of SARS patients and in the hospital setting. In medical care settings, it is important that health care providers follow special precautions when caring for a patient who may have SARS. For others, the best way to prevent SARS is by not traveling to places where there are known outbreaks of SARS, unless absolutely necessary.

Is there a treatment for SARS?

Because the exact cause of the illness is still being investigated, there is currently no known treatment for SARS. Different types of treatment regimens have been used for severely ill hospitalized patients with SARS, including antibiotics, anti-virus medications and steroids, but it is too soon to tell if any of these will be effective. Supportive treatment, such as intravenous fluids and medicines to control fever or pain, is critical.

Who can I call if I have any questions or concerns?

The public can visit the Department of Health and Senior Services web site at www.nj.state.nj.us/health or call the Department at 609-588-7500.

For additional information, see the World Health Organization's website at <http://www.who.int/en/>

or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at www.cdc.gov.