

SARS

Frequently Asked Questions

What is severe acute respiratory syndrome?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness that was recognized as a global threat in March 2003, after first appearing in Southern China in November 2002. SARS is caused by a previously unrecognized coronavirus, called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV).

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that have a crown-like (corona) appearance when viewed under a microscope. These viruses are a common cause of mild to moderate upper respiratory tract illness in humans, including the common cold.

How do people get SARS?

The disease is spread by close person-to-person contact, such as those who have cared for, lived with or had direct contact with an infected person. SARS can spread when an infected person sneezes or coughs, droplets are propelled into the air (generally up to three feet) and land in another person's eyes, nose and/or mouth. Touching an infected surface and then touching your eyes, nose and mouth is another way the disease might be spread. It is possible that the virus might be spread through aerosols (tiny liquid droplets that remain suspended in the air for a long time) or by other ways that are not now known.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

Symptoms of SARS can vary, but are usually seen within 2 to 7 days, although it may be as long as 10 days.

- High fever (greater than 100.4°F or >38.0°C)
- Chills
- Headache
- Body aches
- Pneumonia
- Diarrhea
- Dry cough
- Low levels of oxygen in the blood (hypoxia)

Some people may need a machine to help them breathe.

Can people with SARS pass the illness to others?

People are most likely to spread the disease when they have symptoms, such as fever and cough. People with SARS are most contagious during the second week of illness. However, as a precaution against spreading the disease, it is recommended that people with SARS limit their activities outside the home (e.g., by not going to work or school) until 10 days after their fever has gone away and their respiratory (breathing) symptoms have gotten better.

How is SARS diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects SARS-CoV, samples of the patient's blood, stool, nasal secretions or other body fluids will be examined.

What is the treatment for SARS?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people with SARS receive the same treatment that would be used for a person with serious pneumonia. Different types of treatment regimens have been used for people who are severely ill and hospitalized, including antibiotics, antiviral drugs and steroids. A specific medicine that can effectively treat SARS has not been identified.

What can be done to prevent SARS?

Some actions that you can take to decrease the chances of respiratory illnesses include:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, especially with unclean hands.
- Encourage people to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze and then wash their hands.

What is the current SARS situation in the world?

The last outbreak of SARS occurred in China in 2004. Though the exact cause of the outbreak has not been determined, the investigation focused primarily on a research facility where experiments using live and inactivated SARS-CoV were being carried out.

Are there currently any travel alerts or advisories related to SARS?

None at this time.

Where can I get more information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/sars

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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