



Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a virus that was first reported in Asia in February 2003.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

The illness usually begins with a high fever (greater than 100.4°F). Along with a fever, a person may also experience chills, a headache, general feeling of discomfort and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms and diarrhea is seen in approximately 10 to 20 percent of those with SARS. After two to seven days, people with SARS may develop a dry, nonproductive cough. The cough may progress to a condition in which the oxygen levels in the blood are low. Most people with SARS develop pneumonia.

When do symptoms of SARS appear?

Symptoms typically appear within two to seven days after being exposed. In some cases, it may be as long as 10 days and in a small number of cases, as long as 14 days.

How long is a person with SARS contagious?

People with SARS are most likely contagious only when they have symptoms. As a precaution, it is recommended that persons with SARS limit their interactions outside of the home (for example, by not going to work or school) until 10 days after their fever has gone away and their respiratory symptoms have gotten better.

How is SARS spread?

SARS primarily is spread by close person-to-person contact. 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 person known to have SARS. Close contact does not include activities such as walking by a person or briefly sitting across a waiting room or office. SARS is thought to be spread most readily by respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is possible that SARS might be spread more broadly through the air or by other ways that are not currently known.

How is SARS treated?

The CDC recommends people with SARS receive the same treatment that would be used for a person with any serious community-acquired atypical pneumonia. SARS is being tested against various antiviral drugs to see if a treatment can be found.

How can you prevent SARS?

The most important thing you can do to help prevent SARS is to practice frequent hand washing with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands. When coughing or sneezing, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. Throw soiled tissues away after each use. Cough/sneeze into your sleeve if a tissue is unavailable.

For More Information:

For questions about SARS or other health topics, contact the Sedgwick County Health Department Epidemiology Office at 660-7300.

You can also find more information at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/faq.htm