

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME

What is SARS?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a new illness that is caused by a virus (germ). SARS starts with a fever and a cough that may be mild, or may get worse quickly. SARS may cause pneumonia (new-MOAN-yuh) and other serious breathing problems. Some people infected with SARS may become very sick, and even die. SARS may spread easily between people during close, face-to-face contact.

What causes SARS?

- SARS is caused by a new virus that has never been seen in people before. SARS may be spread in places where people are in close contact with each other. Infected people can spread SARS to others by coughing or sneezing. During coughing and sneezing, tiny droplets of water from the lungs are put in the air. You cannot see these droplets, but if you are close enough you could breathe them in. If the droplets you breathe contain the SARS virus, you may become infected.
- SARS may also be spread by touching something that has the SARS virus on it. SARS may live for a short time on solid surfaces, such as tables or countertops. SARS may also live for a short time on objects such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, and telephones. If you touch an infected object and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth, you may get SARS. Washing your hands often with soap and water decreases your chance of getting SARS and other illnesses.

Who has a greater chance of getting SARS?

You have to come in direct contact with the SARS virus to get it. Ways you may be exposed to the SARS virus include:

- Traveling to an area where SARS has spread in the community.
- Having close contact with someone who became sick within 10 days of returning from a SARS outbreak area.
- Living with, visiting, or caring for a person that has SARS.

What are the signs and symptoms of SARS?

The first symptoms of SARS usually start within 2 to 7 days after being exposed to the virus. Some people take as long as two weeks to become ill after being exposed to the SARS virus. Symptoms of SARS can be mild or severe (very bad). The following are signs and symptoms of SARS:

- Fever is usually the first sign that you are sick. You may have a temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher. You may also have chills.
- You may have body aches and headaches.
- Within 7 days of getting a fever, you may start to have a dry cough.
- You may have nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea (di-uh-REE-uh).
- You may feel dizzy.
- If your SARS is serious, you may have trouble breathing.

How is SARS diagnosed?

- Before coming in contact with caregivers, tell them that you have been exposed to SARS. Caregivers will decide if you have SARS based on your symptoms and possible exposure to the virus. There are tests that can be done to help your caregivers learn what may be causing your symptoms. These tests may include chest x-rays, blood tests, and samples taken from your nose and throat.
- Having a fever or a cough does not mean that you have SARS for sure. Many other illnesses start with the same symptoms. You cannot get SARS unless you were exposed to the virus. Most countries quickly isolate (separate) people with SARS so that they cannot give it to others. This means that SARS has not spread in the community in most countries. Ask your caregiver for the most up-to-date information about areas that have SARS in the community.
- Your caregiver will not consider SARS as the cause of your illness unless:
 - You have an illness that affects your lungs or breathing.
 - You have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.
 - You were exposed to the virus in one of the following ways:
 - You visited an area that had SARS illness in the community. You need to have traveled to the area within 10 days of becoming sick.

- You have had close contact with someone who became sick within 10 days of visiting a SARS-affected area.
- You were around someone who had SARS and became sick within 10 days of the exposure.

How is SARS treated?

Treatment for SARS depends upon how bad your symptoms are. If you are only mildly ill, you may recover at home. If you have trouble breathing, you may need to stay in the hospital. If your SARS is serious, you may need a machine to help you breathe. There is no medicine that cures or prevents SARS. You may get medicine to help symptoms such as fever and coughing. You may need medicine to help your breathing.

How can I avoid catching SARS when I travel?

- Avoid traveling to areas that have a public outbreak of SARS in the community.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Bring germ-killing hand lotion or gel with you when you travel. You can use the lotion or gel to clean your hands when there is no water available. Alcohol-based products work best.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth unless you have washed your hands first.
- If you must travel to an area with a SARS outbreak, avoid being around large groups of people.
- Ask your caregiver if you need to bring disposable gloves or masks with you. This may depend on where you are traveling. For the most current information on SARS, contact the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333
(404) 639-3311
(800) 311-3435
www.cdc.gov

World Health Organization
525, 23rd Street,
N.W. Washington District of Columbia 20037
(202) 974-3000
Fax: (202) 974-3663

<http://www.who.int>
info@who.int

How can I protect myself while caring for someone who has SARS?

- Wash your hands before and after going into the person's room.
- Have the sick person wear a mask when others are in the room with them.
- If the SARS patient cannot wear a mask, have them cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
- Everyone should wear a mask when visiting a SARS patient if the patient cannot wear one.
- Clean all items and surfaces touched by the SARS patient. Do this often. Use a household cleanser that kills germs. Wear disposable gloves while cleaning. Wash your hands before and after wearing the gloves. Only use the gloves once, and then throw them away.
- Do not share bedding, linens, or eating utensils with a SARS patient. These items may be used again after they have been cleaned with hot water and soap. You can clean these items by hand, or by using a dishwasher or washing machine.
- Use disposable (single-use) gloves while handling or washing bedding, eating utensils, or tissues that were used by the SARS patient.
- Pay close attention to how you feel. If you get a fever, cough, or start feeling sick, seek medical attention right away.

How can I keep from giving the SARS virus to others?

If caregivers have told you that you have SARS, your caregiver is required by law to report your SARS illness to the health department. Stay home and away from people until you are no longer contagious (kun-TA-jus). Do the following things until your caregiver says that you can no longer spread your SARS virus to others:

- Tell caregivers that you may have SARS before they come in direct contact with you. They need to take steps to protect themselves and others from the virus.
- You are most likely to give SARS to others during the time that you have symptoms. Do not allow visitors in the room with you unless it is absolutely necessary.

- Infants, children, elderly people, and people who have weak immune systems should not visit you. They are at high risk of catching SARS.
- Wear a mask when other people are in the room with you. If you cannot wear a mask, then your visitors should wear one. Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when you sneeze or cough.
- Wash your hands before and after eating, touching things or people, and going to the bathroom.
- You may be able to give SARS to others for a short time after you have gotten better. Stay home until your caregiver says you can no longer give the SARS virus to others. You may need to stay away from others until you are free of SARS symptoms for 10 days or longer. Do not go to work, school, or other public areas until your caregiver says it's OK.

Risks:

If you have SARS you may become very sick. You could easily spread SARS to others and make them very sick also. Other people need to take special measures to be sure they do not get the SARS virus from you. SARS may cause serious pneumonia and lung damage. You may need to stay in an intensive care unit in the hospital. You may need a machine to help you breathe. You may die from SARS.

Care Agreement:

You have the right to help plan your care. To help with this plan, you must learn about your health condition and how it may be treated. You can then discuss treatment options with your caregivers. Work with them to decide what care may be used to treat you. You always have the right to refuse treatment.

References:

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION: SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS). 2003. AVAILABLE AT: WWW.CDC.GOV/NCIDOD/SARS/ (CITED 4/12/03).

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, COMMUNICABLE DISEASE SURVEILLANCE & RESPONSE (CSR) SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) 2003. AVAILABLE AT: WWW.WHO.INT/CSR/SARS/EN/ (CITED 4/12/03).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE: PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT, SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME. 2003. AVAILABLE AT: WWW.TRAVEL.STATE.GOV/SARS_ANNOUNCE.HTML. (CITED 4/11/03).

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LEE N, HUI D, ET AL.: A MAJOR OUTBREAK OF SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME IN HONG KONG. THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE. AVAILABLE AT: [WWW.NEJM.ORG](http://www.nejm.org). PUBLISHED ONLINE 4/7/03.

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- **For more information about SARS, please see the SARS document written for professionals.**
- **For more information about the CareNotes™ System, please see the CareNotes™ product page at <http://www.micromedex.com/products/carenotes/>.**