



Health  
Canada

Santé  
Canada

Canada

# Flu SARS



*For more information, call Health Canada's toll-free Flu / SARS line: 1-800-454-8302 or contact the local public health authority.*

Our Mission is to help the people of Canada  
maintain and improve their health.

*Health Canada*

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# FACTS ABOUT FLU

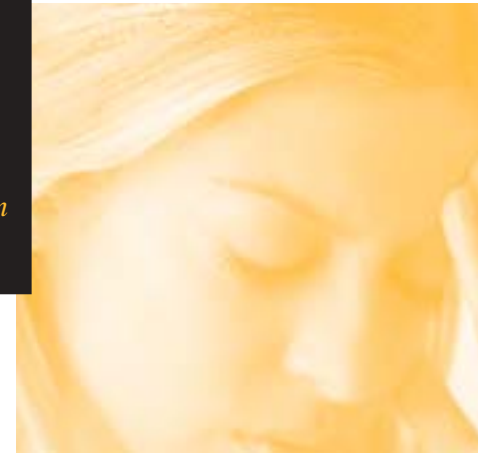
Flu is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. Various strains of the flu virus circulate throughout the world year-round causing local outbreaks. In Canada, flu season usually runs from November to April, and an estimated 10-25% of Canadians may get the flu each year.

## SYMPTOMS

Flu typically starts with a headache, chills and a cough followed rapidly by:

- fever
- loss of appetite
- muscle aches
- fatigue
- runny nose
- sneezing
- watery eyes
- throat irritation

*Children may also have nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, but these symptoms are not common in adults with flu.*



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## HOW FLU SPREADS

The flu virus spreads easily and quickly through droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air by someone who has flu. The flu virus is also found on the hands of people with flu and on surfaces they touch. You can get the flu if:

- you breathe in these droplets through your nose or mouth
- the droplets land directly on your eyes
- you shake hands with infected people or touch contaminated surfaces and transfer the virus to your nose, mouth or eyes

## HEALTH EFFECTS OF FLU

Most people recover within a week to 10 days, but some groups are at greater risk for serious health effects, including pneumonia. Those at greater risk include:

- very young children
- people over 65
- anyone with a medical condition such as chronic respiratory disease (e.g., asthma), heart or kidney disease, diabetes, or a depressed immune system

# FACTS ABOUT SARS

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory illness caused by a previously unknown type of coronavirus. Normally, coronaviruses cause mild to moderate upper respiratory symptoms, such as the common cold. SARS is new, and scientists are still searching for answers to many questions about this illness.



## SYMPTOMS

People with SARS develop a fever higher than 38°C (100.4°F), followed by respiratory symptoms, such as:

- cough
- shortness of breath
- difficulty breathing

Other symptoms may include:

- chills
- sore throat
- headaches
- diarrhea
- muscle aches

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## HOW SARS SPREADS

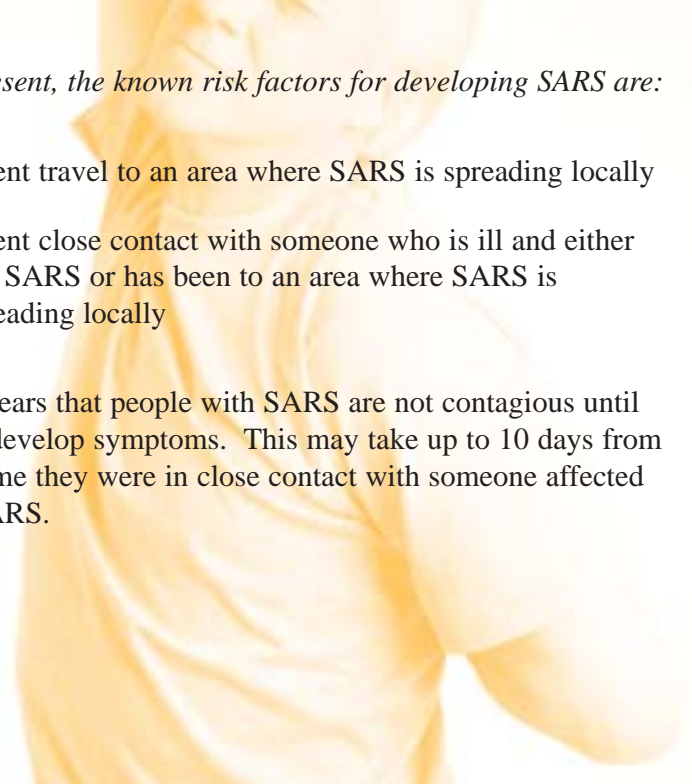
SARS is spread through close contact with someone infected with the virus that causes SARS. Examples of close contact include:

- living in the same household
- providing care to someone with SARS
- having direct contact with the respiratory secretions and body fluids of someone affected by SARS

*At present, the known risk factors for developing SARS are:*

- recent travel to an area where SARS is spreading locally
- recent close contact with someone who is ill and either has SARS or has been to an area where SARS is spreading locally

It appears that people with SARS are not contagious until they develop symptoms. This may take up to 10 days from the time they were in close contact with someone affected by SARS.



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## **HEALTH EFFECTS OF SARS**

Some cases of SARS progress to severe pneumonia or respiratory failure, and this can be fatal. The health effects are more severe for people who are older or have an underlying medical condition such as diabetes.

There is no quick test for SARS. If you have symptoms that could be SARS, please contact your health care provider or the local public health authority. Your health care provider will decide how to manage your case based on your specific symptoms and risk factors for SARS. If necessary, your doctor can request specific tests for the SARS virus.

## **IS IT FLU OR SARS?**

There are concerns that SARS could re-emerge during the winter months. Flu and SARS have similar symptoms, and it may be difficult to distinguish one type of infection from the other when symptoms first appear.



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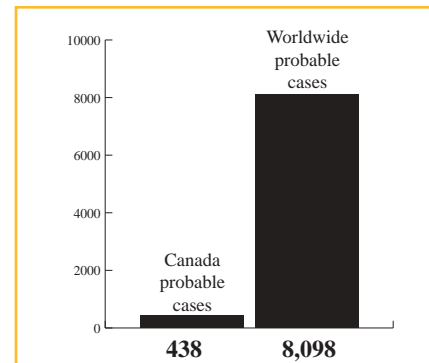
## KEEPING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

For most people, the risks from flu far outweigh the risks from SARS.

Flu causes an estimated 250,000-500,000 deaths worldwide each year. As many as 500-1,500 Canadians, mostly seniors, die annually from pneumonia related to flu.

During the global SARS outbreak of 2003, there were:

- 8,098 probable cases and 774 deaths from SARS worldwide
- 438 probable or suspected SARS cases, causing 44 deaths in Canada



## REDUCING RISKS

The best protection against flu is an influenza vaccination (flu shot) every year. You should discuss the possibility of getting an influenza vaccine with your health care provider. Flu shots do not protect you against SARS or other respiratory infections.



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Regular hand washing helps reduce the spread of many infections, including flu and SARS. Wash your hands often. Use lots of soap and warm running water, and rub your hands together briskly for at least 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand rubs are also effective and convenient.

### **ADVICE FOR TRAVELLERS**

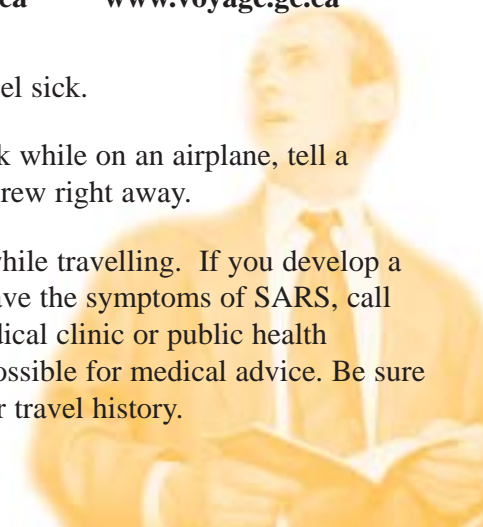
- The best advice we can provide Canadians travelling outside Canada is to contact your family physician or a travel health professional to discuss all potential health issues, including SARS and influenza. You should also discuss the possibility of getting an influenza vaccine with your health care provider to protect against the flu and to reduce the chances of having an illness that can mimic SARS.

- You might also find it helpful to learn about the health risks in the country or countries you plan to visit, your own risk of disease and the steps you can take to prevent illness:

**[www.travelhealth.gc.ca](http://www.travelhealth.gc.ca)**

**[www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)**

- Do not travel if you feel sick.
- If you start feeling sick while on an airplane, tell a member of the flight crew right away.
- Monitor your health while travelling. If you develop a fever and think you have the symptoms of SARS, call ahead to a doctor, medical clinic or public health authority as soon as possible for medical advice. Be sure to tell them about your travel history.



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## **SCREENING TRAVELLERS FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES**

Health Canada coordinates screening measures at Canada's international airports to reduce the spread of serious infectious diseases. As part of these screening measures, Quarantine Officers will be working on-site at international airports in:

- Vancouver
- Edmonton
- Calgary
- Montreal (Dorval and Mirabel)
- Ottawa
- Toronto
- Halifax

Health Canada will continue to work with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international partners on global surveillance for infectious diseases. If there is a major international outbreak of a serious infectious disease, Health Canada will implement additional screening measures as necessary.

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For current information about SARS, influenza and travel medicine issues, you can visit these web sites:

**[www.sars.gc.ca](http://www.sars.gc.ca)**  
**[www.healthcanada.ca/flu](http://www.healthcanada.ca/flu)**  
**[www.travelhealth.gc.ca](http://www.travelhealth.gc.ca)**  
**[www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)**