

Important Health Notice

Information for Healthcare Professionals

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New SARS Cases in China

Dear Colleagues:

This notice is to inform you of the evolving SARS situation in China.

According to the Chinese Ministry of Health, there are two confirmed and two suspected cases of SARS in China; one of the suspect cases has died. The index case, one of the confirmed cases, and one of the suspect cases are laboratory workers. As investigations are ongoing, number of confirmed and suspect cases is expected to change. Confirmation of cases appears on the WHO website - expect reporting delays in updated confirmed numbers while the information is verified.

In light of the developing situation in China, all healthcare providers are advised to adopt heightened vigilance for febrile respiratory illness (FRI) in patients and clients.

Healthcare providers should screen patients and clients for FRI using the screening tool, including inquiring about a travel history to China, Taiwan or Hong Kong within the last 30 days, or close contact with a person who has visited the above geographic areas within the last 30 days. Attached, for your convenience, is the FRI screening tool for acute care and non-acute health care facilities.

While Ontario's healthcare system continues to operate under non-outbreak conditions, this heightened vigilance and the appropriate application of infection control measures is necessary when dealing with patients and clients with respiratory infections.

Provincial Infection Control and Surveillance Standards and Guidelines for FRI were recently established for health care settings across Ontario, including acute care hospitals, non-acute care facilities and community health settings. These standards and guidelines, together with the screening tool for FRI, are available on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubh_ealth/sars/sars_mn.html

Healthcare providers are reminded to follow the infection control and surveillance protocols outlined for their healthcare setting, including initiation of droplet precautions at the point of first contact of patients and clients who present with respiratory symptoms and follow-up laboratory testing and appropriate reporting in the event of a positive FRI screen with epi link.

Additional information on SARS can be found on the following websites:

Health Canada:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgsp/sars-sras/prof_e.html

World Health Organization:

<http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/>

You may also call the Emergency Management Unit SARS hotline at: **1-866-212-2272**

The MOHLTC would like to thank all of Ontario's healthcare providers for their dedication, hard work and continuing vigilance as we work together to strengthen our healthcare system and protect healthcare workers and the public from SARS and other infectious diseases.

Sincerely,

(original signed by)

Dr Sheela Basrur
Chief Medical Officer of Health and
Assistant Deputy Minister

(original signed by)

Allison J. Stuart
Director, Emergency Management Unit



Febrile Respiratory Illness Screener

Screening Questions to be Asked of Patients as Part of an Active Screening Process

1. Do you have new / worse cough or shortness of breath?

- if 'no', stop here (no further questions)
- if 'yes', continue with next question:

2. Are you feeling feverish, have you had shakes or chills in the last 24 hours?

- if 'no', take temperature; if >38 C, continue with next questions, otherwise stop (no further questions)
- if yes, take temperature and continue with next questions:

Initiate droplet precautions if "yes" to 1 and 2.

3. Is any of the following true?

- Have you lived in or visited China, Taiwan or Hong Kong within the last 30 days?
- Have you had contact in the last 30 days with a sick person who has traveled to these same areas?

Patients with FRI (fever and respiratory symptoms) and answered 'yes' to any of these exposures / conditions may potentially have severe respiratory illness (SRI).

Initiate droplet precautions and notify infection control if "yes" to 1, 2 and 3.

Infection control to notify public health.

Additional questions to be asked of all admitted patients:

4. Do you work for a healthcare agency or organization?

5. Are you a resident of a long-term care institution?

Initiate droplet precautions and notify infection control if "yes" to 1, 2 and either 4 or 5.

Infection control to notify public health.

Droplet Precautions¹:

The use of surgical masks and eye protection or face shields on the part of healthcare workers when encountering patients who have respiratory infections especially if associated with coughing, sneezing, felt to be transmissible principally by large respiratory droplets particularly when within one metre of such a patient. Also used where appropriate to protect the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth of the healthcare worker during procedures and patient care activities likely to generate splashes or sprays of blood, body fluids, secretions or excretions (e.g., airway suctioning).

¹ Preventing Respiratory Illnesses, Protecting Patients and Staff. Infection Control and Surveillance Standards for Febrile Respiratory Illness (FRI) in Non-Outbreak Conditions in Acute Care Hospitals, December, 2003