



INFORMATION

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

Q: What is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)?

A: SARS is a new form of atypical pneumonia in which affected individuals develop fever, followed by respiratory symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. Other symptoms of SARS include muscle aches, headaches, and sore throat. Currently, the cause of SARS is unknown, and no infectious agents have been identified.

Q: How do people get it?

A: SARS is spread through close contact with someone who is infected. Close contact includes living in the same household or caring for someone with SARS, having face-to-face contact (within one metre), or being exposed to coughing, sneezing or other respiratory secretions.

Q: Who is at greatest risk?

A: Individuals who have had direct contact with a SARS patient, or have travelled to China; Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam (the city of Hanoi), or some specific health facilities (Scarborough Grace and York Central hospitals) in Toronto should monitor themselves for 10 days, watching for symptoms.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: Symptoms include:

- Sudden onset of fever (greater than 38°C or 100.4°F);
- One or more of the following respiratory symptoms: dry cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Headaches, muscle aches and a general feeling of being unwell are common at the start.

Q: How is SARS diagnosed?

A: There is no test for SARS, so doctors are using the following criteria to diagnose suspect and probable cases:

- A suspect case is a person who develops a fever and one or more respiratory symptoms within 10 days of having had close contact with a "probable" case of SARS, or returning from travel to areas in Asia where SARS cases are being reported.
- A probable case is similar to a suspect case, but often patients have a more severe illness, with progressive shortness of breath and difficulty breathing, and in some cases, x-rays show signs of atypical pneumonia.

Q: How is it treated?

A: In Canada, patients with SARS are being treated in hospital with antibiotics and antiviral agents and are receiving supportive care. In some cases the respiratory symptoms become increasingly severe, and people require oxygen support and mechanical ventilation. Patients are being kept in isolation rooms and hospital staff are using appropriate precautions.

Q: What should I do if I think I have SARS?

A: Containment and early treatment of this disease is important for public health. If you have recently traveled to Asia, visited an affected health facility, or had close contact with someone who has SARS and you develop symptoms within 10 days, you should seek medical attention. Call ahead to your family physician or nearest hospital and proceed there as soon as possible.

Q: Is SARS in Saskatchewan?

A: In late March, one patient was treated in Saskatoon hospital as a potential case of SARS. Based on the patient's symptoms and travel history, the patient met the Health Canada criteria for a suspected case. The patient has recovered, but will continue to be counted as a suspect case until there is a definitive test to confirm or rule out the disease. There are no other suspect or probable cases in Saskatchewan.

Q: What is being done in Saskatchewan to prepare for a possible case of SARS?

A: Saskatchewan Health has been coordinating a provincial response to SARS. For example, physicians and other health providers have been notified to be on the alert for suspected cases of the new disease, and have been given information on infection control guidelines and testing procedures related to SARS.

Saskatchewan Health is also participating in the national coordinating committee, which is sharing epidemiologic and clinical information, and developing recommendations on infection control and public health control measures.

Regional Health Authorities are developing plans to safely deal with a small number of SARS and are working with Saskatchewan Health to develop contingency plans for handling larger patient numbers.

Q: How many SARS cases are there in Canada and throughout the world?

A: Health Canada and the World Health Organization provide daily updates on the number of suspect and confirmed cases. The latest information from Health Canada is available at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html and from the World Health Organization at www.who.int/csr/table/en/index.html.

Q: Are there any restrictions on foreign travel?

A: Due to the mounting concern about transmission of the SARS agent in non-hospital and community settings in the City of Hanoi, Vietnam; the People's Republic of China including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; Singapore; and Taiwan, Health Canada recommends that persons planning to travel to these areas should defer all travel until further notice. For further information on this travel advisory, please see: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspssp/tmp-pmv/2003/sars0402_e.html.

Are there any restrictions on travel within Canada?

Health Canada has not placed restrictions on travel within Canada. It is unlikely that someone who has not had close contact with someone with SARS will develop it. Just being present in the Toronto or Vancouver airport, for example, is not considered to be a high-risk activity.

For more information on SARS, please visit the [Health Canada](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) website or call Health Canada toll-free at 1-800-454-8302.