

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Interim Information for Travellers Leaving Canada

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This document has been developed to provide information to people who have chosen not to defer travel to SARS affected areas. As more information about the cause, communicability and transmission of this illness becomes available, the recommendations provided in this document may change.

The material provided in this document has been adopted from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, and modified through consultations among federal, provincial, territorial and local public health officials across Canada. Health Canada would like to acknowledge the significant and ongoing contributions of all participating stakeholders.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Information for Travellers Leaving Canada

SARS is a respiratory illness that has recently been reported in Asia, North America, and Europe. The illness usually begins with a fever (measured temperature greater than 38.0°C (100.4°F)). The fever is sometimes associated with chills or other symptoms, including headache, general feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough) at the outset. In Canada, older people (i.e, over 70 years) and those with medical problems seem to be at higher risk of developing the serious form of this illness and ultimately at higher risk of death.

Health Canada has issued a travel advisory to defer all travel to Mainland China; Hong Kong; Singapore; Taiwan and Hanoi, Vietnam, until further notice. All people considering travelling to these locations should read the travel advisory (see www.sars.gc.ca) and check regularly for any changes in the travel advisory.

Travellers are advised that they will have to depend upon the local medical services in the countries where they reside or visit, and are reminded that the health care services may be inadequate for the appropriate management of SARS. In addition, medical evacuation of a patient with SARS may be very difficult. Canadian Missions may not be able to assist Canadians with SARS with medical transportation out of the region or back to Canada.

There have been cases of SARS reported in Canada and the United States in people returning from travel to Asia. If you are scheduled to go to one of these affected areas and choose to not to defer travel, please keep the following guidelines in mind.

Before you leave:

- Assemble a travel health kit containing basic first aid and medical supplies. Be sure to include a thermometer, household disinfectant, a supply of masks (see www.sars.gc.ca for further details), disposable gloves and alcohol-based hand rubs for hand hygiene.
- Inform yourself and others who may be traveling with you about SARS. For information about this illness, see www.sars.gc.ca
- Be sure you are up to date with all your immunizations (shots), and see your healthcare provider at least 4 to 6 weeks before travel to get any additional immunizations or information you may need. For information on Health Canada health recommendations for international travel, see www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/tmp-pmv
- You may wish to check your health insurance plan or get additional insurance that covers medical evacuation in the event of illness.
- Identify in-country healthcare resources in advance of your trip.

While you are in an area with SARS:

People with SARS may give this disease to close personal contacts, that is, people they live with or travel with, and any others like healthcare providers that may come into contact with fluids (secretions) from the respiratory tract of the ill person.

To protect against SARS infection, **wash your hands** frequently. As much as possible avoid crowds. If you find yourself in a situation where you are concerned that you may come into close contact with an ill person, you may wish to wear a mask.

If you think you, a family member or someone you are in close contact with has SARS or symptoms compatible with SARS:

If you or a family member becomes ill with fever and respiratory symptoms (for example, cough or shortness of breath), it is strongly recommended that the ill person see a physician as soon as possible. The physician should be contacted by **phone** prior to the visit, and informed that the ill person has the symptoms of SARS. The nearest Canadian Embassy or Consular Office can help you find a physician in the area. Again, you are encouraged to identify these resources in advance of travelling.

The sick person may be required to follow isolation procedures, including hospitalization at a designated facility, instituted by the country you are visiting. Travelling companions in close contact with the sick person may also be required to limit their activities and quarantine themselves for a specified period of time.

Unless instructed to quarantine themselves, travelling companions do not need to restrict their outside activities as long as they are feeling well. They should notify a physician immediately if they start to feel unwell and develop a cough or fever or any other respiratory symptoms.

Do not travel while sick with SARS, and limit contact with others as much as possible to help prevent the spread of any infectious illness you or your family member may have.

There are many potential causes of respiratory illnesses. Many people who have the early symptoms of SARS, including headache, chills, fever and cough, will not actually have SARS. In general, when you are around ill people it is always wise to wash your hands frequently and avoid contact with respiratory secretions from the ill person (e.g. by not sharing glasses or cutlery, touching used facial tissues etc.). The person who is ill should cover their mouth and nose with a facial tissue when coughing or sneezing. These basic hygiene measures will help reduce the spread of most types of respiratory illness.

Extra precautions including the use of masks and gloves would only be recommended if the ill person is diagnosed with SARS.

After your return:

People returning from one of the affected areas should monitor their health for 10 days. Any person who becomes ill with fever AND one or more of the following symptoms – chills, muscle aches, feeling generally “unwell”, headache, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, during the 10 day period, should call their personal physician or their local public health authority and tell him or her about their symptoms and recent travel history.

A physician should evaluate household members or other close contacts of persons with SARS who develop fever and other symptoms of SARS. In advance of the evaluation, your doctor’s office should be informed **by telephone** that the individual is a close contact of a person with SARS. Household members or other close contacts with symptoms of SARS will receive instructions from their physician or local public health authority regarding the precautions they should take to avoid spreading their illness to others.

For general information on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) visit the Health Canada website at: www.sars.gc.ca or phone 1-800-454-8302