



## **SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)**

### **What is SARS?**

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. The illness spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia before the SARS global outbreak of 2003 was contained.

### **Who gets SARS?**

Anyone can become infected, but cases of SARS have been reported mainly among people who have had direct close contact with an infected person, such as those sharing a household with a SARS patient and health care workers who did not use infection prevention procedures while taking care of a SARS patient. In the United States, there have been signs of community spread, though spread to close contacts and health care workers has not occurred.

### **How does SARS spread?**

The main way that SARS seems to spread is by close person-to-person contact. The virus that causes SARS is thought to be transmitted most readily by respiratory droplets (droplet spread) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplet spread can happen when droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled a short distance (generally up to three feet) through the air and deposited on the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, or eyes of persons who are nearby. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eye(s). In addition, it is possible that the SARS virus might spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread) or by other ways that are not now known.

### **What are the symptoms of SARS?**

In general, SARS begins with a high fever (temperature greater than 100.4 degrees F [ $>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$ ]). Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also have mild respiratory symptoms at the outset. About 10% to 20% of patients have diarrhea (loose stools).

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The time between exposure to SARS-CoV and the onset of symptoms is called the "incubation period." The incubation period for SARS is typically two to seven days, although in some cases it may be as long as 10 days. In a very small proportion of cases, incubation periods of up to 14 days have been reported.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

Yes, SARS has spread from ill people to others through close contact.

## **What is the treatment for SARS?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that patients with SARS receive the same treatment that would be used for a patient with any serious community-acquired atypical pneumonia. SARS-CoV is being tested against various antiviral drugs to see if an effective treatment can be found.

## **What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of SARS?**

The most important way to prevent the spread of SARS is frequent hand washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub. Individuals should also avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands and encourage others to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

## **Resources**

CDC, SARS Frequently Asked Questions, <https://www.cdc.gov/sars/about/faq.html>