

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). It was first recognized in March 2003, when it caused a global outbreak after first appearing in Southern China in November 2002. A total of 8,098 people worldwide became sick and 774 died. The outbreak ended in July 2003 and no cases have appeared since then.

Symptoms

Symptoms appear 2 to 10 days after exposure to a person with SARS and include:

- High fever (temperature >100.4° F) with chills, headache, general sick feeling, and body aches.
- Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms
- After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry, nonproductive cough
- The cough gradually worsens, making it difficult to take in oxygen and often causing pneumonia
- Some people have diarrhea.

Transmission

- SARS-CoV is thought to be transmitted when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air. These fluids from the nose and throat can be propelled up to 3 feet from a cough or sneeze and may infect people who breathe them in or get them in the mouth, nose, or eye. The droplets can also fall on a surface or object that people touch and pick up the germs, which later get into the eyes or mouth.
- People who cared for or lived with a person with SARS are most likely to get sick. Other people may be exposed through kissing, hugging, sharing eating or drinking utensils, close conversation (within 3 feet), physical examination, and any other direct physical contact between people. This does not include walking past an ill person or sitting in the same room.
- People with SARS are most likely to be contagious only when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. Patients are most contagious during the second week of illness. However, as a precaution against spreading the disease, CDC recommends that persons with SARS limit their interactions outside the home (for example, by not going to work or to school) until 10 days after their fever has gone away and their respiratory (breathing) symptoms have gotten better.

Treatment

- People exposed to SARS should measure temperature twice a day and watch for respiratory symptoms for 10 days following exposure and notify their health-care provider immediately if fever or other symptoms develop.
- People with SARS receive treatment for symptoms, possibly including oxygen, intensive care, or being put on a breathing machine. There is no known cure, but antiviral drugs are being tested for use on SARS.

Prevention

- Cover your cough and sneeze into your elbow or shirt sleeve
- Frequent hand washing with soap and water or use of an alcohol-based hand rub can prevent SARS and many other diseases. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands.
- All cases of SARS that occurred in the U.S. in 2003 had traveled to areas of the world where outbreaks were occurring. Before traveling, check the CDC web site (www.cdc.gov) for alerts about outbreaks around the world and avoid traveling to outbreak areas.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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