

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## SARS

### What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. SARS was first seen in Asia in February 2003 and spread to over two dozen countries in North America, South America and Asia before the outbreak of 2003 ended.

### How is the disease spread?

SARS is mainly spread through close person-to-person contact. According to the CDC, SARS is spread when someone with the disease coughs or sneezes droplets into the air. The virus can also spread when a person touches an object or surface with the virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth. SARS might also spread through the air or by other unknown ways.

### What does “close contact mean”?

For SARS, close contact means having lived with or cared for a person with SARS. It also means having direct contact with respiratory droplets or body fluids from a SARS patient. Close contact includes:

- Hugging and kissing
- Sharing eating or drinking utensils
- Talking within 3 feet to someone who has SARS.

Close contact does not include walking by a person or briefly sitting across the room.

### What are the signs and symptoms of SARS?

SARS usually begins with a fever greater than 100.4° F. The disease may cause chills, headache, and body aches. Some people may have mild respiratory symptoms. After 2 to 7 days, patients may get a dry cough and have trouble breathing. Most patients develop pneumonia.

### Who is at greatest risk of getting the disease?

People who have had direct contact with an infected person, and health care workers who did not use infection control procedures while caring for a SARS patient, are at greatest risk.

### What precautions can I take?

While you are in an area with SARS :

- Wash your hands often to protect against SARS infection. Alcohol-based hand rubs may be used if soap and water are not available and if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Avoid close contact with large numbers of people as much as possible to decrease the chance of infection.
- CDC does not recommend routine use of masks or other personal, protective equipment while in public areas.

CDC recommends that U.S. travelers take the following safety measures to protect their health:

- Avoid settings where SARS is most likely to be transmitted; such as health care facilities caring for SARS patients.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs may be used if soap and water is not available and if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Stay informed about SARS using various websites, including <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/> and [www.who.int/csr/sars/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/)
- Follow recommended travel and infection control advisories (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel.htm>).

## How is SARS treated?

The CDC recommends that patients with SARS get the same treatment that is used for community acquired atypical pneumonia of an unknown cause. This includes medications used for atypical and typical respiratory diseases and supportive care such as, hydration and nutrition treatment.

## Are there any travel restrictions related to SARS?

CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO) issue [travel advisories](#) or [travel alerts](#) as needed.

- A [travel alert](#) informs people about a health concern and precautions to take in a particular area.
- A [travel advisory](#) informs people about a possible, more serious situation and advises that all unnecessary travel be delayed.

Visit the CDC and/or WHO websites listed below for travel recommendations.

## Where can I get more information about SARS?

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/index.htm) and the World Health Organization at [www.who.int/csr/sars/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/).

**For more information on SARS, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free  
1 (800) 848-5533**