

COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE
COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT
SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME
(SARS)

Adapted from CDC Guidelines of May 15, 2003

THE ILLNESS

What is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)?

SARS is a respiratory illness that has recently been reported in a number of countries. CDC has indicated that the most likely cause of SARS is the Coronavirus. For additional information, check the World Health Organization's (WHO) website at www.who.int/en or visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars.

What are the symptoms and signs of SARS?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the main symptoms and signs of SARS include a fever greater than 100.4° F (38° C), and cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing.

If I were exposed to SARS, how long would it take for me to become sick?

Initial information from the investigations in Hong Kong and Hanoi indicates that the incubation period for SARS is between 2 and 7 days on average.

How does the disease (SARS) spread?

It is difficult this early in the investigation to say exactly how SARS spreads. Close contacts of cases, including health care workers and family members have developed similar illnesses. Examples of close contact include having cared for, lived with, or had direct contact with respiratory secretions and body fluids of people with SARS.

Can SARS be transmitted through contact with an inanimate object?

What has been seen so far is a pattern of transmission related to direct close contact with a person with SARS. In areas where person-to-person transmission has been documented, cases have occurred almost exclusively in health care workers or in persons in very close contact with patients, such as family members. Currently, available data indicate that transmission of the infectious agent requires direct and close contact. There is no evidence to date of transmission following casual contact or contact with inanimate objects.

Is SARS an outbreak of the Avian Flu?

There is no evidence at this time that the current cases of SARS are related to Avian flu.

Are there any reports of people having contracted SARS in California?

As of May 9, 2003, the SARS suspect case count in California is 65, involving 17 counties. There have been no deaths. Locally, in Riverside County, there are five (5) suspect cases.

Who is most at risk of contracting SARS?

At this time, cases appear to primarily involve health care workers caring for patients with SARS and close family contacts.

CDC RECOMMENDATIONS

What should I do if I think I have SARS?

If you are ill with fever, accompanied by cough or difficulty breathing, you should consult a health care provider. To help your health care provider make a diagnosis, tell them about any recent travel to regions where cases of SARS have been reported and whether you were in contact with someone who had these symptoms.

What should I do if I have recently traveled to a country where cases of SARS have been reported?

If you become ill with fever, accompanied by cough or difficulty in breathing, you should consult a health care provider and tell them about your recent travel.

What has CDC recommended to prevent transmission of SARS?

CDC has developed interim infection control recommendations for patients with suspected SARS in the health care and community setting. Visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars and review CDC Interim Information and Recommendation for Health Care Providers and CDC Interim Guidance for State and Local Health Departments.

Are there any travel restrictions related to SARS?

At this time there are no travel restrictions in place that are directly related to SARS. However, a CDC travel advisory recommends individuals who are planning non-essential or elective travel to parts of China (Hong Kong, SAR, and Guangdong Province) and Taiwan, may wish to postpone their trip until further notice. As of May 15, 2003, CDC has removed Hanoi, Vietnam from the list. For additional information about travel advisories, check www.cdc.gov/travel, which will be updated as necessary.

Should potential SARS patients be quarantined?

CDC has developed guidelines that address infection control precautions in the health care and community setting. These can be found at CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/> and will be updated as new information about SARS becomes available. It is important to contact the County of Riverside's Department of Public Health to inquire about local requirements.

How should a suspected SARS patient be transported to ensure infection control?

To minimize the potential of transmission outside the hospital, case patients should limit interactions outside the home until more is known about transmission of SARS. Placing a surgical mask on case patients in ambulatory health care settings, during transport, and during contact with others at home is recommended.

Riverside County requires patients with SARS to be on home isolation for 10 days after they are no longer symptomatic.

OTHER

Is there any reason to think SARS is or is not related to terrorism?

Information currently available about SARS indicates that people who appear to be most at risk are either health care workers taking care of sick people or family members or household contacts of those who are infected with SARS. That pattern of transmission is what would typically be expected in a contagious respiratory or flu-like illness.