

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRE-HOSPITAL PERSONNEL

SARS is an emerging Public Health Concern. At this time, it appears that the coronavirus is the most likely cause of this illness. The majority of individuals with SARS present with influenza-like symptoms, which may include fever, muscle aches, headache, sore throat, non-productive cough and sometimes pneumonia by chest x-ray. A small number of patients have developed more severe signs and symptoms, such as shortness of breath and respiratory distress.

Although information concerning SARS continues to evolve, it is important that pre-hospital personnel take appropriate infection control precautions when caring for and/or transporting patients who may have SARS. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) interim guidance for pre-hospital emergency medical care and ground transport of suspected SARS patient(s) is summarized below.

INFECTION CONTROL PRECAUTIONS:

- Standard precautions should be followed. This includes: eye protection to prevent droplet exposure, gowns to protect clothing, and N-95 respirators with appropriate fit-testing.
- Suspected SARS patients should be transported using the minimum number of EMS personnel
- Thorough hand hygiene is essential for personnel working with possible SARS patients. SARS may be transmitted by infectious particles, which are left on environmental surfaces and transferred by unwashed hands to a person's face, eyes, or mouth.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION:

- Transport vehicles should be cleaned by staff wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, disposable gowns, and eye protection).
- An EPA-registered hospital disinfectant should be used to clean patient care compartments.
- Reusable equipment should be cleaned and disinfected according to manufacturer's instructions.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP OF PRE-HOSPITAL PERSONNEL

- Personnel who have transported and/or cared for a suspected SARS patient and develop a fever of 100.4°F or higher, with respiratory symptoms, within 10 days of the exposure, should immediately notify their supervisor and/or Designated Officer.
- Symptomatic individuals should seek medical care and not report to work until cleared to do so. The physician's office or hospital must be notified in advance of the EMT's exposure to suspect SARS patient, so that appropriate precautions may be taken.
- Designated Officers must report the suspect SARS patient and exposed EMT to the Public Health Department at:
 - Weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (909) 358-5107
 - **Weeknights, Weekends, and Holidays (909) 782-2974**
- Personnel may continue to work during the 10 day post-exposure period, if they have no symptoms of fever or respiratory illness.

Information on SARS is updated on a frequent basis by CDC. For more detailed information on SARS, please go to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars. A fact sheet with the most frequently asked questions is attached for your information.

Please contact the Disease Control Officer at (909) 358-5107 if you have questions on these guidelines.