



# SARS

(Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)

## 1. What is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)?

SARS is a new illness that can lead to a severe form of pneumonia. It was first identified in late February and early March 2003 when people became ill in Hanoi (Vietnam), Hong Kong, Singapore, Toronto and Vancouver.

Looking back, it is now believed that a large outbreak that began in November 2002 in Guangdong Province in China is also due to SARS. Guangdong Province is right next to Hong Kong in China. The largest number of cases of SARS has occurred in Guangdong Province and Hong Kong.

## 2. Who is at risk of getting SARS?

- ◆ People who have had close contact with a person who is sick with SARS.

## 3. What are the symptoms of SARS?

The first symptom of SARS is a fever. The fever is usually quite high (greater than 38°C or 100.4°F) and begins suddenly. People with SARS may also have chills, headache, tiredness, sore muscles and sometimes a cough. Over the next 3 to 7 days cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing may develop. X rays of the lungs usually show signs of pneumonia. To be called a “suspect case of SARS” you need to have one of the risk factors discussed in question #2 **AND** a fever **AND** a cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing not due to any other cause.

## 4. How is SARS spread?

SARS is spread when fluids from the nose or mouth of the person sick with SARS enters the nose, mouth or eyes of another person. Only people who are sick with

SARS can spread their infection to others. This usually occurs when the sick person coughs or sneezes. For spread to occur, close contact is needed with the sick person.

Close contacts are those who live in the same house as the sick person, have cared for the sick person, or had face-to-face contact within 1 metre (3 feet) with the sick person. It takes between 2 and 10 days for illness to develop after close contact with a person with SARS.

In Canada, most of the people who first became sick with SARS had either lived with or provided health care for people with SARS. These people have then spread the infection to some of their close contacts.

## 5. What is the cause of SARS?

It is currently thought that a new virus in the “Coronavirus” family may cause SARS. This family is called “Corona” because the viruses looks like a “crown” under the microscope. Viruses in this family also cause other respiratory illnesses.

## 6. What is the treatment for SARS?

The cause of SARS is currently unknown, so doctors are presently treating patients' symptoms. With supportive care, several hospitalized individuals with SARS in Canada are recovering and some have been discharged. Good general nursing and medical care are very important.

## 7. How is the spread of SARS being stopped?

Cases of SARS in Ontario are currently confined to Toronto and the surrounding areas. Close contacts of people with SARS, such as family members and health

care workers who cared for patients with SARS, are being asked to stay away from other people. This is called “quarantine”. They are staying away from others for 10 days after their last contact with the person with SARS. If they become sick in those 10 days, they will be seen by a health care provider to determine if they have SARS. If at the end of the 10 days they remain well, they can return to their normal activities, since they are no longer at risk of developing SARS.

## 8. What is happening in hospitals?

To stop the spread of SARS, sick people with SARS are being isolated in hospitals. Health care workers are taking precautions such as wearing masks, gloves and gowns when caring for these patients. As well, masks, gloves and gowns are being worn by staff in the intensive care units and emergency departments at all hospitals in Ontario as a precaution. **Handwashing after all patient contact is also very important.**

All hospitals in Ontario have closed most entrances to the hospital. At the open entrances they are screening patients and visitors for risk factors and symptoms of SARS. This screening is being done as a precaution at Windsor-Essex Hospitals.

## 9. What is happening in long-term care facilities?

People who are close contacts of a SARS case should be in quarantine for 10 days from their last exposure, and therefore should not be entering long-term care facilities.

Source: Health Canada

### Windsor Office:

1005 Ouellette Avenue  
Windsor, Ontario  
(519)258-2146  
fax: 258-8672

### Leamington Office:

215 Talbot Street East  
Leamington, Ontario  
(519)326-5716  
fax: 326-4642

### Essex Office:

360 Fairview Avenue West  
Suite 215, Essex, Ontario  
(519)776-5933  
fax: 776-6102

### Website:

[www.wechealthunit.org](http://www.wechealthunit.org)



### **10. What is happening in doctors' offices and clinics?**

Doctors' offices are screening at their own discretion. Patients may be asked to go to the emergency department if they meet the following criteria:

Have symptoms of SARS (fever, headache, muscle aches, malaise, cough or shortness of breath)

#### **AND**

Have a risk factor for SARS (in the past 10 days have had contact with a person with SARS.)

**It is important that patients who suspect that they may have SARS call before going to their doctor's office or emergency room. By doing this, they can be properly isolated and promptly assessed.**

### **11. What is happening at other health facilities?**

Other health care facilities such as laboratories and Community Care Access Centres (CCAC's) may be screening using questions similar to those being asked by doctor's offices.

### **12. What should people who have trips planned to affected areas do?**

As of July 7, 2003, Health Canada is no longer recommending travel restrictions due to global severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreaks. Based on multiple sources of data, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and country reports to the WHO, Health Canada is aware that health authorities in affected areas have made concerted efforts to contain the spread of SARS in their populations.

Health Canada continues to remind Canadian travellers to seek an individual risk assessment consultation with their personal physician or a travel medicine clinic to

determine their individual risks for illness prior to travelling outside of Canada.

### **13. What should people do who are planning a trip to the Greater Toronto Area?**

There is no Health Canada travel restriction to the Greater Toronto Area.

### **14. Should travellers returning from affected areas stay home from work or school?**

Health Canada is no longer recommending travel restrictions due to global severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreaks. Based on multiple sources of data including the World Health Organization (WHO) and country reports to the WHO, Health Canada is aware that health authorities in affected areas have made concerted efforts to contain the spread of SARS in their populations.

However anyone who does not feel well after returning from travel should always consult a physician immediately.

### **15. What should I do if I experience symptoms that might be SARS?**

Individuals with symptoms of SARS, or who have had contact with a SARS patient, should call their doctor or the emergency department before going anywhere. They will be given specific instructions on where to go and how to get there. If you are unsure of whether or not you may have SARS, you may also call the Health Unit at the number below. Additional information on SARS is available from:  
Telehealth Ontario at  
1-866-797-0000

Windsor-Essex Health Unit's Community Outbreak Line at 258-2146 ext. 1444.

You may also go to our website at:  
[www.wechealthunit.org](http://www.wechealthunit.org)

*Revised: July 9, 2003*

*Source: Health Canada*

#### **Windsor Office:**

1005 Ouellette Avenue  
Windsor, Ontario  
(519)258-2146  
fax: 258-8672

#### **Leamington Office:**

215 Talbot Street East  
Leamington, Ontario  
(519)326-5716  
fax: 326-4642

#### **Essex Office:**

360 Fairview Avenue West  
Suite 215, Essex, Ontario  
(519)776-5933  
fax: 776-6102

#### **Website:**

[www.wechealthunit.org](http://www.wechealthunit.org)

