

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)



SARS is a respiratory illness of unknown cause that has recently been reported in Asia, North America and Europe.

The Florida Department of Health (DOH) is currently looking into all suspected cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in Florida. These cases were found through the Department of Health's disease surveillance system. DOH is working with the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to find possible cases of SARS in Florida. The department has also asked local health officials and doctors to watch for patients who became sick after February 1, 2003, and have symptoms of SARS.

What are the signs and symptoms of SARS?

The illness generally begins with a fever. The fever is sometimes associated with chills or other symptoms, including headache, and body aches. Some people also have mild respiratory symptoms in the beginning. After three to seven days, the person may get a dry cough that may reach the point where not enough oxygen is getting to the blood. This results in breathing difficulty. In 10%–20% of cases, patients will require mechanical ventilation. The incubation period (the time from exposure until sickness appears) for SARS is usually two to seven days; however, some reports have said that the incubation period can be as long as 10 days.

Travel to an area with known transmission of SARS, as well as close contact with a person who has SARS, is considered in the case definition. Close contacts of cases, including health care workers and family members, have had similar illnesses. Examples of close contact include having cared for, lived with, or had direct contact with respiratory discharge and body fluids of people with SARS.

People who seem to be most at risk for SARS are health care workers taking care of sick people, family members or household contacts of those who are infected with SARS. This is the usual pattern of transmission in a contagious respiratory or flu-like illness.

Symptoms:

- fever of 100.5 °F or over [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]
- cough or difficulty breathing

The CDC has issued the following recommendations to individuals regarding SARS. Recommendations change frequently. To get the most current information, please check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov.

What should I do if I think I have SARS?

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?

You should check your own health for seven to ten days after you return. If you become ill with a fever of 100.5 °F or over [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$] and you have a cough or problem breathing, you should get in touch with 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 medical treatment is recommended for patients with SARS?

CDC currently recommends that patients with SARS receive the same treatment as any patient with a serious pneumonia of unknown cause. For more information on SARS visit CDC's SARS web site and see "Interim Information and Recommendations for Health Care Providers."

Are potential SARS patients isolated?

CDC has developed guidelines that address infection control precautions. These can be found at CDC's SARS web site (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/infectioncontrol.htm) and will be updated as new information about SARS becomes available.

How is a suspected SARS patient transported to ensure infection control?

To cut down the spread of the disease, outside the hospital, SARS patients are asked to limit contacts outside the home until more is known about how the disease is spread. Using a surgical mask on patients in health care settings, while moving patients, and during contact with others at home is suggested.

What precautions do health care facilities follow when family members visit a SARS patient?

Those in close contact of SARS patients are at risk for infection. Health care facilities should teach all visitors about use of infection control precautions (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/infectioncontrol.htm) when visiting SARS patients and should emphasize the importance of following these precautions. Visitors may be asked to not touch the patient, to wear a surgical mask, and to wash their hands before leaving the patient's room. Health care facilities should also have a system to check for fever or respiratory symptoms for visitors of SARS patients.

People with either fever or respiratory symptoms should not be allowed to enter a health care facility as visitors and should be told about this policy.

What has the CDC recommended to prevent transmission of SARS in households, the workplace and schools?

CDC has developed infection control recommendations for patients with suspected SARS. The basic precautions outlined in this include the following:

- Infection control precautions should be continued for SARS patients for 10 days after respiratory symptoms and fever are gone. SARS patients should limit contacts outside the home and should not go to work, school, out-of-home day care, or other public areas during the 10-day period.
- During this 10-day period, all members of the household with a SARS patient should carefully follow recommendations for hand hygiene, such as washing hands often or using alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Each patient with SARS should cover his or her mouth and nose with a tissue before sneezing or coughing. If possible, a person getting over SARS should wear a surgical mask during close contact with uninfected persons. If the patient is cannot wear a surgical mask, other people in the home should wear one when in close contact with the patient.
- Disposable gloves should be used for any contact with body fluids from a SARS patient. However, immediately after activities involving contact with body fluids, gloves should be removed and thrown away, and hands should be washed. Gloves should not be washed or reused, and should not replace proper hand hygiene.
- SARS patients should not share eating utensils, towels, and bedding with other members of the household, although these items can be used by others after regular cleaning, such as washing or laundering with soap and hot water.
- Common household cleaners can be used for disinfecting toilets, sinks, and other surfaces touched by patients with SARS, but the cleaners must be used often.
- Other members of the household should not limit their outside activities unless they have symptoms of SARS, such as a fever or respiratory illness.■

For more information visit www.cdc.gov or contact your local county health department.