

SARS

What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that have a halo or crown-like (corona) appearance when viewed under a microscope. These viruses commonly cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory illness in humans and are associated with respiratory, gastrointestinal, liver and neurologic disease in animals. However, SAR-CoV can cause a more severe respiratory illness in humans.

How do I get SARS?

The primary way that SARS-CoV is spread is by close person-to-person contact. SARS-CoV is thought to be transmitted most readily by respiratory droplets (droplet spread) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplet spread can happen when droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled a short distance (generally up to 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose or eyes of persons who are nearby. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose or eye(s). In addition, it is possible that SARS-CoV might be spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread) or by other ways that are not now known.

Symptoms

Symptoms begin 2 to 7 days after exposure to SARS-CoV, although in some cases it may be as long as 10 days (in a very small proportion of cases, 14 days have been reported).

The illness begins with a high fever (measured temperature greater than 100.4°F that is sometimes associated with chills, headache, general feeling of discomfort and body aches. Diarrhea is seen in approximately 10 to 20 percent of patients. Some people also have mild respiratory symptoms at the outset. After 2 to 7 days, a dry, nonproductive cough may develop that might be accompanied by or progress to a condition in which the oxygen levels in the blood are low (hypoxia). Most persons develop pneumonia. In 10 to 20 percent of cases, mechanical ventilation is required.

Available information suggests that persons with SARS-CoV are most likely to be contagious when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. Patients are most contagious during the second week of illness.

Prevention

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unclean hands.
- Encourage people around you to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.



Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

(continued on back)



SARS (continued)

Prevention (continued)

- As a precaution against spreading the disease, persons with SARS-CoV should limit interactions outside the home (for example, by not going to work or to school) until 10 days after fever has gone away and respiratory (breathing) symptoms have gotten better.
- Follow international travel health guidelines set by the World Health Organization.

Treatment of SARS

There is no antiviral medication for treatment, nor is there a vaccine for prevention of SARS-CoV. Persons with SARS-CoV should receive supportive therapy and treatment that would be used for any patient with serious community-acquired atypical pneumonia.