



Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

Information Sheet

NORAD-USNORTHCOM/SG

What is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) ?

SARS is a respiratory illness of unknown etiology that was first reported in Asia, which is caused by a new strain of corona virus (SARS CoV). There is no specific treatment for SARS disease.

Why are we concerned with SARS as a bioweapon?

SARS presents with nonspecific signs and symptoms, coupled with relatively long incubation period and the absence of reliable diagnostic tests and limited understanding of the spread of the disease raises concerns about its use as a bioweapon. Outbreak of SARS would easily overwhelm a medical system due to its resource intensive monitoring and control to protect medical staff and further spreading of SARS. The SARS virus may have been spread by a "super spreader" potentially causing a worldwide infection of > 300 patients (World Health Organization). This finding has far reaching implications about the ability to use it as a bioweapon. However, virus manipulation and use is very difficult except for the most advanced laboratories.

Does this disease occur naturally?

Yes, unknown transmission at this time

Are there different forms of this disease?

No variations have been identified. However, the corona virus can mutate rapidly.

Is the disease seasonal in its occurrence?

No. However, symptoms may be confused with seasonal outbreaks of influenza.

Where is the disease currently established?

SARS was established in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and the following cities: Toronto, Canada; Hanoi, Vietnam; and Beijing, China; and travel to these area is potential for concern.

How does SARS spread?

SARS is very contagious and transmission is very likely from droplet exposure.

What is the risk of catching SARS?

Highly contagious and person-to-person transmission is very likely.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

Symptoms begin with malaise, high fever, rigors, headache, and muscle aches. After 3-7 days, a dry, nonproductive cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing develops. In some cases (10-20%) the patient will require a ventilator to help with breathing. The severity of illness might be highly variable, ranging from mild illness to death.

How soon do infected people get sick?

The incubation period of SARS is usually 2-7 days and as long as 10 days.

How is SARS diagnosed?

Primary diagnosis is made based on the clinical presentation but definitive diagnosis is based on laboratory confirmation. Chest X-rays are sometimes helpful for assistance in diagnosis.

Is a vaccine available to prevent SARS? No

Can SARS be treated?

No, SARS is not treatable at this time. However, an antiviral agents with steroids has provided some benefits but no treatment regime is available at this time.

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Where will the medications to treat infected individuals come from?

Antiviral, antibiotics and steroids will come from regionally dependent resources based on national stockpiles.

Are there contraindications to vaccine, antibiotic therapy, other treatments (ie. Pregnancy, immunosuppression, etc)

No specific treatment regimen has been identified at this point.

How long can SARS exist in the environment? Are there ways to test for SARS in the environment?

SARS virus is stable in excrement 1- 4 days. No field expedient methods are available for testing. Samples must be sent to laboratory for testing

What should someone do if they suspect they or others have been exposed to SARS?

Contact public health officials immediately for further instructions. SARS is very contagious and person to person transmission is very likely.

What can I do to reduce the risk of getting SARS or giving it to someone else?

Avoid travel to areas where current outbreaks have been identified. Avoid contact with people who may be infected with the virus.

References:

www.bt.cdc.gov

www.who.int

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