

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Frequently Asked Questions

What is SARS?

SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, is a respiratory illness that has recently been reported in Asia, North America, and Europe.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

The illness usually begins with a fever (measured temperature greater than 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]). The fever is sometimes associated with chills or other symptoms, including headache, general feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms at the outset.

After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry, nonproductive cough that might be accompanied by or progress to the point where insufficient oxygen is getting to the blood. In 10% to 20% of cases, patients will require mechanical ventilation.

How contagious is SARS?

Based on currently available evidence, close contact with an infected person is needed for the infective agent to spread from one person to another. Contact with aerosolized (exhaled) droplets and bodily secretions from an infected person appears to be important. To date, the majority of cases have occurred in hospital workers who have cared for SARS patients and the close family members of these patients. However, the amount of the infective agent needed to cause an infection has not yet been determined.

If I were exposed to SARS, how long would it take for me to become sick?

The incubation period for SARS is typically 2-7 days; however, isolated reports have suggested an incubation period as long as 10 days. The illness usually begins with a fever ($>100.4\text{ F}$)

What is the cause of SARS?

Scientists at CDC and other laboratories have detected a previously unrecognized coronavirus in patients with SARS. While the new coronavirus is still the leading hypothesis for the cause of SARS, other viruses are still under investigation as potential causes.

Could this be the result of bioterrorism?

There is no indication that SARS is linked to bioterrorism.

Should we be worried?

This illness can be severe and, due to global travel., has spread to several countries in a relatively short period of time. However, SARS is not highly contagious when protective measures are used, and the percentage of cases that have been fatal is low. Since the WHO global alert issued on March 15, 2003, only isolated cases have been identified and no secondary outbreaks have occurred.