

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)

What is SARS?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory illness that has recently been reported in Asia, North America, and Europe. This fact sheet provides basic information about the disease and what is being done to combat its spread.

Symptoms of SARS

In general, SARS begins with a fever greater than 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]. Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms. After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough and have trouble breathing.

How SARS spreads

The primary way that SARS appears to spread is by close person-to-person contact. Most cases of SARS have involved people who cared for or lived with someone with SARS, or had direct contact with infectious material (for example, respiratory secretions) from a person who has SARS. Potential ways in which SARS can be spread include touching the skin of other people or objects that are contaminated with infectious droplets and then touching your eye(s), nose, or mouth. This can happen when someone who is sick with SARS coughs or sneezes droplets onto themselves, other people, or nearby surfaces. It also is possible that SARS can be spread more broadly through the air or by other ways that are currently not known.

Who is at risk for SARS

Most of the U.S. cases of SARS have occurred among travelers returning to the United States from other parts of the world with SARS. There have been very few cases as a result of spread to close contacts such as family members and health care workers. Currently, there is no evidence that SARS is spreading more widely in the community in the United States.

Possible cause of SARS

Scientists at CDC and other laboratories have detected a previously unrecognized coronavirus in patients with SARS. The new coronavirus is the leading hypothesis for the cause of SARS.