



## Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Mar 28, 2003

As of April 16, 2003, 303 probable or suspected cases of SARS and 13 SARS related deaths have been reported to Health Canada. There is growing concern from both the healthcare professionals and the public in terms of the cause, symptoms, treatment and prevention of this potential epidemic. The following is intended to address some of these concerns; keeping in mind new information on this condition is evolving daily:

### **Q: What causes SARS?**

**A:** Health officials have identified the causative agent of this disease as a *coronavirus*. This will now be referred to as the "SARS virus".

### **Q: How is SARS spread?**

**A:** Investigators are unsure as to the exact transmission of this disease. It is thought that SARS is transmitted through close contacts of SARS cases i.e. health care workers and family members.

### **Q: How can the transmission of SARS be prevented?**

**A:** Proper hand hygiene, contact precautions for health care professionals (i.e. gown/gloves) and airborne precautions using a N-95 filtering disposable mask are the current recommendations for those individuals who have come into contact with a SARS patient.

### **Q: What symptoms should we look for?**

**A:** Patients with SARS present with the following:

- Fever (>38.0 °C)
- Myalgias
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Dry cough
- Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing

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Patients presenting with these symptoms should phone their physicians office for further directions.

Complications of these symptoms can include hypoxia, pneumonia and occasionally acute respiratory distress requiring mechanical ventilation and death in some patients.

### **Q: What is SARS treated with?**

**A:** Until scientists can isolate the agent that is causing this disease, specific treatment guidelines cannot be recommended. Various cocktails using antibiotics and antivirals have been tried at the different hospitals, however the optimal cocktail has not been determined at this point.

The following websites should be consulted for updated information on this topic and for further detail:

[www.who.int/csr/sars/infectioncontrol](http://www.who.int/csr/sars/infectioncontrol) (last accessed April 17, 2003)

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars) (last accessed April 17, 2003)

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/protection/warnings/sars/update32.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/protection/warnings/sars/update32.html) (last accessed April 17, 2003)

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