

# SARS

**WHAT YOU, AS A HEALTHCARE  
WORKER, NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SARS**

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## What is SARS?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a recent, sometimes deadly, respiratory disease. SARS has been reported mainly in Asia, North America and Europe. SARS typically affects the lungs, but it may also attack the digestive system.

## What causes SARS?

A previously unknown virus that belongs to the *corona virus* family is suspected to be the primary cause of SARS.



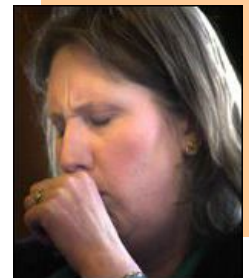
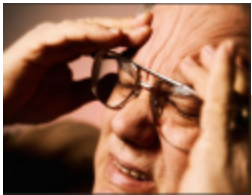
## How do you get SARS?

- Similar to a common cold, SARS is transmitted through direct person-to-person contact.
- SARS spreads through airborne droplets released when the SARS-infected person sneezes or coughs.
- SARS can also be transmitted through contact with body fluids of the infected person.

*For these reasons, SARS has become a serious occupational health disease!*

## What are the symptoms of SARS?

- SARS usually begins with a fever of 100.4°F or more;
- Chills;
- Muscle aches;
- Headache;
- Dry cough;
- Dizziness;
- Difficulty in breathing;
- In some cases, severe diarrhea.



## How does the sickness develop?

- The incubation period of SARS is usually 2 – 7 days, but may be as long as 10 days. High fever, chills, muscle aches and headaches set in.
- After 3-7 days, a dry, non-productive cough starts, which could develop into oxygen insufficiency in the blood. 10% – 20% of these patients need intubations and mechanical ventilation.
- Worldwide, approximately 15% of people who contracted SARS have died.

## Who is at risk of becoming SARS-infected?

- People age 40 or older, especially those over 65, are at greater risk of becoming infected and dying of SARS;
- People who have other medical conditions (such as heart or liver disease), or chronic illnesses (such as a weak immune system);
- Healthcare workers or family members of a SARS-infected patient. In fact, healthcare workers have been hit harder than any other group by the SARS epidemic.

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## What is the treatment for SARS?

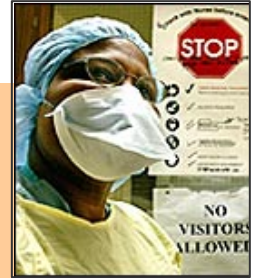
The treatment for SARS is supportive care for symptoms, such as liquids to avoid dehydration or ventilators to help breathing. Researchers are currently working on the development of a vaccine against SARS and drugs that could block the *corona virus* infections.

*Antibiotics are not effective, since SARS is not a bacterial but a viral disease.*

## How can you protect yourself against SARS?

### Take proper safety precautions:

- Wear respirators with an N-95 filter at a minimum. Make sure they fit tightly to your face;
- Wear gowns, gloves and eye protection;
- Make sure there is appropriate ventilation in your workplace;
- **Wash your hands** with low or intermediate level disinfectants, or wash hands frequently with plenty of water and soap.



## What can your employer do to protect you from SARS?



- Develop a plan to identify and treat SARS patients.
- SARS education classes for healthcare workers, so that SARS symptoms can be identified and health personnel can protect themselves.
- Screening procedure for all patients before they enter the emergency room or other patient entrances to the healthcare facility (the personnel receiving patients with SARS symptoms will have to have special training).

## If you have been exposed to SARS and cannot go to work, do you lose your pay?

- Ask your employer about their policy.
- Workers who have been exposed to SARS or have contracted the sickness and are asked to stay at home in order to avoid spreading SARS should take sick leave, not vacation time, and should not suffer a loss of wages.

*Remember that under federal OSHA or state plan OSHA programs your employer is required to provide you with a workplace that is “free from recognized hazards” [OSHAct section (5) (a) (1)].*

*For more information visit the following websites:*



US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)



World Health Organization:  
[www.who.int/csr/sars](http://www.who.int/csr/sars)



Service Employees' International Union:

[http://www.seiu.org/docUploads/Final\\_SARS\\_Factsheet\\_5\\_21\\_03.pdf](http://www.seiu.org/docUploads/Final_SARS_Factsheet_5_21_03.pdf)