



Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

What is Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a lung illness caused by the SARS-associated coronavirus. SARS was first seen as a global threat in March, 2003. A new coronavirus causing similar illness has been found in people coming from the Middle East in the region of Saudi Arabia.

How is SARS spread?

SARS seems to be spread mainly through close person-to-person contact. It may spread most easily by airborne droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can also spread when a person touches a surface that has infectious droplets on it and then touches his mouth, nose or eyes. It is possible SARS might spread through the air or by other ways that are not known at this time.

Close contact means caring for or living with someone with SARS or having direct contact with respiratory secretions or body fluids from a patient with SARS. It includes kissing or hugging, sharing eating or drinking utensils, talking to someone within three feet and touching someone directly. Close contact does not include activities like walking by a person or briefly sitting across a waiting room or office.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

The illness usually begins with a high fever (greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit). Other symptoms may include chills, headache, overall feeling of discomfort and body aches. Two to seven days after initial symptoms, you are likely to have a dry cough. Most patients develop pneumonia.

How do you prevent the spread of SARS?

Once a person has been exposed to SARS, it typically takes two to seven days before symptoms appear, although in some cases it has been as long as 10 to 14 days. Information available suggests that persons with SARS are most likely to be contagious only when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough. Patients are most contagious during the second week of illness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people with SARS avoid going outside the home until 10 days after their fever is gone and the respiratory symptoms have gotten better.

How is SARS treated?

CDC recommends that SARS patients receive the same treatment that any patient with community-acquired atypical pneumonia would receive.

How can I protect myself and my family?

CDC recommends that people follow some common sense precautions that apply to many infectious diseases. The most important is frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands. Encourage people around you to cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

For more information contact the Guilford County Department of Public Health at (336) 641-7777 or visit our website at www.guilfordhealth.org or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov