

## SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a virus caused by a coronavirus. A coronavirus has a large RNA structure. The coronavirus is responsible for many illnesses in mammals. The SARS disease reached epidemic proportions, and caused seven hundred and seventy four deaths between November of 2002 and July of 2003 with eight thousand and ninety six known cases of the viral infection during that time. In the World Health Organization reports, the SARS cases were broken down by countries, and the five countries with the highest number of cases (in descending order) were the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Canada, Taiwan, and Singapore. No cases have been reported since 2004 when some research workers—two in Singapore and one in Taiwan were thought to have contracted the disease through improper handling of specimens of the SARS virus. The symptoms of SARS are similar to symptoms of the flu — e.g. fever, stomach problems, sore throat, cough, tiredness, etc. with shortness of breath often appearing in the later stages of the illness. Initial symptoms usually appear within two or three days after exposure to the virus. The World Health Organization divides SARS cases into suspected, probable and known with progressive inclusion of criteria across the three levels of certainty of the illness. A suspected case of SARS occurred when a person had a temperature above 38 degrees Centigrade, and had either recently visited an area where the SARS breakout occurred or had come into close contact with someone with a SARS diagnosis within the previous ten days. A probable case of SARS was indicated when the individual had the same symptoms as that of a suspected case of SARS, and in addition, had a chest xRay with indications of pneumonia that was not typical or which indicated some other respiratory distress. Once the laboratory tests were developed to confirm diagnosis of SARS, a person with a confirmed laboratory diagnosis was considered a known case of SARS. The mortality rate associated with SARS approached ten percent. Since SARS is a viral infection, antibiotics do not help with the disease. Supportive therapy and the implementation of quarantines and travel advisory to prevent spreading were the main treatments used when the epidemic was raging. Currently, vaccines have been developed for the illness should it recur. Research has also been done into the treatment of the illness with weapons used to fight other diseases such as AIDS, influenza, and hepatitis. The countries with the heaviest caseload of SARS received economic setbacks from the presence of SARS in their countries. In the western world, the city of Toronto, Canada was the most heavily hit economically with travel advisories being issued against flying to Toronto as well as to the People's Republic of China where the disease was thought to have originated and to other far eastern countries which had a large number of victims. Chinatowns throughout the United State but particularly in New York City experienced a lowering of clientele as a result of the epidemic. Sources Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website information on SARS URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/>  
World Health Organization Website URL: <http://www.who.org>