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SARS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness that was first reported in Asia in February 2003. Within the next few months, the disease spread to over two dozen countries. By late July of that year, no new cases were reported, and the illness was considered contained.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

SARS symptoms include fever (100.4F or higher) and respiratory difficulties such as coughing, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing. A SARS diagnosed is guided by a history of being exposed to SARS or a setting in which the illness has been transmitted, such as a hospital, or being in close contact with ill persons who have recently been diagnosed with SARS.

How is SARS spread?

Most commonly, SARS appears to be spread by close person-to-person contact. The virus that causes SARS is thought to be transmitted most readily by respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplet spread can happen when droplets from a cough or a sneeze are propelled a short distance (up to 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose or eyes of persons who are nearby. The virus can also spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose or eyes.

How do I protect myself from SARS?

The most important factor in prevention is frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs. You should also avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes with unclean hands and encourage those around you to cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing.

How long is a person with SARS infectious to others?

Available information suggests that a person with SARS is infectious only when they have symptoms such as fever or cough. However, as a precaution, CDC recommends that a person with SARS limit their interaction outside their home until 10 days after the symptoms disappear.

For more information on SARS, please visit the Michigan Department of Community Health's website at www.michigan.gov/mdch, or call District Health Department No. 2 at 1-800-504-2650.

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SARS Fact Sheet - Information taken from the Michigan Department of Community Health's fact sheet "SARS Information for the Public" revised December 2003. Will need to be reviewed prior to dissemination to ensure accuracy.