

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #68 - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) - April 26, 2004

Background

On April 23, 2004, the Chinese Ministry of Health (MOH) reported four patients with possible severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) to the World Health Organization (WHO). Two of the cases are from Beijing and two are from Anhui Province, located in east-central China. One of the patients in Anhui Province died. Below is a brief description of the four cases.

- The first patient is a 26-year-old female graduate student from Anhui Province who worked at the National Institute of Virology Laboratory of China's Center for Disease Control in Beijing during March 7-22. The laboratory is known to conduct research on SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV). She developed fever and other SARS-like symptoms on March 25 while in Anhui Province; she traveled by train to Beijing and was admitted to a local hospital on March 29 with pneumonia. She returned to Anhui Province on April 2 and is currently under medical observation. Laboratory test results reported on April 23 showed evidence of antibodies to SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV).
- The second patient is the mother of the 26-year-old graduate student who had provided bedside care for her daughter during her recent illness. The mother became ill on April 8 and was admitted to a hospital in Anhui Province with pneumonia. She died on April 19; Chinese health authorities have identified her illness as a possible SARS case.
- The third patient is a 20-year-old female nurse (described in CDC Health Advisory on April 22) who provided care to the 26-year-old graduate student in a Beijing hospital from March 29 to April 2. The nurse became ill on April 5, was admitted to a hospital in Beijing on April 7, and was transferred to another Beijing hospital on April 14, where she remains in intensive care. On April 22, her illness was identified as possible SARS on the basis of positive test results for antibodies to SARS-CoV in serum.
- The fourth patient is a 31-year-old male graduate student who worked at the same research laboratory in Beijing as the 26-year-old graduate student. He reported fever on April 17 and was admitted to a hospital in Beijing on April 22. Chinese health authorities have identified the illness as possible SARS.

In light of this report, the New York State Department of Health along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are recommending that U.S. physicians and primary care providers maintain a greater index of suspicion for SARS.

Recommendations:

1. Continue the use of Standard Respiratory Precautions when evaluating patients with respiratory symptoms.
2. Elicit a travel history on all patients being evaluated with respiratory symptoms and fever. Place patients who have traveled to Mainland China with above symptoms on

Airborne and Contact Precautions with the use of face shields pending results of medical evaluation.

3. Patients considered at **high risk for SARS-CoV** infection are those who:
 1. Require hospitalization for radiographically confirmed pneumonia or acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), AND
 2. Who have a history of travel to mainland China (or close contact with an ill person with a history of recent travel to mainland China) in the 10 days before onset of symptoms.
4. When a patient is identified as high risk for SARS-CoV:
 1. Continue airborne and contact precautions along with eye protection.
 2. Immediately report the patient to the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) (716) 858-7697 (Monday - Friday, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM) or (716) 898-4225 (Weekends, Evenings and Holidays).
 3. Laboratory testing can be arranged through the ECDOH. If the ECDOH cannot be reached, call the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4436 during business hours, or the NYSDOH Duty Officer after-hours at 1-866-881-2809.
 4. The state and local health departments will work with the hospital to identify, evaluate, and monitor relevant contacts of the patient, as needed.
5. When the patient is considered not to be at high risk for SARS-CoV after medical evaluation, continue Standard Respiratory Precautions.

Additional Information about SARS

Guidelines and recommendations for SARS reporting, infection control, and clinical and laboratory evaluation can be found on the following websites: Health Provider website at: https://commerce.health.state.ny.us/hpn/hanweb/sars/sars_clinicians.html Public website at: http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/sars/sars_reporting/index.html. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/ncid/sars