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What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory disease caused by a SARS-associated coronavirus (known as SARS-CoV).

What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness in humans, ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory illness. Coronaviruses can also infect animals. SARS-CoV is the coronavirus that causes the illness known as SARS. SARS-CoV-2 (a virus similar to SARS-CoV) is the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

What is SARS-CoV?

SARS-CoV is a type of coronavirus. SARS-CoV was first detected in Asia in 2003 and caused a global outbreak, spreading to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia before it was controlled. During this outbreak, 8,096 people got SARS and 774 of them died. In the United States, only eight people developed SARS, including one Virginia resident. No cases of SARS have been reported in the world since 2004.

Who gets SARS?

During the 2003 global outbreak, many people who got sick were exposed to the virus in healthcare facilities where an infected person was receiving care, or in the household of an infected person.

How is SARS-CoV spread?

SARS-CoV is most easily spread from person to person through close contact with an infected person. When a person coughs or sneezes they produce infected respiratory droplets that another person can breathe in and become ill from. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches their mouth, nose, or eye(s). It is also possible that SARS-CoV might be spread through the air.

What are the symptoms of SARS?

People who become ill from SARS often have the following symptoms:

- Dry Cough
- Fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Headache
- Body aches

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- Fatigue
- Less common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 2–7 days after exposure to the virus, but it may be as long as 10 days before symptoms begin.

How is SARS diagnosed?

SARS can be diagnosed based on the medical history the patient provides along with the physical exam and lab testing. Tests may include swabs of the nose, throat, and rectal area. Blood tests can also be done.

What is the treatment for SARS?

There is no specific treatment for SARS. Medical care focuses on providing symptom relief and necessary supportive care. People with mild symptoms might use non-prescription medications for fever and pain relief. People who are more severely ill may need to be admitted to the hospital to receive oxygen, breathing treatments, or other therapies.

How can SARS be prevented?

A vaccine against SARS is not currently available. People should follow these general public health tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses of any kind:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash. You can also cough or sneeze into your elbow and not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact (such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils) with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched, such as toys and doorknobs.

Is MERS-CoV the same as SARS-CoV?

No. MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV are both types of coronaviruses, but they are not the same. MERS-CoV causes the illness Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (known as MERS) while SARS-CoV causes the illness SARS. MERS is a respiratory illness that spreads mainly from camels to humans. MERS is seen in countries including Saudi Arabia and those near it. Limited spread from one person to another is possible, but not common.

How can I learn more about SARS?

- Contact a healthcare provider.

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- Contact your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- Visit the CDC's page on SARS at cdc.gov/orr/responses/sars.html or the World Health Organization's page on SARS at www.emro.who.int/health-topics/severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome/.

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