Severe acute respiratory syndrome is a viral respiratory illness caused by the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). It was first reported in Asia in 2003. The SARS outbreak of 2003 made it a disease to watch. While it seems SARS has subsided in its aggression, with no known cases reported worldwide since 2004, it is always best to be informed and prepared.

Transmission

• SARS is thought to be spread through close person-to-person contact (within 3 feet).
• SARS is most effectively spread through respiratory droplets emitted when an infected individual coughs or sneezes.
• These droplets may be transferred through the air when breathing close to an infected individual and by touching an area covered with the droplets.
• Once exposed, SARS may incubate in the body for 2–10 days.
• An individual with SARS may be contagious up to 10 days after the fever and respiratory symptoms have subsided.

Symptoms

• Symptoms include—
  » Early onset fever (100.4°F or more)
  » Headache and body aches
  » Mild respiratory symptoms at onset
  » 10%-20% have diarrhea
  » A dry, nonproductive cough, which may lead to hypoxia (low oxygen levels in the blood) and may require ventilation
  » Pneumonia

Treatment

• There is currently no specific treatment for SARS.
• It is recommended individuals infected with SARS be treated with the same techniques as any other severe pneumonia.

Prevention

• Always wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to prevent the spread of germs.
• Avoid touching anything or anyone with unwashed hands.
• Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and encourage others to do so.

Where to Find Additional Information

• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—
  » www.cdc.gov/sars/about/fs-SARS.pdf
  » www.cdc.gov/sars/
• World Health Organization—
  www.who.int/csr/sars/en