

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

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Background

A new disease, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is under investigation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States and the World Health Organization (WHO). Cases first occurred in China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong as early as last fall. Over 70 cases have been reported in the United States. World wide about 3% of those with SARS have died. Many others had a mild illness and recovered completely. SARS appears to be transmitted by close contact including contact with coughed secretions either by breathing or touching objects that secretions land on. A viral agent is suspected as the cause of SARS.

Clinical Features

Those affected by SARS have a respiratory illness with fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit. Individuals typically have cough, shortness of breath, low blood oxygen levels, and/or an abnormal chest X-ray which may include findings of pneumonia. They may also have muscle aches, headache, and fatigue. These symptoms are not specific to SARS and could represent a number of illnesses affecting the lungs. Therefore, to confirm the diagnosis of SARS, individuals with respiratory symptoms must also have traveled to an area of the world with SARS cases within 10 days of the onset of symptoms OR have been in close contact with a person with a respiratory illness who had traveled to a SARS area.

Treatment

Treatment for those with the most severe cases includes supportive care such as the use of life support. Steroids and antiviral agents have also been administered. Their effectiveness will be evaluated.

Risks for the Primary Immune Deficiency Diseases (PID's)

It is not known if individuals with primary immune deficiency diseases are at an increased risk for SARS. However, a defective immune system could put a person at increased risk. Therefore it may be reasonable for individuals with

PID's to wear surgical masks and wash their hands when they go to health care delivery sites such as hospitals and infusion suites where patients potentially affected by SARS might be evaluated and treated.

In the coming weeks, the causative agent of SARS should be identified and more will be learned about the infection, its prevention and treatment. In addition to the IDF Web page, the CDC website at (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars) will continue to provide current information.