



Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

In Hong Kong, the streets are less crowded and the faces of those people still out are covered by protective masks. These and other extreme measures have been triggered by the appearance of a new communicable disease: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

SARS has been compared to influenza and pneumonia and it has been spread around the globe by air travel. The World Health Organization is calling it a global health threat. As of March 29th, a total of 1,550 cases and 54 deaths have been reported from thirteen countries. Hong Kong, where fifty-eight new cases of SARS were reported on March 28 alone, is the most severely affected area. Fears exist that this communicable disease will spread to many countries including India and many more deaths will continue.

The disease spreads from person to person. It often begins with a high fever, headache and sore throat. Respiratory symptoms appear two to seven days after exposure. Other possible symptoms include loss of appetite, confusion, rash and diarrhea. Not everyone affected has reacted the same way. The World Health Organization has advised doctors to watch for those symptoms with:

1. a fever over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit
2. cough, shortness of breath, difficulty in breathing
3. close contact with someone diagnosed with SARS or a history of travel to affected areas

including Guangdong province in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Hanoi, Toronto and Vancouver.

Researchers suspect that SARS is caused by a virus but are not yet certain. Tests have failed to identify it as influenza. The leading candidate has been human metapneumovirus, a family of microbes that can cause measles, mumps and canine distemper, but this theory is based on the less-than-definitive evidence of electron microscope images. Other tests, such as genetic profiling, are needed to confirm the findings.

Researchers in the U.S. have seen a coronavirus, one of the viruses

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