



Royal College of  
Dental Surgeons of Ontario

*Ensuring Continued Trust*

# BULLETIN

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TO: ALL RCD SO MEMBERS

Thursday, March 27, 2003

## ADVICE TO MEMBERS ABOUT SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a global alert about cases of an atypical form of pneumonia called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Known affected areas include China (Hong Kong, Taiwan and Guangdong provinces), Vietnam (Hanoi) and Singapore. Cases of local transmission have also been identified in Toronto, Ontario. The etiology and mode of transmission of SARS are unclear at this time, but respiratory droplet spread is suspected.

The College has received numerous telephone calls from dentists and patients concerned about the possible transmission of SARS in the dental office. This article is a summary of the College's current advice to members regarding the identification and direction of suspect cases and probable cases of SARS, and the management of patients who have come in contact with a person with SARS, or recently returned from an affected area.

### HEALTH CANADA DEFINITIONS

#### **Suspect case**

- a person with a fever over 38 degrees Celsius; **AND**
- one or more respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing; **AND**
- close contact with a probable case and/or a history of travel to an affected area in Asia within 10 days; **AND**
- no other known cause of current illness.

#### **Probable case**

- a person meeting the suspect case definition; **AND**
- a history of severe progressive respiratory illness suggestive of atypical pneumonia or acute respiratory distress syndrome with no known cause.

#### **Close contact**

- a person who has cared for, lived with or had face-to-face (within one metre) contact with, or has had direct contact with respiratory secretions and/or body fluids of a person with SARS.

*(continued)*

## **IDENTIFICATION, DIRECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS**

When booking or confirming appointments, patients should be asked about current illnesses, including the presence of fever and respiratory symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath, and difficulty breathing; recent travel history to China, Vietnam and/or Singapore; or if they have come in contact with a probable case of SARS. If a patient reports fever and respiratory symptoms, and a recent history of travel to an affected area, or contact with a probable case of SARS, he/she should be instructed to call their physician for advice, or referred to a hospital for medical assessment. Dental treatment for suspect and probable cases of SARS should be delayed.

Health Canada advises persons with a recent travel history to Asia, or those who have had close contact with a probable case of SARS, to monitor themselves for 10 days. If they develop fever and respiratory symptoms, they are advised to seek medical attention. It would therefore be prudent to delay elective dental treatment for patients with a recent travel history to affected areas, or contact with a probable case of SARS for this same period of days.

Dentists should advise such patients to consult their public health unit or to visit the Health Canada Web site for further information if they have any questions. See the Web site address at the end of this bulletin.

For close contact patients who are experiencing an emergency, it may be possible to manage dental symptoms over the 10-day period by pharmacological means. If definitive care is required (e.g.: temporary filling, pulpotomy/pulpectomy, extraction), treatment should be rendered in such a way as to minimize aerosol and splatter through the use of antimicrobial rinses, rubber dam, high volume suction, and hand instrumentation where possible.

Universal precautions and appropriate personal protection barriers should be followed, as outlined in the College's Guidelines for Infection Control in the Dental Office. The College Guidelines are on our Web site at [www.rcdso.org](http://www.rcdso.org) under Publications.

In addition, Health Canada has provided recommendations in its Routine Practices and Additional Precautions for Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Health Care.

More information about SARS for the general public and health-care practitioners is available on-line from:

- Health Canada at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgsp/sars-sras/index.html>
- City of Toronto SARS Information Line at 416-338-7600
- Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000

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*This article is based on current information received from Health Canada, and the offices of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health and Long-term Care; and the Medical Officer of Health, City of Toronto Public Health Department. We will revise this bulletin as new information becomes available.*