

## Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): a risk management response



### Summary

- SARS is the term being used to describe a serious respiratory illness which has recently been reported in parts of East and South East Asia and in Toronto, Canada.
- Although SARS appears to be less infectious than influenza, the speed of international travel creates a risk of cases spreading rapidly around the world.
- At the time of drafting this Bulletin, there are six probable cases of SARS in the UK. Other individuals are undergoing assessment. There is no evidence of local transmission and currently no travel restrictions apply to people travelling into or out of the UK.
- This document records the basic facts about SARS, suggests a number of simple action points for managers to consider, considers the possible insurance implications and identifies sources of further information.

### The basic facts about SARS

The following information is provided by the Health Protection Agency and is current at 29 April 2003.

The main symptoms of SARS are high fever (more than 38° C), dry cough, shortness of breath, or breathing difficulties. Changes in chest X-rays also occur, that are indicative of pneumonia.

SARS appears to be less infectious than influenza. The incubation period is believed to be short, around three to six days. The speed of international travel does, however, create a risk that cases can rapidly spread around the world.

Based on currently available evidence, prolonged close contact with an infected person poses the highest risk of spread. To date, the majority of cases have occurred in hospital workers who have cared for SARS patients and also in close family members of these patients.

Antibiotics and antiviral drugs are being used to treat the illness, but there is no specific treatment and there is no vaccine available.

### The position in the UK

The number of 'probable' cases of SARS reported to the Health Protection Agency Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre by 28 April 2003 remains at six. All cases have recovered. Other individuals are undergoing assessment. There is no evidence of local transmission and, currently, no travel restrictions apply to people travelling into or out of the UK.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) website page that profiles areas affected by SARS mentions London. However, it is only listed as an "Area with limited local transmission and no evidence of international spread from area since 15 March 2003 and no transmission other than close person-to-person contact reported".

There is a risk that persons returning to the UK from SARS infected areas may return with the condition, or develop it on their return.

### Recommended action

If your organisation employs people who may need to fly to South East Asia on business you should consider:

- drawing up and publicising a SARS policy statement (see Appendix 1 of this document for an example)
- issuing travellers with the Health Protection Agency traveller health alert leaflet (This can be downloaded from the PHLS website, see below)
- nominating someone to keep up to date with any emerging travel restrictions via the WHO website (see below)
- reviewing your insurance covers (see the section on insurance implications, later in this document)

### Special advice for educational establishments

Many people from the Far East attend educational institutions in the UK. If your organisation is an educational establishment with students or staff returning from SARS affected areas then follow the Health Protection Agency guidance available on the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) website.

Broadly, the advice is that students and staff who are well should be allowed to return to the educational establishment as normal. They should be advised to seek medical advice if they develop any symptoms suggestive of SARS, up to ten days after their return. They should not return to school if they have any of the symptoms of SARS (see below).

The Health and Safety Executive is expected to issue supplementary advice for educational establishments, in the near future.

### Special advice for healthcare workers

If your organisation employs healthcare workers then the current Health & Safety Executive (HSE) advice is as follows:

If a patient fitting the definition for a suspected or probable case of SARS is admitted to the hospital, clinicians should notify infection control personnel immediately. Until the cause and route of transmission are known, in addition to standard precautions, infection control measures for inpatients should include:

- Airborne precautions, e.g.
  - Either an isolation room with negative pressure relative to the surrounding area or a single room with own bathroom facilities, and
  - Use of FFP3 filtering masks conforming to EN 149:2001 for persons entering the room. Care should be given to face-fit testing for this equipment.
- Contact precautions (including use of long sleeve fluid repellent gown and latex or similar non-latex gloves with tight fitting cuffs for contact with the patient or their environment).
- Standard precautions including careful attention to hand hygiene.

- When caring for patients with SARS, clinicians should wear eye protection for all patient contact.
- Standard precautions when handling any clinical waste, which must be placed in leak-proof biohazard bags or containers and disposed of safely.
- Laundry should be classified as infected.
- If hospitals lack isolation facilities and lots of cases occur, then cohort nursing is recommended as per WHO guidelines.
- Long sleeve fluid repellent gowns and latex or similar non-latex gloves with tight fitting cuffs should be worn by all persons entering the room of a SARS case (until more is known about transmissibility).
- It is not necessary to use disposable crockery or cutlery when caring for SARS patients in hospital.
- Hypochlorite is the recommended disinfectant for environmental decontamination of areas where the SARS patient has been in the hospital (e.g., A&E department).

### Special advice for businesses

If you have operations or personnel domiciled in areas of the world affected by SARS, you should protect your personnel by following the health advice issued by the authorities in those countries.

You should also formulate business continuity plans to protect your business in case of an outbreak of SARS amongst your workforce in any location. For instance, you need to consider and plan for the potential interruption to your business if the operation is placed in quarantine.

If your business is dependent on supplies from an operation based in a SARS affected area; then again you need to formulate contingency plans that can respond in the event of the loss of that supplier through a SARS outbreak.

### Insurance implications

Insurance coverage should be considered under the Property Insurance, Travel Insurance, Employers' and General Liability insurances and, if an event has been planned in any area with a known outbreak of SARS, Cancellation and Abandonment insurance.

#### Property Insurance

An outbreak of SARS on any premises will, undoubtedly, mean that the location will be subject to quarantine and de-contamination. Most property policies are on an 'All Risks' basis with 'damage' defined under the policy. In order for an Insured to trigger property damage cover, it would need to prove that there has been "damage to insured property" as defined under the relevant policy. However, it may be difficult for an Insured to prove that a premises was actually contaminated with the virus and the contamination constitutes damage to the property. In any event, policies will usually exclude 'contamination' unless caused by a named peril such as fire or explosion. Similarly, Business Interruption insurances may not respond to a loss following disease contamination unless there is a "non-damage"

extension of cover, such as an Infectious Disease. Most business interruption cover extensions such as denial of access and suppliers extensions are triggered by “damage” losses only and similarly exclude contamination.

### Liability

It should be remembered that liability policies will only respond where there is a legal liability on the part of the Insured (subject to the policy terms). This may be difficult for a claimant to prove although this could be dependent upon how the injured person was infected and whether or not the Insured operates a strict internal control system where there is a potential for exposure to this virus.

### Employers’ Liability

UK Employers’ Liability policies should not contain any exclusion or limitation, at least for the first £5 million of each occurrence, that will prevent any claim arising from an infected employee from being defended or otherwise dealt with under the terms of the insurance.

### General Liability

Insurers are not, currently, imposing any specific SARS exclusions as such, although, depending upon the circumstances of the infection, insurers may attempt to rely on the Pollution and Contamination limitation wording should they wish to deny coverage. The pollution limitation does not have Case Law interpretation in the UK and there is no guidance as to how this limitation will interpret. However, unlike some pathogens, SARS does not appear to be incubated in buildings or premises’ facilities over an extended period before humans are infected. Based on the very limited knowledge so far available on how this virus can cause infection, it is unlikely that the UK pollution limitation will exclude potential liability of an Insured arising from SARS infection.

### Travel Insurance

There is currently no limitation on group business travel insurances for journeys to infected areas. Employees suffering from SARS whilst on an overseas business trip will be provided with full medical expenses cover subject to the policy terms. However, this may not necessarily apply for individually arranged travel such as holidays and individuals will need to enquire with their travel insurance provider regarding the extent of cover.

There is often a cancellation and curtailment extension on travel insurances although this cover is usually limited to cancellation due to actual ill-health of anyone due to travel, close family or family bereavement. Any loss arising from disinclination to travel or cancellation due to advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not usually covered. The policy may also exclude “expenses incurred as a result of regulations made by any public authority or government” and this could exclude cancellation charges where a trip was arranged to an area put into quarantine.

### Cancellation and Abandonment

Cancellation and abandonment policies placed at this time will have a specific SARS exclusion. Coverage is not available on a buy back basis.

Policies placed before SARS was deemed to be a threat will not have a SARS exclusion. This means that any claims due to events cancelled as a result of SARS will be paid, providing that the cancellation of the event is deemed necessary and beyond the control of the Insured. In practice this means that SARS must make it impossible for the event organiser to continue staging the event. Examples of this have included: the conference centre/venue being closed due to SARS, and movement or travel being prohibited or severely restricted within the area where the event is being held. Cancellation and abandonment policies do not cover claims as a result of disinclination or reduced attendance. However, advice given by the World Health Organisation not to travel to a certain country or area has been deemed to be a valid trigger for necessary cancellation. Where applicable, insurers will want the Insured to reschedule the shows to a later date rather than cancel. This is in some cases proving difficult due to the uncertainty of when the SARS epidemic will be over.

For further advice and assistance on this issue please contact your usual Marsh representative.

#### Sources of additional information

World Health Organisation	<a href="http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/">www.who.int/csr/don/en/</a>
Health Protection Agency	<a href="http://www.phls.org.uk">www.phls.org.uk</a>
Health & Safety Executive	<a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/sars.htm">www.hse.gov.uk/sars.htm</a>
Foreign Office	<a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a>
Department of Health	<a href="http://www.doh.gov.uk/sars">www.doh.gov.uk/sars</a>



## Appendix 1

### An example of a SARS policy statement to employees

As you will be aware, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome 'SARS' virus remains a serious threat throughout the world. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will update all colleagues with the latest developments.

Here in the UK, we need to be ever vigilant to the potential for exposure to SARS through our business undertakings, whilst relying on our employees to take a 'common sense' approach when dealing with foreign visitors and travel. Set out below are a series of sensible guidelines for all colleagues to follow:

#### 1. Business Travel

Colleagues are advised not to travel to affected areas and any trips will continue to need sign off from a senior manager. For an up-to-date list of affected areas, please check the World Health Organisation (WHO) website.

In the event that travel has to take place, then colleagues should NOT attend the office on their return. They should consult with their GP and work at home for a 10-day quarantine period, keeping their manager fully informed of their progress.

#### 2. Holiday Travel

The company appreciates that while airlines are still flying to these affected destinations, it is unlikely that colleagues will be able to cancel their holiday and successfully claim against any holiday insurance they may have. In the event that colleagues decide to continue with a planned holiday to an affected area, then they must follow the guidelines for business travel upon their return to the UK. That is, they should consult with their GP and work at home for a 10-day quarantine period, keeping their manager fully informed of their progress.

#### 3. Overseas Visitors

Invitations should not be extended to overseas visitors without consideration of the SARS issue.

#### 4. Employees Rights

The company will fully support all colleagues who decide not to travel or meet overseas visitors if they are nervous of the possibility of contact with the SARS virus.

#### 5. Social Contact

If colleagues come into social contact with others who they believe to have been in the affected areas within the previous 10 days, they should consult with their GP in the first instance and contact their manager about their concerns.

#### 6. Flu Symptoms

Colleagues who develop flu-like symptoms without having knowingly been in contact with the virus should consult with their GP. Please don't simply 'soldier-on' by coming into work. Symptoms to be aware of are the development of fever (greater than 100.4° F) or respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough or difficulty breathing).

As previously mentioned we are relying on you to use a 'common sense' approach during this time. There is no need to panic, but we must not be complacent.

In summary, these guidelines have been drawn up to protect you and your colleagues whilst the SARS virus remains a threat.




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Tower Place, London, EC3R 5BU Tel: 020 7357 1000

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