

Works & Emergency Services
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March 28, 2003

TO: All Toronto EMS staff

FROM: Peter Macintyre, Manager, Community Safeguard Services

RE: **Frequently Asked Questions from Paramedics**

Why am I in quarantine and my family isn't?

You are in quarantine because you were in Scarborough Grace Hospital on or after March 16 and have indicated that you were not wearing respiratory protection at some time during your visit. It is unlikely that you have contracted SARS. Your family has not been exposed to SARS and are not at risk unless you become symptomatic. The best medical evidence we have at this point in time is that people who are asymptomatic are not contagious.

I am currently working with John. His regular partner, Mary, is in quarantine. Why isn't John in quarantine too? Am I at risk while working with John?

Mary is in quarantine because she had unprotected exposure at Scarborough Grace. John did not, so he is not in quarantine. As long as John remains asymptomatic, you are not at risk from your contacts with him.

I've heard the media reports that there are SARS patients in other hospitals? Does this mean I'll be quarantined if I go into them?

No. Since you are wearing your N95 mask at all times during patient contact and while your in the hospital, the quarantine rules for unprotected exposure would not apply to you.

Each hospital has been directed to implement comprehensive protection protocols to ensure that SARS does not spread to their staff and patients. Each hospital is mandated to create a dedicated SARS area to treat these patients. Since the SARS outbreak began in Ontario, only those people that had close, unprotected contact with symptomatic patients have become infected themselves. The problem at Scarborough Grace, and all the confirmed cases so far, resulted from unprotected close contact with symptomatic patients.

One of the medics in my station is in hospital with SARS. Is it safe to work in that station?

Yes. SARS is only transmitted by close contact with a symptomatic individual. There is no evidence that it survives on surfaces.

Should I sanitize the station? What about the ambulance?

Toronto EMS cleaners have or will be cleaning the stations where the infected paramedics worked as a extra precaution and to reassure our crews that the stations are safe. The experience of the hospitals in dealing with syndrome is that the only infected staff were ones with direct unprotected close contact with symptomatic patients. Daily cleaning of doorknobs, toilets and counters is always a good idea.

The ambulance is safe. Your regular cleaning with Hydrox or Virox will be sufficient to ensure your safety. If you wish, you can apply Hydrox or Virox to door handles, the steering wheel, etc. at the beginning of the shift.

It takes time to clean up the ambulance after a potential SARS patient. Will I get the time I need or will Communications be on me to get out quickly to the next call?

You will get the time you need to clean the ambulance appropriately. Inform the Hospital Destination Coordinator that you are cleaning up after a potential SARS patient and then call back when you are finished.

I transported a patient that might have SARS. How do I clean the ambulance?

First, try and make sure that the patient is completely wrapped in a sheet prior to transport. Of course, they will have a surgical mask on. After unloading the patient, the sheet should be placed into the hospital linen container. Spray Virox or Hydrox onto areas of the stretcher that might have been contaminated by the patient as well as any surfaces that might have been contaminated. Remember to let the solution sit for 5-10 minutes or until dry and then wipe clean. Outside the hospital, remove your mask, gloves and gown and bag them. Take the bag to an ALS Station and place it in the biohazard container. Remember to wash your hands before you start cleaning and after you finish. Before your next patient contact, put on your mask and the rest of your protective equipment. NOTE: this only applies to potential SARS patients, based on case definition.

I saw one of the medics with suspected SARS lying down at the station last week. What about the couch and pillow in the station?

If you are lucky enough to get a chance to lay your head down for a few minutes, use a clean pillow case, put a sheet down on the couch, and then put them both in the linen bag when you're done. You can also spray the plastic pillow cover and couch with Hydrox, if you wish.

I'm in quarantine. Will I still get paid?

Yes. The Collective Agreement provides that paramedics quarantined due to occupational exposure will be paid in the regular way. This is not sick time.

If you become symptomatic, WSIB will cover your salary.

I'm in quarantine for another week. I'm going crazy at home and my spouse and I are getting on each other's nerves. What can the department do to help me?

Remain at home in quarantine. The City of Toronto has an excellent Employee Assistance Program, which is free and absolutely confidential. If you need to talk to someone during normal business hours (08:00 – 16:00), call the EAP at 416-392-6633. On evenings and weekends, page Leslie Langdon at 1-800-268-0600 - code 57127 or Gerry Goldberg at 1-800-268-0600 - code 99919. They will call you back immediately.

My child's daycare is closed. Can you help?

Yes. Call the EAP group at 416-392-6633. They can help with a myriad of problems like this.

I only have four respirator masks left and a week to go on my quarantine. What should I do?

Call the HealthCare Divisional Operations Centre (H-DOC) at 416-338-2117 and Toronto EMS will make arrangements to have masks delivered to your home.

According to Dr. Friedberg, you should be able to use a mask at home for about 12 hours, so you really need two per day at minimum.

I live alone and need some groceries and a prescription refilled. What should I do?

Remain at home under quarantine and call the H-DOC at 416-338-2117 and we will make the appropriate arrangements. The department is committed to supporting our paramedics during this stressful time.

Tomorrow is the last day of quarantine for me. I'm scheduled to start work the day after. What do I do?

Call Scheduling. You will be asked a series of questions, prepared by the Base Hospital, to confirm that you are symptom free and able to return to work. Once you have successfully completed this process, you will be booked fit and should report to work as directed.

I'm really upset that more information hasn't been given to me about the medics who are in hospital with SARS. Why was the department trying to minimize their situation?

Your fellow paramedics who are in hospital have the same privacy rights as any other patient. It would have been inappropriate for Toronto EMS to divulge any information that could identify these medics or even which hospital they are in. The information we did release in our daily updates and to the media respected their privacy. At the request of one of the

medics who had heard the inaccurate rumours about his condition, we provided that information to staff to reassure his colleagues that he was doing satisfactorily.

We had a college student riding out with us who came into Scarborough Grace with us and wasn't wearing their mask either? My partner and I are in quarantine, what about the student?

All students who were working with paramedic crews who visited Scarborough Grace on or after March 16 were contacted regarding possible unprotected exposure. They are in quarantine. Toronto EMS and their colleges are in contact with them and offering them all the support we are offering our staff.