

Works & Emergency Services
Barry Gutteridge, Commissioner

Emergency Medical
Services
4330 Dufferin St.
Toronto, ON M3H 5R9

Tel: 416 392-2069
Fax: 416 392-2115

March 25, 2003

TO: All Toronto EMS staff

FROM: Peter Macintyre, Manager, Community Safeguard Services

RE: SARS Update for March 25, 2003

There are now three Toronto paramedics in hospital being treated for what appears to be SARS. Only one of them is considered to be a probable case. The other two are suspected cases only. At the request of the family of one of the involved medics, we can state that he is feeling much better, his fever has broken, and despite rumours to the contrary, has not been intubated, nor has he suffered a cardiac arrest. Our thoughts are with all three paramedics and their families.

According to Public Health, as of Tuesday morning, there are 16 probable and 5 suspect SARS patients in the GTA. A further group of about 25 people are under investigation. Many of these patients are being monitored at the West Park hospital. All of these patients had unprotected contact with a SARS patient.

All available evidence shows that respiratory precautions are effective in preventing infection. It is important to remember to apply the N95 mask properly. We have attached a copy of the MOH training package for your review.

The N95 mask is designed to fit snugly over the face and any leakage of air increases the risk that infectious particles may be inhaled. Facial hair will diminish the effectiveness of the seal. We recommend that paramedics with beards consider shaving them off. This issue has been discussed with Corporate Health and Safety, who may rule that paramedics must be beardless. We expect to hear from them tomorrow and will notify paramedics accordingly.

N95 masks and gloves must be worn for all contacts with possible SARS patients. Gowns and eye protection should be used for protection against splashes. The importance of regular handwashing cannot be overemphasized. At a minimum, you should use alcohol based hand cleaner or wash - before and after all patient contacts. Remember to use the exhaust fan when transporting potential SARS patients and to notify the hospital of your impending arrival.

As was mentioned yesterday, we are upgrading from Hydrox to a new product. Hydrox remains a very effective sanitizer, but based on recent recommendations we will be issuing Virox - a product similar to Hydrox, but with a higher level of hydrogen peroxide. There are only limited quantities of Virox available, since demand for it has recently increased. More supplies will be available next week, but in the interim, we will be placing spray bottles of

Virox in the crew area of every hospital ED. Refills will be available from your supervisor, but if Virox is not available, please continue to use Hydrox as directed.

Over a month ago, the equipment committee recommended that we order a better quality glove since there were complaints that the current glove was prone to tearing. A limited supply of these new gloves arrived today, and we will be distributing them to all stations and placing them on units. As more stock becomes available, they will be available as personal issue from your supervisor.

There are three main criteria indicating SARS. Patients must meet all of them. These are:

- ◆ Fever greater than 38 degrees Celsius.

AND

- ◆ One or more respiratory symptoms including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing.

AND One or more of the following:

- ◆ Close contact* with a probable case.
- ◆ Recent history of travel (within 10 days) to Asia especially in areas reporting cases of SARS.

*Close contact means having cared for, lived with, or had face-to-face (within 1 metre) contact with, or having had direct contact with respiratory secretions and/or body fluids of a person with SARS.

There must also be no other known cause of the current illness.

Remember that unless the patient meets all of the above conditions, they are very unlikely to have SARS.

Today, the Minister of Health added SARS to the list of reportable diseases. This gives the Medical Officer of Health the legal right to enforce quarantine for possible contacts. They are also opening a Community SARS Assessment Clinic on Thursday morning where people with symptoms can go for assessment. This clinic will be located at the Women's College site of Sunnybrook and Women's College.

We have put a 24-hour EMS hotline into place at 1-800 416-9699. Call for the most current information. The number is liable to be busy, but keep trying and you will get through.

We are committed to providing our paramedics with the best possible equipment, and to keeping everyone updated as new information comes in. More updates will follow.