

SARS and the University Community

Questions and Answers for University Employees

Issued: June 3, 2003

The University of Florida is keenly aware of your concerns about SARS. This document has been prepared by the Student Health Care Center to inform you about steps the University is taking to protect the health of students and staff. Prevention is key to understanding and curtailing transmission of this highly infectious disease. The following information is provided to assure a healthy and safe university community.

“A comprehensive plan to address a potential SARS case at the University of Florida is in place. We are prepared to effectively educate students and employees about this issue and to protect our community”

**- Phillip Barkley, M.D.
Director, Student Health Care Center
Associate Professor, Community Health and Family Medicine**

1. What is SARS and what are the symptoms of SARS?

A new infectious disease outbreak began appearing in the news in March 2003. The disease first began in China and rapidly spread to other Pacific rim nations. The disease is called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, SARS for short. Not only does the disease affect all ages with middle-aged and elderly people at higher risk for serious illness, it also can infect health care workers if certain precautions are not strictly followed.

Symptoms of SARS include fever greater than 100.4°F (38°C) and respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath, cough, and difficulty breathing. Diagnosis of SARS requires specific epidemiological criteria in addition to the clinical symptoms listed above. These criteria include either travel to a SARS affected area, caring for or living with a person known or suspected to have SARS, or contact with infectious materials such as respiratory secretions from a known or suspected SARS patient within 10 days before the start of symptoms.

2. How can I protect myself and my family from SARS and other infectious diseases?

- Good hand hygiene is the best defense against infectious disease transmission. Wash hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cover mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing, then wash hands immediately.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils and drinking after others.
- Eat nutritiously, stay well hydrated, and get adequate sleep to keep the immune system working optimally.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. They not only affect decision-making and concentration, but can also alter immune system functioning and the ability to fight even minor infections.

3. What is the best way for me to stay informed about SARS?

To stay updated on SARS, monitor the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/>, and the World Health Organization (WHO), <http://www.who.int/>, web sites regularly. You can also visit the University of Florida Student Health Care Center's website, <http://health.ufl.edu/shcc/>, for up-to-date information about SARS.

4. If I develop a cough or a fever, does this mean that I might have SARS?

Currently, SARS is not a community health problem in the United States. To date, only travelers returning from parts of the world affected by SARS, or persons who have cared for or lived with SARS patients have contracted SARS.

Having a fever and respiratory symptoms DO NOT alone constitute a SARS illness. A symptomatic person must have come into contact with someone with the illness by traveling to an affected area or caring for or living with a traveler to an affected area.

The illness usually begins with a fever of greater than 100.4° F (38° C) and respiratory symptoms. In addition, chills, headaches, body aches and a general feeling of discomfort may accompany these symptoms. After 7-10

days, a worsening of respiratory symptoms including shortness of breath may develop. If you have concerns about SARS, contact the Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161, ext. 1-4217.

5. What precautions is the University of Florida taking to prevent SARS on campus?

The University has adopted proactive, prevention-focused SARS policies that endorses CDC guidelines and practices. Health care staff and administrators are working closely with state and local state health authorities to monitor for any new cases. They are also educating the University community with up-to-date printed and web-based health alerts. These alerts focus on personal health and prevention of transmission and have been distributed to students and employees planning summer travel abroad. The Student Health Care Center (SHCC) will continually update UF students, faculty and staff with information about SARS as well as personal and community health risks. Visit <http://www.health.ufl.edu/shcc/> for up-to-date information.

6. In my department there are students and staff who may have come from SARS affected areas. How can I be sure these persons are not infected with SARS?

Persons traveling from an area with a high number of SARS cases are currently being screened at airports on departure. Any person found to be symptomatic is quarantined and detained in that country until they are determined to be safe. Persons who are not symptomatic are given instructions to monitor for symptoms for 10 days on their arrival into the U.S.

The SHCC and the local health department have developed internal procedures should a suspected case of SARS be identified. These procedures focus on getting the patient proper medical care *and* preventing the transmission of the disease to others. Be assured that the University will work closely with the local health department to evaluate contacts and initiate quarantine measures if indicated.

Please remember that there is no way to determine whether someone has traveled from a SARS affected area from how they look. Therefore, please do not discriminate against any student or employee because of race or ethnic background. Should you have concerns related to international students or staff, please contact Student Health Care Center Administration at 352-392-1161 ext. 1-4217 to discuss these concerns.

7. Do students and professors who have traveled abroad pose an increased risk to me?

UF students and staff traveling abroad have been counseled before their trip to take every precaution in monitoring for SARS. Additionally, these persons will be screened as they are departing countries with high numbers of SARS cases. They will also be screened again upon arrival in the U.S. It is the responsibility of these travelers to contact Student Health Care Center Administration at 352-392-1161, ext. 1-4217 upon their return to Gainesville. They will be counseled with specific instructions to monitor for SARS symptoms for 10 days after returning from abroad.

8. If I develop symptoms similar to those experienced with SARS, what should I do?

On the average, healthy individuals experience viral cold symptoms once or twice a year. This is normal and expected. If you experience these types of symptoms and have not traveled or been in close contact with someone who has traveled to a SARS affected area, there is no reason for concern and no need to notify health authorities regarding SARS. Should your symptoms worsen or persist, contact your personal health care provider for advice.

If you become ill with fever greater than 100.4°F (38°C) and respiratory symptoms including shortness of breath, cough, or difficulty breathing and you have traveled to a SARS affected area or have come in contact with a known or suspected SARS patient, contact your health care provider immediately **by telephone**. Calling your health care provider allows appropriate precautions to be taken to protect others from transmission of this highly contagious disease. If you are evaluated by your health care provider, you will be asked to wear a surgical mask and placed in a private room. All health care staff will wear protective masks, gowns and gloves for their protection.

UF travelers, students and staff returning from a SARS affected area are required to contact the SHCC administration at 352-392-1161 ext. 1-4217 upon their return to Gainesville for specific health care guidance.

For more information, contact the University of Florida Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1161, or visit the SHCC website at <http://www.health.ufl.edu/shcc/>

