



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

## Guidance for Prevention of Transmission of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome at the Workplace

### Introduction

There is currently **no** community transmission of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in New York City; including no evidence of SARS infection spreading at a workplace. Because we cannot predict how SARS will spread in the future, all New Yorkers should understand several important facts about SARS and what simple measures can reduce the risk of infection at the workplace. This guidance is not intended for health care settings; guidance for health care workers is available at [www.cdc.gov/SARS](http://www.cdc.gov/SARS). Up-to-date information on SARS in New York City is available at [www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health).

### Important facts about SARS

- SARS has affected many countries worldwide— there is no way to tell if someone has SARS by their racial background or nationality.
- Persons who are from an area of the world affected by SARS and are feeling well (no fever or cough) are **not** a risk for spreading SARS. There is no reason to exclude a well person from the workplace because of recent travel or nationality.
- Travelers returning to New York City after visiting an area of the world affected by SARS who are feeling well (no fever or cough) do **not** need to be excluded from work, school or other activities. These individuals are **not** a risk for spreading SARS to others.
- SARS is primarily transmitted by respiratory droplets caused by coughing or sneezing when there is close, direct contact between 2 people (such as in a household). People with SARS who are most likely to cause infections in others are typically very sick with fever, cough and shortness of breath—and are unlikely to be out in public.
- The virus that causes SARS can be killed using common household or commercial detergents and disinfectants (see below for more details).
- One of the best ways to prevent any respiratory infection, including SARS, is to wash your hands before touching your eyes, nose or mouth, before eating, after using the bathroom and any time your hands are soiled. Good hand hygiene is of primary importance for any individual who might possibly be exposed to SARS at the workplace. Important points about hand hygiene are detailed below.

More information about SARS can be found in the accompanying sheet entitled “Frequently Asked Questions about SARS”.

### **How to reduce the risk of infection at the workplace**

For all New Yorkers, several simple measures can reduce the spread of respiratory infections, including SARS, at the workplace. These include:

- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze; dispose of used tissues in a wastebasket.
- Wash your hands in soap and water frequently, especially before touching your eyes, nose or mouth, before eating, after using the bathroom and any time your hands are soiled. If you do not have easy access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand rub containing 60%–95% alcohol.
- As you would normally, if you have a fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F) accompanied by cough, you should stay home from work and consult with your doctor.

The risk of exposure to SARS in the United States is currently felt to be very low. Although this risk is very low, individuals whose work involves contact with large numbers of people or cleaning of areas frequented by travelers may believe they are at increased risk for exposure to SARS. This guidance is intended for those individuals.

- Those who clean and disinfect rooms and common areas should wear non-sterile disposable gloves. Individuals with latex allergies should wear latex-free gloves. The gloves should be removed and discarded if soiled or damaged during use and when moving from one work area to the next. Hands should be washed with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub containing 60%–95% alcohol immediately after gloves are removed. The use of a mask is not currently recommended.
- Bed linens may be handled and cleaned in the usual manner.
- There is currently no evidence to suggest that special vacuuming equipment or procedures are necessary.
- Although there are no disinfectant products currently registered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) specifically for the virus associated with SARS, it is believed that currently available household and commercial disinfectants are effective. When cleaning, special attention should be paid to lavatory facilities.
- Special cleaning of upholstery, carpets, drapes or vertical surfaces is not needed unless they are visibly soiled.
- Used cleaning solutions should be discarded after each use; re-usable equipment should be rinsed thoroughly in tap water and allowed to dry.

**If you have further questions, refer to the accompanying sheet entitled “Frequently asked Questions about SARS” or call the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) at 311.** This guidance is based on our current understanding of SARS; refer to the DOHMH website at [www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health) for the latest developments.