

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

EAST & SOUTH EAST ASIA: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

11 April 2003

Information Bulletin N° 02/2003

This Information Bulletin is for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors at this time but this may change according to circumstances.

Current Situation

Since the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the World Health Organisation (WHO) expert team has accelerated its efforts, working with governments on strengthening of surveillance, clinical management, infection control and laboratory evaluation of SARS cases. Early recognition and treatment of the cases is among one of the key priority actions.

According to latest figures, a total number of 2722 cases, with 106 deaths have been reported from 16 countries. China in particular Guangdong province and Hong Kong are among the hardest hit affected areas. So far the identified cases have had contact with SARS sick persons before falling to it themselves. Transmission by having close contact with saliva/ body fluids from suspected SARS case still is the main cause, although there is investigation on the possible faecal – oral spread. There is no confirmation as yet. Federation health specialists advise that the best prevention is appropriate information and public understanding of the symptoms of the disease and the immediate actions to take if someone falls sick.

The encouraging news in Hong Kong is that out of the total of 970 cases, 142 are now recovered and returned to their homes.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Federation's Health and care team in Geneva and in the East and South East Asia regions, continue to maintain close contact with the World Health Organisation. Information updates and advices are issued along the WHO guidelines. Attention should also be paid to country specific regulations relating to traveling and people entering the country.

National societies in the region remain alert, keeping updated on the latest developments of the disease and staying in contact with their governments.

In Hong Kong, where SARS has been particularly prevalent, the Red Cross is collaborating closely with the different government departments and supporting the community through a number of key initiatives:

- { More than 40,000 cards written with words of concerns and appreciation by the public have been sent to the health workers and patients treated for the disease in the Prince of Wales Hospital.
- { A special section on the Hong Kong Red Cross webpage has been developed for Red Cross youth members and others in access to correct information in personal hygiene and disease prevention. The young people benefit directly by participating in this interactive exchange. They are encouraged to make personal pledges to pass these messages to their peers and family members.
- { A campaign has been launched, raising funds to provide hygiene kits to the elderly and the needy. A leading investment bank has already donated HK\$ 500,000, towards a target of HK\$ 2,000,000. The response has been very encouraging.
- { Youths and adult volunteers are coming forward to pack the hygiene packs. Adult volunteers recruited from the existing pool will be prepared with key messages, and provided with protective measures to distribute these packs to the elderly. Distribution and home visits will start this weekend.
- { Staff and volunteers are involved in providing logistic support to shop for affected families who have to be isolated and housed temporarily at camps.
- { The Hong Kong Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service is calling for those who are healthy and fit to continue with blood donation. Specific questions and answers regarding atypical pneumonia are made available. The public is being informed about the precautionary measures are taken to ensure blood safety.

In summary, through its overall response, the Hong Kong Red Cross is working closely with other community organisations. It is using this opportunity to strengthen the cross functionality of its various departments. The solidarity of its staff and volunteers working towards one common goal has further uplifted the image of the Red Cross as a caring community organisation.

For further details please contact :

- *Dr Hakan Sandbladh, Senior Officer, Health in Emergencies; tel: 41.22.730.4407; fax: 41.22.733.0395; email: <hakan.sandbladh@ifrc.org>*

All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

John Horekens
Director
Division of External Relations

Simon Missiri
Head
Asia Pacific Department