

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)

17 April 2003

Information Bulletin N° 03/2003

This 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

As of 16 April, a cumulative total of 3293 cases of SARS, with 159 deaths, have been reported from 22 countries. The highest number of cases is in China (1,432), Hong Kong (1,268) and Singapore (162). There have been 15 deaths - 14 in Hong Kong and one in Singapore - and an increase of 124 cases in the last two days. There has been an increase of 571 cases and 53 deaths since the last information bulletin on 11 April. Affected areas (in which local chain(s) of transmission of SARS is/are occurring as reported by the national public health authorities) include: Toronto (Canada); Singapore; Beijing, Guangdong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Shanxi (China); and Hanoi (Vietnam). Rapid progress is being reported in the characterization of the causative virus (Corona Virus) and the development of diagnostic tests, which will assist in early identification of infected persons as well as the control of the spread of the infection. However, these tests are still under investigation and not yet readily available. Infection control measures are still relying on the basis of exposure history and clinical symptoms.

Advice to travellers

The International Federation maintains the same standpoint regarding international travel, as recommended by WHO, for journeys to and from affected areas as follows:

- International travellers should be aware of the main symptoms of SARS: high fever ($> 38^{\circ}$ Celsius, $>100.4^{\circ}$ Fahrenheit), dry cough, shortness of breath or breathing difficulties. Persons who experience these symptoms and who have been in an affected area are advised to see a doctor.
- WHO recommends that persons ***travelling to*** Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Guangdong Province, China, consider postponing all but essential travel. This temporary recommendation is being reassessed daily as the outbreak evolves. The recommendation does not apply to passengers simply transiting through international airports in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region or Guangdong Province, China.
- International travellers ***departing from one of the affected areas*** should be screened for possible SARS at the point of departure. These affected areas have shown transmission of the SARS infectious agent from human to human. Screening involves answering two or three questions. Travellers with one or more

symptoms of SARS and who have a history of exposure or who appear acutely ill should be assessed by a clinician and may be advised to postpone their trip until they feel better.

- Most cases of SARS occur in persons who have had close face-to-face contact with SARS patients. Direct contact with (exhaled) droplets and bodily secretions from an infected person appears to be important. However, other routes of transmission are under investigation.
- Travellers are advised to contact their doctors or national health authorities for supplementary information as individual countries may adapt WHO's recommendations to take into account national considerations – see some examples below.
- The Thai government has issued a decree requesting travellers arriving from affected areas to be quarantined at home for two weeks and to report any symptoms to health authorities.
- At Swiss airports, passengers arriving from countries with local transmission are issued a form for self-assessment of symptoms, and requested to report to health authorities if they experience any symptoms, or if they have been in contact with SARS cases.
- All available WHO information is posted on the WHO SARS website at <www.who.int/csr/sars> .

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Federation continues its close contact with the World Health Organisation. Regular information updates and advices are issued. Regional and country delegations and national societies are working in collaboration to collect the latest information and providing advices with specific attention to country regulations. National societies stay in close contact with the local situation, and maintain alert.

- In the ‘Campaign for Helping the Vulnerable and Needy to prevent Atypical Pneumonia’, organised by the Hong Kong Red Cross, it has received generous donations from the public. 100,000 SARS prevention hygiene packs have been prepared by hundreds of volunteers.
- On 13 April Sunday, more than 50 Red Cross volunteers and staff distributed the first batch of these hygiene packs to the singleton elderly people in Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate where cases were found. The volunteers helped to teach elderly people how to prevent SARS and how to use the hygiene kits correctly.
- Additional precautionary measures to ensure the continued safety of the national blood supply issued by the blood bank is available on the website of the Singapore Red Cross.

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