

SARS Health Services Staff with Possible Exposure to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

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Functional Sub group Personnel/Workforce - Occupational Health & Safety

Summary Provides directions to Health Services in respect to staff who may have been exposed to SARS.

Author Branch Employee Relations

Branch contact 9391 9357

Applies to Area Health Services/Chief Executive Governed Statutory Health Corporation, Board Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Affiliated Health Organisations, NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Dept of Health, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Private Nursing Homes, Public Hospitals

Distributed to Public Health System, Health Associations Unions, NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Department of Health, Public Hospitals, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Private Nursing Homes

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Director-General

Compliance with this policy directive is mandatory.

CIRCULAR

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**HEALTH SERVICES STAFF WITH POSSIBLE EXPOSURE TO SEVERE ACUTE
RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) –SARS**

The purpose of this Circular is to provide directions to Health Services in respect of Health Services staff who may have been exposed to SARS.

Health Services staff who have recently travelled to SARS affected areas:-

Health Services staff who have recently travelled to SARS affected areas should be asked to monitor themselves for the development of a temperature or flu-like symptoms, but need not exclude themselves from work if they remain well. Staff who become unwell within 10 days of returning from an affected area should immediately notify their employer and proceed on sick leave until medically cleared.

Updated advice about SARS affected areas can be found at www.who.int/csr/sarsareas/en/.

Health Services staff who have worked in an overseas facility known to have SARS patients or who have had unprotected exposure to a known SARS case:-

Health Services staff who have worked in an overseas facility known to have SARS patients, and staff who have had unprotected exposure to a known SARS case, should be offered the choice of working from home or being directed to take special leave, and should not attend work for a period concluding 10 days after their last exposure to that facility or case. This action should be taken even if the staff member is asymptomatic.

Working from home may apply where there is no obstacle in the relevant award, where the staff member has a preference for working from home, and where it is practicable for work from home to be performed. Special leave is paid leave, and includes any penalty rates that might otherwise have been payable were special leave not being taken.

Medical attention should be sought as soon as possible if symptoms develop. Should the staff member become unwell or symptoms develop in this period, the employer is to be notified and the staff member should proceed on sick leave until medically cleared.

SARS symptoms:-

People who contract SARS usually start to develop symptoms within 2 to 7 days after being exposed to the virus. These symptoms include:

Distributed in accordance with circular list(s):

A 35	B	C 27	D	E	73 Miller Street North Sydney NSW 2060
F	G	H 28	I	J 9	Locked Mail Bag 961 North Sydney NSW 2059
K	L 6	M 3	N 11	P	Telephone (02) 9391 9000 Facsimile (02) 9391 9101

In accordance with the provisions incorporated in the Accounts and Audit Determination, the Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officers and their equivalents, within a public health organisation, shall be held responsible for ensuring the observance of Departmental policy (including circulars and procedure manuals) as issued by the Minister and the Director-General of the Department of Health.

- fever greater than 38 degrees centigrade;
- coughing;
- shortness of breath;
- difficulty in breathing.

Other symptoms include headaches, muscle aches, poor appetite, skin rash, diarrhoea and sore throats.

Under the *Public Health Amendment (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) Regulation 2003*, SARS has been made a Category 4 medical condition under the *Public Health Act 1991*. Any person suffering from such a condition is required to take reasonable precautions against spreading the condition.

A Safe Workplace:-

The obligation under occupational health and safety legislation for all employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all workers requires Health Services to ensure that all relevant staff are aware of, and directed to comply fully with, the NSW Infection Control Guidelines for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. These guidelines are available on the NSW Health Web site (www.health.nsw.gov.au then What's New, then Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, then NSW Infection Control Guidelines for SARS).

It is emphasised that adherence to these guidelines will reduce significantly any risks of Health Services staff contracting SARS. The spread of SARS overseas to health workers has occurred most notably in situations where the procedures set out in these guidelines were not followed.

Health Services staff who may have contracted SARS at work:-

In the event that it appears that a Health Services staff member may have contracted SARS in the course of their work, the processes set out in the NSW Health Occupational Health, Safety and Rehabilitation Guide apply. There is an obligation under occupational health and safety legislation on employers and occupiers of any place of work to send WorkCover an Incident Report Form for serious work-related illnesses, which would include work-related confirmed SARS cases. All work-related confirmed SARS cases also should be reported to GIO Workers Compensation within 48 hours of being notified, via phone 131010, facsimile 1300 733 677 or email sydneyimc@gio.com.au.

Enquiries

Specific enquiries concerning the human resources aspects of the above information should be directed to the relevant human resources personnel in the Health Services. Only Health Services human resources personnel are to contact the Department.

Medical enquiries should be directed to the local public health unit of the relevant Health Service.

Robyn Kruk
Director-General