



SOUTHCOAST
HOSPITALS GROUP

Charlton ■ St. Luke's ■ Tobey

BACKGROUNDER
April 24, 2003

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Southcoast Hospitals Continue to Monitor for Suspected Cases of SARS

Infectious disease specialists and the Infection Control department at the three hospital sites monitor and distribute information provided from various sources on a regular basis.

NEW BEDFORD, Mass. — Southcoast Hospitals Group has been working hard to keep our employees, physicians and the community informed on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Our infectious disease specialists and infection control department at the three hospital sites monitor and distribute information provided from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) on a regular basis.

SARS is currently linked to travel to the following geographic areas:

Toronto, Canada
Singapore
China (Guangdong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China,
Shanxi, Taiwan Province)
Hanoi, Vietnam

According to the CDC, SARS is a respiratory illness that has recently been reported in Asia, North America, and Europe. As of April 20 about 198 suspect cases of SARS and 38 probable cases of SARS had been reported in the United States. As of April 24, 15 suspect cases of SARS and one probable case has been reported in Massachusetts with one reportedly from Bristol County. Southcoast Hospitals Group has seen no cases of the SARS virus.

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As with all public health concerns, numerous policies and procedures are in place to maintain that our patients receive the highest standard of care and services available. For many years, Southcoast has had procedures and methods in place for isolating infectious disease cases that come to the hospitals. (For example, chickenpox, suspected tuberculosis.)

At Southcoast we take the quality of our environment and the care we provide our patients very seriously. The following is a brief overview of what Southcoast has been doing with regard to SARS:

Southcoast's Infection Control Department and Medical Directors of Infectious Diseases at all three hospital sites are monitoring and distributing information on SARS received from the CDC, WHO, DPH, American Hospitals Association and Massachusetts Hospitals Association. New information is provided as it becomes available and archived for easy access by employees and physicians.

Emergency Departments at all three sites have received materials with instructions on how to handle suspected SARS cases. This information is very detailed and based on guidelines issued by the CDC.

As always, the Southcoast Infection Control department is reminding staff that good infection control practices, like with all infectious diseases, is key to control.

Southcoast is distributing updated information for all hospital employees with specific tips and procedures.

The hospital is dedicated to educating employees on what to do if they have traveled recently to the high-risk areas or if they are in close contact with someone who has traveled to high-risk areas.

We have also asked that employees who may be planning a trip to any of the regions recently identified by the WHO as a high-risk region contact Employee Health Services.

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For more information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Information hotline: 888.246.2675.
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/>
- World Health Organization
<http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/>
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
<http://www.state.ma.us/dph/cdc/epii/sars/sars.htm>

Southcoast Health System, a not-for-profit charitable organization, is a community based health delivery system with multiple access points, offering an integrated continuum of health services throughout Southeastern Massachusetts and East Bay, Rhode Island. It includes Southcoast Hospitals Group, formed in 1996 from the merger of Charlton Memorial Hospital in Fall River, St. Luke's Hospital in New Bedford and Tobey Hospital in Wareham.

Southcoast is one of three community hospitals approved by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to perform open heart surgery and elective coronary angioplasty. For more information visit www.southcoast.org.

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