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New Facts From The World Health Organization About SARS & Sewage

(From Reuters News Agency, May 5, 2003) - The World Health Organization said on Sunday that the SARS virus can live for days in the stool and urine of patients. The test results posted on the WHO Web Site at <http://www.who.int> show the virus can live for days in human waste.

"Virus is stable in feces (and urine) at room temperature for at least one to two days," WHO said in a statement. "Virus is more stable (up to 4 days) in stool from diarrhea patients than in normal stool where it could only be found for up to 6 hours."

Acidity seems to be important -- stool in diarrhea is more alkaline and thus seems to be more hospitable for the virus. The stool of newborns, which is more acidic, kills the virus after three hours.

But standard disinfectants such as chlorine bleach killed the virus in five minutes, WHO found.

SARS is related to viruses that cause the common cold and gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases in animals. Air travelers have spread the disease across the world. During air travel, the virus can be passed by droplets from the nose and mouth through sneezing and coughing.

Like many other viruses that cause respiratory illness and stomach upset, it can live on surfaces and be passed on when one person touches a contaminated area and then touches his or her own nose, mouth or eyes.

As in flu and colds, doctors say the best defense against SARS is to wash the hands frequently.

SARS is not spreading in any communities in the United States. The Centers For Disease Control (CDC) has not identified sewer workers as being at any increased risk as compared to the average citizen. Most U.S. cases have occurred among travelers returning from other parts of the world affected by SARS.

**Please See The Attached SARS Q&A For More Information
Or Contact David Patzer, CSRMA Risk Control At:**

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Some Questions and Answers About SARS

Question: How is the SARS virus transmitted?

Answer: The main way appears to be close person-to-person contact: Infected people cough or sneeze contaminated droplets that settle on their own hands, other people or objects. Non-infected people may get it on their hands and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

Scientists have also found that the virus can survive at least four days in excrement, bolstering a theory that leaky sewage pipes spread an infection in a Hong Kong apartment complex.

Question: What's the best way to avoid catching SARS?

Answer: Frequent hand-washing, particularly in an area where the disease has spread.

The WHO and CDC do not recommend routinely wearing masks in public.

Question: How long can the virus survive on surfaces?

Answer: It can live on chilled surfaces, like those in a refrigerator, as long as four days.

Question: Can anything kill the virus when it's on a surface?

Answer: Common household cleaners are sufficient for disinfecting toilets, sinks and other surfaces.

Question: Who is most at risk of getting SARS?

Answer: SARS is not spreading in any communities in the United States. Most U.S. cases have occurred among travelers returning from other parts of the world affected by SARS. A few cases have come from close contact with family members and health care workers.

Question: What are the symptoms?

Answer: It usually starts with a fever of greater than 100.4 degrees F., sometimes along with chills and other symptoms like headache, general discomfort and body aches. After two to seven days, the patient may develop a dry cough that might progress to the point where insufficient oxygen reaches the blood.

Question: If I'm exposed to the virus, how long would it take me to get sick?

Answer: Typically the incubation period is two to seven days, but it can be as long as 10 days.

On the Net:

CDC information: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars

WHO information: www.who.int/csr/sars/en/