



# number 18 Circular from the Chief Health Officer

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## SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) ADVICE FOR CLERICAL/ADMINISTRATION STAFF WORKING IN HOSPITALS

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- Information provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to date is that:
    - In the incubation period, SARS is not transmitted from person to person.
    - Infectivity starts when people have a fever ( $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) and other non-specific symptoms (e.g. generally feeling unwell, headache, loss of appetite, aching muscles).
    - When respiratory symptoms develop (e.g. dry non-productive cough, difficulty breathing) there is higher infectivity (this is usually after 3 to 7 days). High levels of transmission come from people who are extremely unwell.
  - SARS spreads from person to person, usually by droplet transmission from infected persons. This could be as a result of coughing which spreads the virus to those people in close contact. The virus can also contaminate objects for a short period of time. There is no evidence that SARS spreads through air-conditioning systems.
  - Within Australia, SARS is not common. Other causes of infection in the respiratory tract are far more common than SARS. For example, influenza is much more contagious than SARS.
  - Queensland Health has developed signage for emergency departments and general practices, to alert patients and visitors to the precautions they need to take when entering a health care facility if they suspect they may have SARS.
  - Information about SARS is available for administration staff working in health care facilities. If further advice is required, staff should contact their Infection Control Department or local Public Health Unit.
  - Risks to administration staff must be considered when developing infection control procedures for management of possible SARS cases.
  - Administration staff should be advised of the following:
    - Avoid close contact with any patient or visitor who is unwell, particularly people who are exhibiting symptoms of possible respiratory infection. (Maintain a distance of at least 1 metre from the person)
    - Basic hygiene is essential in reducing the risk of virus transmission. Hands should be washed regularly whilst on duty, particularly before eating. Avoid facial and eye contact with hands as much as possible. Smokers should wash their hands before smoking, as contaminants on the hands are easily transferred to the mouth whilst smoking.
    - Do not touch disposed tissues or handkerchiefs as these may carry secretions with infected material.
- These precautions will also protect staff against other respiratory illnesses.
- Routine use of masks by staff is not recommended at this time. Masks should be offered to any patient who has symptoms suggestive of SARS.
  - Environmental surfaces such as counter tops and partitions should be cleaned on a regular basis, or when visibly soiled.
  - Although influenza vaccines do not protect against SARS, those people for whom annual influenza vaccinations are recommended should have this vaccination.

**Developed by:**  
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