

# This is an official **CDC HEALTH UPDATE**

Distributed via Health Alert Network  
Monday, March 24, 2003, 22:10 EST (10:10 PM EST)  
CDCHAN-00127-03-03-24-UPD-N

## **CDC Lab Analysis Suggests New Coronavirus May Cause SARS**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced today that a previously unrecognized virus from the coronavirus family is the leading hypothesis for the cause of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Two coronaviruses that are known to infect humans cause one third of common colds and are also a common cause of health care-associated upper respiratory infections in premature infants.

"This is encouraging news from our laboratories at CDC," said Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services. "These and other excellent scientists all over the world have been working around the clock for days and their hard work is paying off. They continue to look at other possible causes of SARS, but this is a key finding in our efforts to identify the cause of this global outbreak."

Additional steps needed to confirm this hypothesis include further culturing of the virus from appropriate specimens, sequencing the viral genome, and examining specimens from patients at different stages of their illness.

"This collaboration among scientists led by the World Health Organization (WHO) is unprecedented," said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding. "We certainly have more work to do, but we think we are on the right track. And our systems to identify cases and investigate them are working too, thanks to all the frontline clinicians and state and local health departments around the country."

As of Monday, March 24, CDC is reporting 39 suspected SARS cases in 18 states. WHO is reporting 456 cases and 17 deaths.

Since the outbreak of SARS was first reported two weeks ago, CDC has responded in these ways:

- Activated the agency's Emergency Operations Center
- Alerted public health partners in cities and states by issuing electronic messages
- Prepared and distributed more than 60,000 health alert cards to travelers returning from Southeast Asia.
- Provided guidance to public health departments, health care facilities, and clinicians in monitoring and identifying potential cases.
- Provided safe specimen-handling guidelines to laboratories
- Deployed more than a dozen CDC staff members, including medical officers, epidemiologists, infection control specialists, and pathologists to support the World Health Organization in the global investigation.

- Provided regular media briefings to report on progress of the investigation.

Additional information about SARS in the United States and globally is available at the following websites:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars>

[http://www.who.int/csr/sarscountry/2003\\_03\\_22/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/sarscountry/2003_03_22/en/)

Information on SARS-related travel advisories is available at:

<http://travel.state.gov/>

**\*Errata:** Do to a systems error, this message previously sent today may have included an error in the serial number and/or date.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national and international organizations.*

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**