

Living with SARS



At the beginning, SARS was pretty much likened to the "Angel of Death". Sending a chill down one's spine, quietly leaving the heart to rattle with fear. SARS surfaced and penetrated our society rather swiftly. Spreading like wild fire, the virus consumed more than thirty persons in one fell-swoop. There was a moment, when the mention of this hissing acronym wielded a powerful hold on everyone's sanity, as it rung the death knell on some of its victims.

It has been more than three months since SARS first showed up at our doorstep. Despite researchers' frantic drive to discover more about the characteristics and evolution of the virus, limited information was uncovered. We have been told that there is, as yet, no available cure or immunity vaccine against SARS. We can, however, seek comfort in the knowledge that there are basic precautions we can take to protect ourselves from the virus and adhere to the commonly heard dictum - "Life must go on!"

Coming to Terms

For starters, we have faced up to reality that SARS might be something we have to live with for a while - a matter of a few months or years, perhaps. It will be sometime before the virus eradicates itself, a cure is found, or even an immunity vaccine is available. One thing is for certain - we cannot go on living our lives in fear and anxiety!

Lifestyle Changes - to what degree? (No pun intended!)

Running a temperature often tells of an ailment that has besieged the human body. With no clear and definite indicators for the onset of SARS, a temperature of 38°C and above is one of the more indicative symptoms, we know of right now.

Overnight, the thermometer has become an indispensable item in every Singaporean household. Even school children are being issued with a thermometer each and instructed to check their own temperature daily. They have been educated on the appropriate procedures to follow, in the event that they come down with a spiking temperature of 38°C or above. Several corporate institutions have also adopted the same practice in having their staff monitor their temperature daily.



If this is anything to go by, daily temperature checks are, by and large, the most obvious change to our daily lifestyle in Singapore.

Bathroom Etiquette

It is a bad display of manners when after using the bathroom, you leave it soiled and unsanitary for the next person. By keeping the toilet environment clean, not only do we minimise and eliminate the transmission of germs and bacteria to others, it leaves the facility more pleasant to use! It is a fact that body excrement harbours germs and when left exposed, it can contaminate the environment and cause others to fall ill.

Practising Personal Hygiene

These days, there certainly is more emphasis on the need for personal hygiene. Previously, those who were inconsiderate in behaviour with their hygiene habits (eg. spitting, coughing and sneezing out into the open atmosphere, etc) were regarded with disdain and left as that. Now, these offenders are given instant alienation, dagger stares by passers-by and a stern reprimand from the authority.

The wearing of masks seems to be the rage over these past few months - be it the N95, surgical or decorative ones! When you are unwell, it is a sensible and responsible thing to wear a mask to minimise the exchange of respired vapours in the atmosphere.



Washing Your Hands

We have been told over and over again to *wash our hands* before we eat, not to rub our eyes, touch our face, mouth or nose with our hands without first *washing them*...

Giving our hands a good scrub with soap and water is sufficient to kill off germs, bacteria and weak viruses. Refraining from rubbing our eyes, touching our face, mouth or nose is common sense, otherwise, it would mean paving an entrance for harmful germs and viruses to enter our body.



This trait of personal hygiene is heightened even more, now that we have been told that in so doing, we can prevent the spread of micro-organisms and infections. More importantly, it is a crucial and relevant step in minimising the transmission of the SARS virus.

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At The Dinner Table

In Singapore as well as many parts of Asia, a meal amongst family or friends often comprise several dishes shared between two or more people. As such, it is a good and sensible idea to place a serving spoon for each dish. This will certainly help to eliminate the action of "double-dipping" and cross-contamination among the diners, by allowing everyone to keep their dining cutlery for personal use.



Keeping You in the Loop

Contact Bowl – These days, the contact bowl is a feature that is commonly found at restaurants, hotels and other public establishments. The sole purpose of this "bowl" is to facilitate contact tracing. This system was introduced for establishments to collect the contact details of all who patronise them. This is so, in the event of a SARS outbreak which ties back to the establishment, the patrons can be traced, informed and have their health status monitored.



It is a relatively effortless act, requiring patrons to drop their name cards into the bowl or to fill up a coupon that indicates their contact details. After which, the establishment would collate and compile these information daily.

At a glance, it seems like we have to adjust to too many changes in lifestyle habits all at once. Yet, as an after thought, you might realise that these pointers are very sensible habits which we should factor in to our daily routine. There are no major overhauls involved. These procedures simply require us to be more responsible where hygiene and health issues are concerned. In turn, everyone stands to benefit from a more pleasant environment.

Virtual Visiting @NUH



With the temporary restriction on visitors to hospital, we have set up a **Visitors Lounge** at our main lobby to facilitate communication between our patients and their loved ones. Visitors can now use videophones at our Visitors Lounge or at any of the Virtual Visitors Centres *(VVCs) to chat and see their relatives / friends who are patients in NUH (selected wards), face-to-face online! There is no restriction on the number of visitors for this virtual visiting but only ONE (1) virtual visit per day is allowed for each patient. Call us today to make your 'Virtual Visit' appointment!

NUH Virtual Visit Appointment & Enquiry Hotline - 6772 2001

Operating hours: 8.30 am to 8 pm Daily (including Sundays & Public Holidays)

* Virtual Visitors Centres (VVCs)

- NUH Visitors Lounge, Main Building 1, Level 1 (next to 7-Eleven)
Operating Hours: 12 noon to 2 pm & 5 pm to 8 pm Daily (including Sundays & Public Holidays)
- Bishan Community Club (next to Junction 8)
- South West CDC People's Hall (Jurong East)
- Choa Chu Kang Community Library
- IBM Towers (Anson Road)

Family members, relatives and friends can also send their gifts to patients through the South West CDC's "**SPEEDY GIFTS**" express service. All they need to do is to drop off their gifts at the VVCs in South West CDC District (People's Hall and Choa Chu Kang Community Library) between 11am and 8pm daily and the items will be hand-delivered to their loved ones in NUH on the same day!

* This is a community partnership between South West CDC, Corporate and Healthcare organisations.

Stick As You Go!

In case you are wondering why are there two fanciful boards at our exit areas at Main Building 1 Lobby and Kent Ridge Wing 2 South Entrance... Yes, they are there for YOU and our VISITORS! As part of our efforts to keep Singapore clean, we are encouraging patients and visitors to stick their temperature stickers on the board when they leave our hospital premises. So, the next time you step out of NUH, don't forget to leave your sticker with us on one of these boards!



Getting Rid of Your Temperature Sticker? Stick 'em Right Here!

Useful Contact Numbers

SARS AMBULANCE

Think you've got SARS? Call for ambulance service to **Tan Tock Seng Hospital: 993**. This ambulance service is free.



For public enquiries or to obtain more information on SARS, contact:

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Hotline:
1800 333 9999
Website:
www.moh.gov.sg

NUH

Hotline:
6772 2525
Website:
www.nuh.com.sg/SARS/