

SARS and the University Community

Questions and Answers for Parents

Last Updated: June 3, 2003

The University of Florida is keenly aware of your concerns about SARS. This document has been prepared by staff the Student Health Care Center to inform you about the proactive steps the University is taking to protect the health of students and staff. Prevention is key to understanding and curtailing transmission of this highly infectious disease. With that in mind, we urge you to talk with your student about how to protect his or her health.

One of the many strengths of the University of Florida is its willingness to embrace diversity and multiculturalism. The University intends to continue this willingness, but also recognizes that special precautions need to be in place primarily for international students and travelers. These safeguards are currently in place. The following information is provided to assure a healthy and safe university community.

1. What is the best way for my student and me to stay informed about SARS?

To stay updated on SARS, monitor the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) web sites regularly: <http://www.cdc.gov/> and <http://www.who.int/>. You can also visit the University of Florida Student Health Care Center's website for up-to-date information about SARS: <http://health.ufl.edu/shcc/>.

2. How can students protect themselves from SARS and other infectious diseases?

- Good hand hygiene is the best defense against infectious disease transmission. Wash hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cover mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing, then wash hands.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils and drinking after others.
- Eat nutritiously, stay well hydrated, and get adequate sleep to keep the immune system working optimally.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. They not only affect decision-making and concentration, but can also alter immune system functioning and the ability to fight even minor infections.

3. If my student develops a cough or a fever, does this mean that he or she might have SARS?

Currently, SARS is not a community health problem in the United States. To date, only travelers returning from parts of the world affected by SARS, or persons who have cared for or lived with them, have contracted SARS.

Having a fever and respiratory symptoms like shortness of breath and a cough DO NOT alone constitute a SARS illness. A symptomatic person must have come into contact with someone with the illness by traveling to an affected area or caring for or living with a traveler to an affected area.

The illness usually begins with a fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or greater and mild respiratory symptoms. In addition, chills, headaches, body aches and a general feeling of discomfort may accompany these symptoms. After 7-10 days, a dry non-productive cough may develop with worsening respiratory symptoms including shortness of breath. If your student has concerns, encourage him or her to contact the Student Health Care Center at 392-1161.

4. What precautions is the University of Florida taking to prevent SARS on campus?

The University has adopted proactive prevention-focused SARS policies that endorse CDC guidelines and practices. Health care staff and administrators are working closely with state and local state health authorities to monitor for any new cases. They are also educating the University community with up-to-date printed and web-based health alerts. These alerts focus on personal health and prevention of transmission and have been distributed to students and employees planning summer travel abroad. The Student Health Care Center (SHCC) will continually update UF students, faculty and staff with information

about SARS as well as personal and community health risks. Visit <http://www.health.ufl.edu/shcc/> for up-to-date information.

5. Many international students, including those from countries affected by SARS, study at the University of Florida. How are these students being screened?

Persons traveling from an area with a high number of SARS cases are currently being screened at airports on departure. Any person found to be symptomatic is quarantined and detained in that country until they are determined to be safe. Persons who are not symptomatic are given instructions to monitor for symptoms for 10 days after their arrival back into the U.S.

The SHCC and the local health department have developed internal procedures should a suspected case of SARS be identified. These procedures focus on getting the patient proper medical care *and* preventing the transmission of the disease to others. The SHCC will work closely with the local health department to evaluate contacts and initiate quarantine measures if indicated.

6. Do students and professors who have traveled abroad pose an increased risk to my child?

UF students and staff traveling abroad have been counseled before their trip to take every precaution in preventing and monitoring for SARS. Additionally, these persons will be screened as they are departing countries with high numbers of SARS cases. They will also be screened again upon arrival in the U.S. These travelers will be given specific instructions to monitor for SARS symptoms for 10 days after returning from abroad.

7. If my child develops symptoms similar to those experienced with SARS while at UF, what should he or she do?

Anyone who suspects that he or she may have SARS symptoms should call a medical care center before coming in. UF students should call the Student Health Care Center (392-1161), and ask to be connected to a medical professional. He or she should clearly indicate they are having symptoms of SARS. The nursing and medical staff of the SHCC will follow CDC guidelines for providing medical care to anyone presenting with SARS symptoms. Patients will be placed in a private room and will be required to wear a surgical mask. Precautions will be taken to prevent transmission of the virus while the provider is examining the student. A chest x-ray may be taken to appropriately diagnose pneumonia. Mild and moderate illnesses will be monitored closely for progression. Persons with more severe symptoms, including pneumonia, may be hospitalized.

8. If my child were to develop a SARS illness requiring medical care while at the university, who will be responsible for the costs of the medical care?

The health fee included as part a student's tuition typically covers routine medical visits to the Student Health Care Center. Laboratory tests, x-rays, medical procedures/treatments, and pharmaceuticals incur additional cost. These may be covered or reimbursable by your student's health insurance policy. The costs of medical treatment and hospitalization are the responsibility of the student. For this reason, all UF students are strongly advised to have health insurance coverage that would assist if hospitalization were necessary.

For more information, contact the University of Florida Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1161, or visit the SHCC website at <http://www.health.ufl.edu/shcc/>

