



Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases, Region of the Americas

Vol. 1, No. 8—28 August 2003

Acute Respiratory Disease in British Columbia, Canada

An outbreak of respiratory illness in an aged care facility in Canada has now been extensively investigated for SARS and WHO concludes the disease is not SARS. On 14 August, Canadian public health officials reported to WHO that an unidentified respiratory disease in a Surrey, British Columbia health care facility had infected 143 residents and staff. Some initial testing suggested the SARS coronavirus may have played a role.

At present, WHO and Canadian health authorities have gathered enough evidence to conclude that the outbreak in British Columbia is not SARS. Analysis from laboratories in Canada and the United States did not confirm the initial concern that SARS had mutated into a milder disease.

Two lines of evidence have converged to dismiss the SARS concern:

1. Clinically, the disease itself was strikingly different from the SARS outbreak in the spring. The features of the current outbreak included a low case fatality, runny nose, lack of fever in most patients, and no SARS-like changes in the lung seen on X-ray.
2. Now, sequencing of a portion of the virus causing the outbreak has led to the finding that it was not the SARS coronavirus but another human coronavirus known as OC43. This virus, which is one of the causes of the common cold, has been associated with respiratory outbreaks in aged care facilities in other countries.

In terms of SARS, Canada continues to be a safe destination for travelers and travelers from Canada pose no exceptional risk to other countries.

This outbreak has no international public health implications.

For further information on this outbreak and on SARS, see the websites for the [British Columbia Center for Disease Control \(BCCDC\)](#) and the [WHO SARS page](#).

Sources: British Columbia Center for Disease Control (BCCDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).