



Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases, Region of the Americas

Vol. 1, No. 12—25 September 2003

Update on the SARS Situation

Referring back to the case of SARS confirmed in Singapore this past 13 September, the Ministry of Health carried out a press conference in which it made public the document produced by the national and international group of experts entitled *Biosafety and SARS Incident in Singapore, September 2003: Report of the Review Panel on New SARS Case and Biosafety*. This [Report](#) contains the main conclusions and recommendations arrived at on the basis of this new case.

From the study of this case, the conclusion was that the most probable hypothesis is that the 27-year-old male acquired the infection through occupational exposure. Despite his having worked in a laboratory with West Nile Virus, it was demonstrated that he could have had contact with SARS Co-V from laboratory contaminated material he was working with. The patient had no background of contact with persons suffering the disease, nor of travel to affected areas. The genomic sequence from both the environmental samples and the patient seem to be closely related, indicating that the contaminated material is the most probable source of infection.

The recommendations made concerning biosafety in the laboratories are centered upon compliance with basic structural requirements of the laboratories and with organizational procedures. There are indications that audits need to be carried out to certify the safety of biosafety level three facilities, as well as training for all staff working in this them. Biosafety level 3 containment requires special engineering and design features as well as heightened safety standards and practices. More information is available in the WHO [Laboratory Biosafety Manual](#).

In response to this incident, the World Health Organization (WHO) is reviewing its recommendations for the handling and storage of SARS specimens in laboratories. In October 2003, a meeting of SARS experts and leaders in the field of biosafety will take place, with the objective of reviewing current guidelines for handling the SARS coronavirus.

Sources: [Ministry of Health](#), Singapore | [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)