

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Henrietta Campbell CB

To:

Directors of Public Health to forward to:

- All General Practitioners – please ensure this message is seen by all practice nurses and non-principals working in your practice and retain a copy in your 'locum information pack'
- Deputising Services
- Out-of-Hours Co-operatives

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 9052 0563

Fax: 028 9052 0574

Email:

Henrietta.Campbell@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Chief Executives of Trusts to alert Medical Directors Office:

Medical Director of Trusts to forward to:

- Accident and Emergency Departments
- Hospital Physicians (particularly respiratory physicians, ID physicians and all those doing acute medical "take in")
- ITUs
- Paediatricians
- Nurse Directors of HSS Trust
- Consultant Microbiologists

Your Ref: HSS(MD)16/04

Our Ref:

Date: 29 April 2004

Consultants in Communicable Disease Control
Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (NI)
Regional Virus Laboratory

Dear Colleague

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SARS SITUATION IN CHINA

1. The purpose of this communication is to make you aware of the developing situation in China in relation to a number of SARS cases.
2. On 22 April, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported a suspected case of SARS in Beijing. This was the first confirmed case of SARS anywhere in the world since January. Since then the Chinese authorities have reported a further 8 cases of clinically suspected SARS, 5 of which have links to the index case. To date a total of 2 cases are **confirmed** and results of tests from the others are awaited. One death has occurred.
3. The index case is a postgraduate student who was working at Beijing's Institute of Virology and in whom exposure to the SARS virus occurred in the laboratory setting. This laboratory is now closed and the other workers there have been placed under quarantine. The second confirmed case of SARS is in a nurse who cared for the index case in hospital. Chinese authorities have undertaken extensive tracing and follow-up of contacts in relation to these to cases. In Beijing, nearly 700 persons have been isolated or placed in quarantine.
4. WHO are continuing to monitor the situation and have sent a team of investigators to Beijing to aid the Chinese authorities. There are currently no travel advisories or restrictions on travel to China. Up to date information is available on the WHO website at <http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/index.html>.

5. DHSSPS, in conjunction with the other Health Departments and the UK SARS Taskforce are monitoring the situation closely. **The UK remains at alert level 0** - no active cases in the UK or Ireland. No known cases internationally or sporadic cases that are well controlled with little likelihood of international spread.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

6. The Department urges clinicians and other healthcare professionals to remain vigilant to the possibility of SARS even though the level of risk in Northern Ireland very low. Clinicians should continue to report unusual clusters of severe respiratory illness among health care workers and possible SARS infection in persons returning from China to the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control. A reporting form is available at – www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/phealth/sars_info/sars_reporting.pdf.

7. Considerable work has been undertaken over the last year in relation to SARS Contingency Planning. Boards and Trusts should review their local SARS contingency plans and ensure that the actions required at level 0 are completed or near completion. This will enhance the capability of the HPSS to respond should we have to move to a higher level of alert.

8. Experience from the SARS outbreak in 2003 has shown how the situation can change rapidly, on an almost daily basis. HPSS organisations and health care workers should make sure they have access to the most up to date information in relation to the developing SARS situation and the management of suspected cases of SARS. Detailed information and guidance is available from the websites listed below. All information currently on these websites is up to date and relevant for the inter epidemic period. In the event that the UK moves to a higher level of alert the guidance will be updated as required.

DHSSPS Website – www.sarsni.gov.uk

Health Protection Agency Website - http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/SARS/menu.htm

CDSCNI website – www.cdscni.org.uk

World Health Organisation website - <http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/index.html>

Yours sincerely

DR H CAMPBELL
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

CC: PS Mr Gowdy
Mr D Hill
Mr P Simpson
Mr A Hamilton
Mr D Sullivan
Mr J Livingstone
Mr D Bingham
Dr L Doherty
Dr E Mitchell
CPO
CNO
Mr P Martin
Mr C Shannon
Mr Dorrian
DHSSPS SARS Team