

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) UPDATE SHEET 4 – 24TH JUNE 2003

Although the SARS epidemic predominantly in the Far East is no longer headline news, there are still significant concerns for individuals travelling primarily to the Far East and for those organisations whose activities are on a residential basis. For the normal office or manufacturing environment where employees are not in close physical contact with clients or colleagues, the risk is now significantly reduced and extremely low. I would suggest that in this environment the main issues are now with regards to travel insurance and whether holidays or business trips booked prior to the SARS outbreak are still covered by normal travel insurance policies.

Based on the current information available from the World Health Organisation, the area of primary concern is now Mainland China and the area around Beijing. This area is still considered to be high risk and all our previous recommendations remain in place. The WHO have now removed Vietnam, Toronto, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mongolia from its' list of affected areas, but it still recommends deterring all but essential travel from these areas.

The Public Health Laboratory UK advice follows that from the WHO and also makes the point that healthcare services in the above areas will be under significant pressure because of the ongoing cases requiring treatment from the SARS outbreak.

For any individuals travelling to the above areas in the next few months, we would recommend the following:-

- Wash your hands frequently when in any SARS affected area.
- To minimise the possibility of infection, avoid close contact with large numbers of people; for example in cinemas, restaurants, conferences, etc. The advice with regards to symptoms remains as in our previous communications.
- After returning from any of the SARS affected areas, individuals should monitor their health for a minimum of ten days, as per the guidelines that have already been identified. Quarantine should now only be considered if individuals are returning to organisations which have community-style arrangements and where close physical contact may be required, for example healthcare facilities, care homes, etc.