

FRIDAY HOT-LINE CALL

SARS UPDATE

VICTORIA DAVEY, RN, MPH
Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards

SARS continues to emerge as a very important public health issue.

VA Broadcast of CDC SARS Teleconference: VAKN has made available multiple screenings of a SARS Update broadcast entitled, "Increasing Clinician Preparedness for SARS" that was aired by CDC on May 8. Consult the VAKN program guide or your facility listing for the availability of this telecast.

VA SARS Website: In order to provide VA employees with up-to-date information about SARS we update the VA SARS website daily. The URL's for that site are: are www.publichealth.va.gov/sars or <http://vaww.vhaco.va.gov/phshcg/SARS/>.

VA Patient Reporting Directive: An Under Secretary for Health Directive that outlines procedures for reporting and tracking suspected or probably cases of SARS among veteran patients is in the final stage of clearance and will be distributed to the field within the next few days. Accurate tracking and reporting of both suspected and probable SARS cases is important for public health, infection control and resource allocation issues. Until this Directive is in place, please continue reporting of suspected or probable SARS cases to your local health department and VISN office, as requested previously.

Management of Exposures to SARS for Health Care Settings: On May 7, CDC issued interim guidance on this important topic. The interim guidance is posted both on the CDC and VA SARS websites for those who want to read them in detail. In brief, this interim guidance makes recommendations on:

- Surveillance of health care personnel who have contact with patients with SARS.
- Management of health care workers who have an unprotected high-risk exposure to a SARS patient.
- Management of health care workers who have been exposed to a SARS patient and have symptoms suggestive of SARS.

The Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards has convened a workgroup to guide VA implementation of these CDC recommendations.

Correction from April 18 Directors Conference Call: On April 18 we communicated current NIOSH recommendations that reuse of the N-95 face masks was permissible. CDC has examined this practice in SARS and currently recommends, unlike the use in TB, that N-95 face masks NOT be reused because of their potential to act as a fomite for carriage of materials containing SARS virus to non-exposed areas. If shortage of N-95 equipment exists, reuse IS permitted in lieu of use of surgical masks or other less effective personal protective equipment.

Questions: If there are any SARS-related questions please contact the Drs. Susan Mather, Lawrence Deyton or myself at the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards at 202 273-8575.