

**Working Papers
Project on the Public and Biological Security
Harvard School of Public Health**

**9.
AMERICANS' RESPONSE TO SARS (I)**

**Robert J. Blendon, Harvard School of Public Health, Project Director
Catherine M. DesRoches, Harvard School of Public Health
John M. Benson, Harvard School of Public Health
Melissa J. Herrmann, ICR/International Communications Research
Elizabeth Mackie, Harvard School of Public Health
Kathleen J. Weldon, Harvard School of Public Health**

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Survey Finds Many Americans Avoiding International Air Travel, Asian Retailers Due to Fear of SARS

Quarantine and isolation are not seen as a threat to civil liberties

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Boston, MA— A new study by the Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security* finds that 17 percent of Americans who have traveled outside of the United States in the past year have avoided international air travel recently due to reports about severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). (See Figure 1)

“Even though there have been few cases of SARS in the U.S., concerns about this disease have begun to have an impact on the American public,” said Robert J. Blendon, professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Sixteen percent of the public reported avoiding people they thought may have recently traveled to Asia. In addition, 14 percent of Americans said they were avoiding Asian restaurants and/or stores. Other actions taken by the public in response to reports of SARS were using a disinfectant at home or at work (21%), avoiding public events (10%), carrying something to clean objects that may have been in contact with someone who had SARS (9%) and consulting a web site for information about how to protect themselves from SARS (9%). Despite the widely televised images of people in Asia wearing face masks, very few Americans said they bought a face mask (3%) or talked to a doctor about health issues related to SARS (5%). (See Figure 1)

Eighty-three percent of Americans said that SARS is a disease that requires quarantine in order to keep it from spreading, and 41 percent knew that people were being quarantined for SARS in the U.S. at the time of the survey. Fully 94 percent of the public reported that they would agree to be isolated for two or three weeks in a health care facility if they had SARS. A similar percentage (92%) would agree to be quarantined for up to 10 days in their home if they were exposed to someone who had SARS but did not know if they themselves had the disease. Only 13 percent of Americans thought that President Bush’s recent executive order adding SARS to the list of diseases for which people can be quarantined was a threat to their personal rights and freedoms. (See Figure 2)

“If the number of cases in the U.S. grows, the public appears to be willing to cooperate with public health officials in order to keep the disease from spreading,” said Blendon.

One in four Americans thought it was likely (5% very, 20% somewhat) that they or someone in their immediate family would contract SARS in the next 12 months. Americans were more likely to believe that they would contract SARS than to believe they would contract anthrax (3% very, 9% somewhat) or smallpox (3% very, 9% somewhat). In addition, 32 percent of the public reported being concerned about contracting SARS.

The majority of Americans (92%) knew that SARS is contagious and 82 percent believed that it spread easily (46% very, 35% somewhat). The majority of the public thought that it was possible to get SARS from being in close contact with someone who has SARS (91%), being on the same airplane with someone who has SARS (78%), eating food that has been prepared by someone who was infected with or exposed to SARS (73%), shaking hands with someone with an active case of the disease (71%), touching objects or surfaces that have been in contact with someone who has SARS (66%), and blood transfusions (62%). (See Figure 3)

If SARS spreads more widely in the US, public concern is likely to escalate due to a number of factors. Eighty-four percent of the public know that there is no vaccine for SARS and one-half (51%) know there is no effective treatment. In addition, a substantial number of Americans believe that SARS is more deadly than it actually is. Four in ten Americans said that one-quarter or more of people with SARS die from the disease. The death rate is between six and 10%. Moreover, the majority believe, and the CDC reports, the disease spreads easily through multiple routes of transmission.

Complete survey and graphs are available here:

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/press/releases/blendon/SARStopleveline.doc> (survey)

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/press/releases/blendon/SARS.ppt> (graphs)

For more information about SARS, go to www.cdc.gov

This study was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health. The project director is Robert J. Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health. The research team also includes Catherine M. DesRoches, John M. Benson, Kathleen Weldon and Liz Mackie of the Harvard School of Public Health and Melissa J. Herrmann of ICR/International Communications Research. Fieldwork was conducted via telephone by ICR/International Communications Research of Media (PA) between April 11 – 15, 2003. The survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults age 18 and over. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3 percentage points.

Possible sources of nonsampling error include nonresponse bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Nonresponse in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases, sample data are weighted to the most recent Census data available from the Current Population Survey for gender, age, race, education, as well as number of adults and number of telephone lines in the household. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, callbacks staggered over times of day and days of the week, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

Harvard School of Public Health is dedicated to advancing the public's health through learning, discovery, and communication. More than 300 faculty members are engaged in teaching and training the 800-plus student body in a broad spectrum of disciplines crucial to the health and well being of individuals and populations around the world. Programs and projects range from the molecular biology of AIDS vaccines to the epidemiology of cancer; from risk analysis to violence prevention; from maternal and children's health to quality of care measurement; from health care management to international health and human rights. For more information on the school visit: www.hsph.harvard.edu

Precautions

Among Americans reporting international travel in past year (n=179), percent saying they

Avoided international air travel as a precaution against SARS 17%

Among all Americans, percent saying they took the following precautions against SARS

Used a disinfectant at home or at work 21%

Avoided people they thought recently traveled to Asia 16%

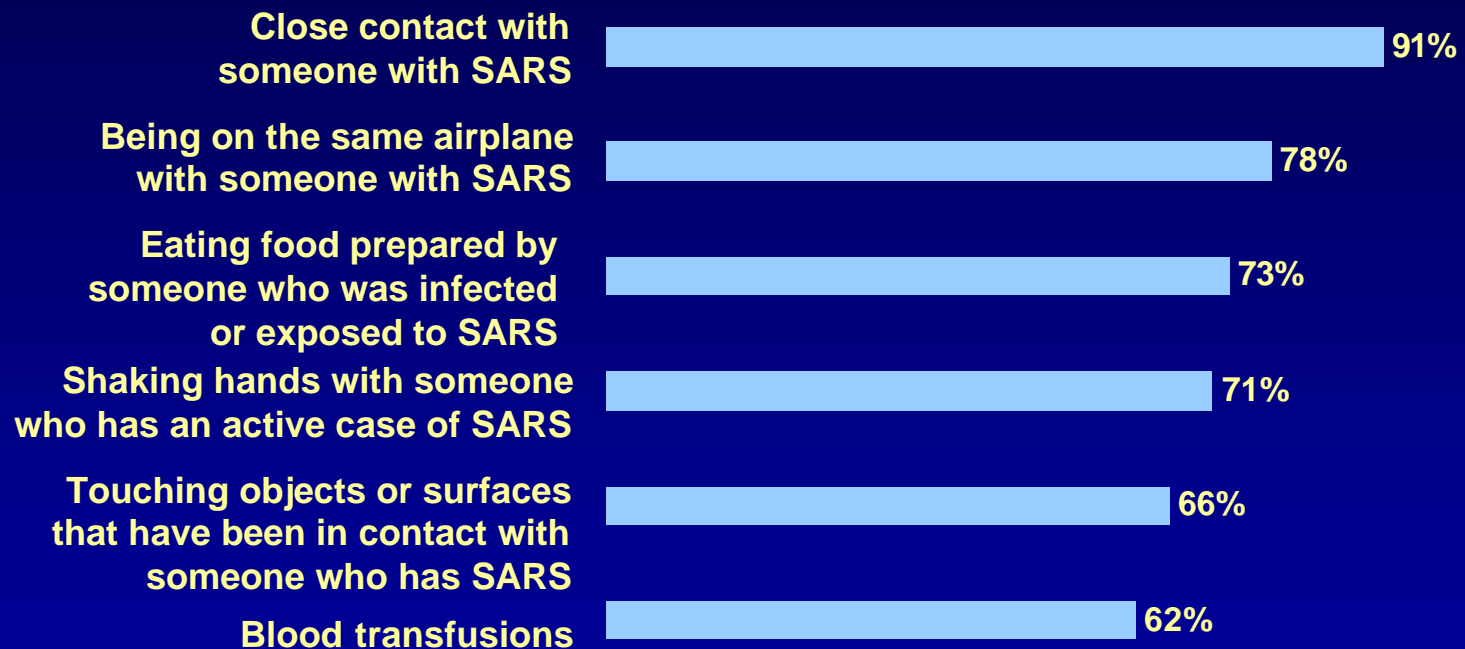
Avoided Asian restaurants and stores 14%

Bought a face mask 3%

Source: *Project on Biological Security and the Public, Harvard School of Public Health, April 11-15, 2003*

Beliefs about transmission

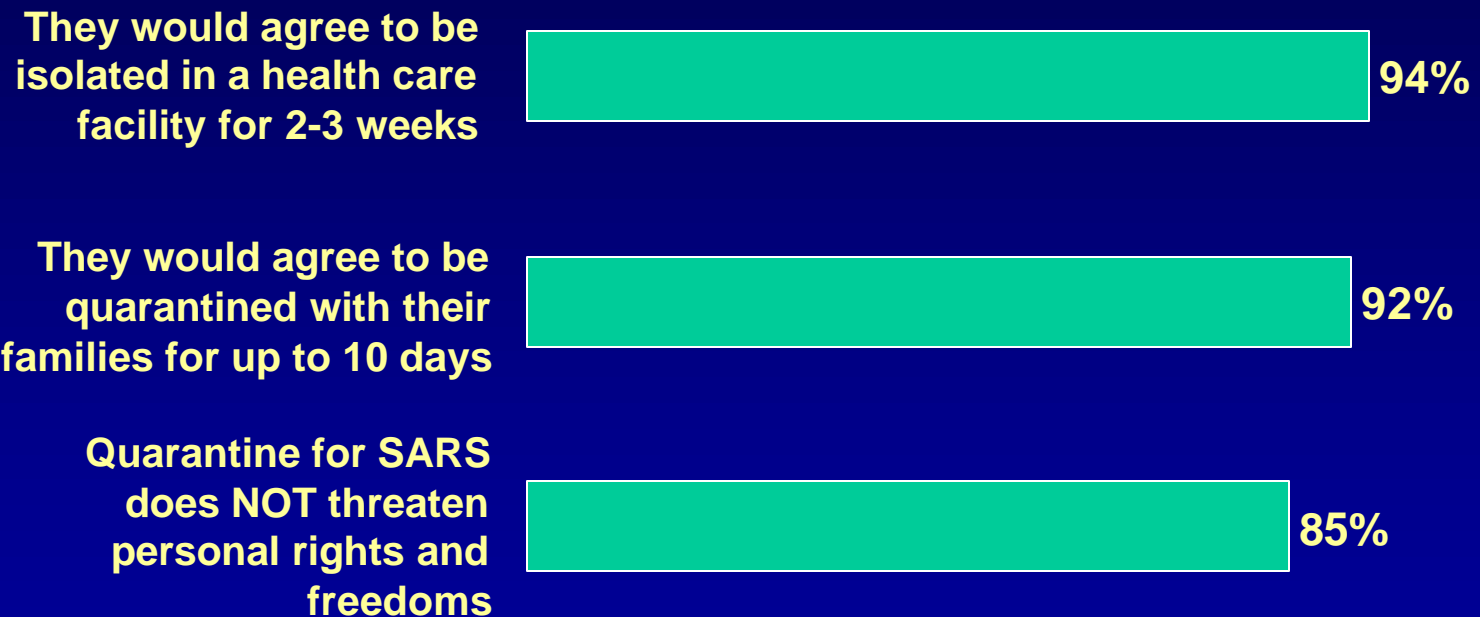
Percent saying that is possible to contract SARS through...



Source: *Project on Biological Security and the Public, Harvard School of Public Health, April 11-15, 2003*

Quarantine and Isolation

Percent of Americans reporting...



Source: *Project on Biological Security and the Public, Harvard School of Public Health, April 11-15, 2003*

**PROGRAM ON BIOLOGICAL SECURITY AND THE PUBLIC
HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
SARS Excel Insert
Topline**

This study was conducted by telephone April 11 – April 15, 2003 among a nationally representative sample of 1003 adults 18 years of age and older. Field work by ICR/International Communications Research of Media, PA. The margin of error for this sample is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

(Asked of one half of total respondents; n =503)

SA-1. If you came down with flu-like symptoms and a high fever, how long would you wait before going to see a doctor or other health professional? Would you not go at all, wait 1 day, wait 2 days, wait 3 days, or wait more than 3 days?

	Would not go	-----Would go to health professional-----					Don't know	Refused
		NET	Wait 1 day	Wait 2 days	Wait 3 days	Wait more than 3 days		
4/15/03	12	84	32	20	13	18	4	*

(Asked of one half of total respondents; n =500)

SA-2. If you came down with flu-like symptoms and had traveled overseas in the past two weeks, how long would you wait before going to see a doctor or other health professional? Would you not go at all, wait 1 day, wait 2 days, wait 3 days, or wait more than 3 days?

	Would not go	-----Would go to health professional-----					Don't know	Refused
		NET	Wait 1 day	Wait 2 days	Wait 3 days	Wait more than 3 days		
4/15/03	12	81	51	14	10	7	6	*

SA-3. If you came down with flu-like symptoms and went to see a doctor or health professional, how important do you think it would be to tell the doctor about (INSERT ITEM)? Would it be very important, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all?

How about (INSERT NEXT ITEM)? Would that be very important, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all? (IF NECESSARY: To tell the doctor)

a. Any suspicious or unusual food you had eaten

	IMPORTANT			NOT IMPORTANT			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	89	67	22	9	6	4	1	*

b. Any recent overseas travel

	IMPORTANT			NOT IMPORTANT			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	89	78	11	10	3	7	1	*

c. Any people you had recent contact with who have been sick

	IMPORTANT			NOT IMPORTANT			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	91	69	21	8	5	3	1	*

SA-4. Have you heard or read anything in the news recently about a new form of flu in Asia, known as SARS, or haven't you?

	Have heard of SARS	Have NOT heard of SARS	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	93	7	*	-

(Asked of one half of total respondents; n = 503)

SA-5. I'm going to read you a list of things and ask you how likely it is that each of them will happen to you or someone in your immediate family during the next 12 months. First, (INSERT FIRST ITEM)? Do you think that is very likely to happen to you or someone in your immediate family, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely? How about (INSERT NEXT ITEM)?

a. Contracting SARS, the new form of flu from Asia

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	25	5	20	72	42	31	2	-

b. Contracting anthrax

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	12	3	9	86	37	49	2	*

c. Contracting smallpox

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	13	3	9	86	41	45	2	-

d. Contracting West Nile Virus

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	30	4	25	67	40	27	4	-

(Asked of one half of total respondents; n = 500)

SA-6. Are you concerned that you or someone in your immediate family may get sick from SARS during the next 12 months, or aren't you concerned about that?

(Asked of total who are concerned about SARS; n = 159)

SA-6a. How concerned are you? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not very concerned?

	Concerned about SARS				Not concerned about SARS	Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	Not very			
4/15/03	32	15	15	2	68	*	--

SA-7. To the best of your knowledge, approximately how many cases of SARS have been reported in the United States? Have there been about a thousand, about five hundred, about two hundred, about one hundred, or have no cases been reported in the United States at all?

	About a thousand	About 500	About 200	About 100	No cases in the US	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	3	4	15	54	12	13	*

SA-8. To the best of your knowledge, is SARS, the new form of flu from Asia, a disease that is contagious, meaning that it can be passed from one person to another, or is it not contagious?

	Contagious	NOT contagious	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	92	2	6	--

SA-9. To the best of your knowledge, how easily does SARS spread? Is it spread very easily, somewhat easily, not too easily, or not easily at all?

	EASILY			NOT EASILY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
4/15/03	82	46	35	9	8	2	9	--

SA-10. I'm going to read you a list of some ways people can get a disease. As I read each one, please tell me whether or not you think it is possible to contract SARS that way.

INTERVIEWER, IF R SEEMS HESITANT OR UNSURE, ASK: If you don't know, just tell me.

First (READ FIRST ITEM). To the best of your knowledge, is it possible to contract SARS that way, or not? How about (READ NEXT ITEM)?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Shaking hands with someone who has an active case of SARS	71	23	6	--
b. Eating food that has been prepared by someone who was infected with or had been exposed to SARS	73	21	6	--
c. Being in close contact with someone who has SARS	91	6	2	--
d. Being on the same airplane with someone who has SARS	78	18	5	--
e. Eating undercooked chicken	20	71	9	--
f. Touching objects or surfaces that have been in contact with someone who has SARS	66	29	5	--
g. Blood transfusions	62	28	9	--

SA-11. In response to reports of SARS, have you or has someone in your household done any of the following? Have you (INSERT ITEM)?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Consulted a website for information about how to protect yourself against SARS	9	90	*	--
b. Avoided public events	10	89	*	--
c. Talked with your doctor about health issues related to SARS	5	94	*	--
d. Purchased a face mask	3	96	1	--
e. Avoided international air travel, that is, airline travel outside of the United States (Among those who traveled outside the U.S. in past 12 months, n=179)	17	82	1	1
g. Avoided Asian restaurants or stores	14	86	*	--
h. Carried something to clean any objects you think might have come in contact with someone who has SARS	9	90	1	--
i. Used a disinfectant at home or work to protect against SARS	21	78	*	--
j. Avoided people you think may have recently visited Asia	16	82	2	--

SA-12. To the best of your knowledge, is there a vaccine against SARS, or isn't there one?

	Yes, there is a	No, there is no	Don't
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	vaccine	vaccine	know	Refused
4/15/03	6	84	9	--

SA-13. To the best of your knowledge, is there an effective treatment for people who have contracted SARS, or doesn't such a treatment exist?

	Yes, there is treatment	No, there is no treatment	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	36	51	13	--

SA-14. Of people who get SARS, about how many do you think die from the disease? Less than one in ten, about one in four, about half, or about three-quarters?

	Less than one in ten	About one in four	About half	About three-quarters	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	53	17	14	10	7	*

SA-15. Some contagious diseases require people who have been exposed to the disease to be quarantined in order to keep the disease from spreading. To the best of your knowledge, is SARS one of the diseases where people who are exposed need to be quarantined, or isn't it?

	Yes, must be quarantined	No, do not have to be quarantined	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	83	12	5	--

**(Asked of those who say SARS is one of the diseases that must be quarantined;
n=839)**

SA-16. To the best of your knowledge, are any people in the United States currently being quarantined for SARS, or not?

	Yes, people are being quarantined	No, people are not being quarantined	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	49	35	16	--

SA-15/SA-16. Combo Table

	Must be quarantined			Do not have to be quarantined	Don't know	Refused
	NET	People are being quarantined	People are not being quarantined			
4/15/03	83	41	29	12	5	--

SA-17. If you had SARS and health officials told you that you needed to be isolated for two or three weeks in a health care facility to prevent spreading the disease, would you agree to go, or wouldn't you?

	Yes, agree to be isolated	No, would not be isolated	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	94	4	2	*

SA-18. Suppose you were exposed to someone who has SARS but you didn't know if you had the disease or not. If health officials told you that you and your family needed to be quarantined in your home for up to ten days away from other people in order to prevent spreading the disease, would you agree to do that, or wouldn't you?

	Yes, agree to be quarantined in home	No, would not be quarantined in home	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	92	7	1	--

SA-19. Recently President Bush signed an executive order adding SARS to the list of diseases for which people can be quarantined. Do you think this order threatens or does not threaten your personal rights and freedoms?

**(Asked of those who think executive order threatens person rights and freedoms;
n =128)**

SA-19a. Is that a major threat or a minor threat?

	Threatens personal rights			Does not threaten personal rights	Don't know	Refused
	NET	Major threat	Minor threat			
4/15/03	13	5	8	85	2	--

SA-20. If you were at an airport and you saw flight attendants wearing face masks, would you want to have masks available for you to wear, or wouldn't you think this was necessary for you to have?

	Yes, want face masks	No, not necessary	Don't know	Refused
4/15/03	79	19	2	1

SA-25. Have you traveled outside of the United States at any time in the past twelve months?

(IF NECESSARY: This includes travel to Canada and/or Mexico; any type of travel)

(Asked of total who have traveled outside the US in the past 12 months; n = 179)

Have you traveled outside of the United States at any time in the past two months?

(IF NECESSARY: This includes travel to Canada and/or Mexico; any type of travel)

SA-25/SA-26. Combo Table

	Traveled outside the US			Not in the past 12 months	Don't know	Refused
	NET	In the past 2 months	In the past 3- 12 months			
4/15/03	16	4	11	84	--	*