

▶▶ **SARS and quarantine**

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a concern to us all. This fact sheet is intended to be of help to that relatively small number of Canadians who will experience quarantine as a result of the syndrome.

Quarantine means isolation from others. It is an extremely important public health tool that is used to prevent those who are infected or who may be infected from infecting loved ones, friends, co-workers and the general population.

Quarantine can be stressful for the quarantined individual as well as for those who love and care for that person. It is not an easy set of circumstances, but it is very important to the health of all of us.

▶▶ **If you are quarantined**

Quarantine is never an easy affair. It means that you are isolated for a period of time — in this case, 10 days. You are not allowed normal contact with other people. It involves being confined to your apartment or home, with little or no direct contact with other people.

Almost everyone finds this to be upsetting. That is normal under the circumstances. However, the extent to which we feel upset or distressed will vary from one person to another.

It is important to maintain a connection with the outside world. This can be done by using the telephone and the Internet. Although it is not as good as seeing people face to face, it allows you to maintain meaningful contact with people who care.

When you talk to others, don't be shy. Tell them how frustrated or upset you feel. Getting things off your chest on a regular basis can be very helpful. It will allow your friends and loved ones to tell you how much they care about you and how they are feeling about the situation as well. This can help both of you feel less helpless and alone.

▶▶ **What can I do to help the person who is quarantined?**

This situation can also be very frustrating for people who are not quarantined. You may feel worried and helpless. Your contact with people who may be vulnerable (e.g., very ill people or seniors) may be cut off. It is

important to be reassuring and listen in a compassionate way. Don't try to be judgmental or explain away feelings. Be honest with how you are feeling, but do not spend a lot of time talking about how upset you are. Remember that the focus should remain on the person who is quarantined.

If you are upset by the experience, it is important to talk to other people who you trust and care about. This will help you feel better and keep things in perspective. You need to *keep your batteries charged* so you can support the quarantined person.

Be sensitive to the needs of the quarantined person. Contact him/her as often as is appropriate. Don't overload them, but also don't abandon them. Sometimes people will tell you that they are fine when they are not. They don't want to "bother" you with their problems. This can lead to feelings of isolation, which is not good for the person in quarantine or for those who care about them. Check in with them by asking them directly how they are doing.

Children can become upset if separated from loved ones. Please consult the SARS fact sheet titled *Dealing with Stress or Anxiety about SARS*, which has a section on children and teenagers. It will also direct you to other useful information.

Most people will be able to handle the quarantine situation without serious difficulty. People are very resilient. However, some people may become very upset. If you are quarantined or if you are in contact with someone who is quarantined and you think they are having significant problems in coping, it is important to

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consult a regulated health professional who can assess the situation and give you good advice. If services are required, they can be provided in a number of ways.

Again, consult *Dealing with Stress or Anxiety about SARS* at cma.ca or the Health Canada web site at www.hc-sc.gc.ca for more information.

Visit the SARS Update on cma.ca for CMA shortcuts to the most current information on SARS from Health Canada and other expert sources.

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