

## Environmental Health Notes

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We shake hands and give hugs. As Lakota people it's in our culture to greet others in friendship, in initial meetings, and at events such as honorings, funerals, memorials, and powwows. Even in our spoken greetings we say "I greet you with a warm handshake." We are happy to show this simple form of respect in anything we do as do hundreds of other tribes do in the same manner. A new, sometimes deadly virus making inroads to other countries from its point of origin, is threatening to put a damper on traditional greeting methods, however.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) has made its way to over 20 other countries including Canada and the U.S.A. from its origin of Southeast Asia, and China and could potentially spread to more as time goes on. SARS symptoms are characterized by at least a 100.4 temperature, respiratory problems such as dry cough, shortness of breath, headache, and having recently traveled to or been in close proximity to someone who's traveled to the Southeast Asia / China region. It can evolve into a deadly form of pneumonia that so far has claimed over 300 people worldwide. The city of Toronto in the Ontario province of Canada has had 15 deaths with 300 + probable cases of SARS. There are 35 cases of probable SARS in the United States with California holding the largest amount of suspected cases. To our benefit, that strain of SARS appears less deadly as all infected U.S. cases have recovered as of this writing. There is currently a 5 % fatality rate of this infectious virus and an early detection test for the virus has been created according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Ga.

How did this virus make its way literally around the world in such a short amount of time? Modern travel methods have allowed unwanted, pests, bugs, snakes, viruses such as SARS and West Nile Virus to take hold in areas that previously never held them. There is currently a voluntary health advisory for not traveling to the affected countries unless it's necessary. It would seem prudent in this time of summer powwow travel season for those traveling to the affected countries specifically the Toronto, Canada region, to practice vigilant hand-washing techniques as well as avoidance of coughing, sneezing individuals which people do during flu season anyway. Using disposable towels to open public restroom doors is normal protocol for many in food service and this should also apply to the general public. In the affected areas, as people with SARS symptoms are isolated at home or in medical facilities depending upon the severity and those who've been in contact with suspect cases are asked to voluntarily quarantine themselves for 10 days.

What will happen should SARS make its way to the local reservations? Continued mass education of the public and voluntary quarantine may become standard protocol as will other measures being formulated by infectious control personnel and state health departments nation-

wide. In Ontario, Canada church-goers have been advised to not drink out of the communal wine cup in church services as well as not shake hands of their fellow parishioners. Locally, just as Sundance leaders now use gloves and individual scalpels for dancers to avoid transmission of blood borne diseases, the traditional handshake may be in jeopardy in order to stop this new bug from proliferating within tribal memberships.

**For updates on SARS, see [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/)**