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COMMUNIQUE #8

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) UPDATE

April 25, 2003

Tourism Toronto – The Toronto Convention & Visitors Association reports that public health officials continue to advise that the risk of contracting SARS in Toronto remains extremely low. The following is the most current information available as of **April 25**. Sources include: [Toronto Public Health](#), [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) and [Health Canada](#). For all SARS updates, please visit [Tourism Toronto](#).

RESPONSE TO [WHO](#) ADVISORY:

- **Dr. Cliff McDonald - medical epidemiologist, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** "The Canadian public health response to this outbreak has been exemplary," said Dr. Clifford McDonald, in Toronto as part of a CDC team to advise on local efforts to eradicate SARS. "The nature of the battle against SARS here, McDonald stressed, "differs in nature from the community spread that has occurred in other parts of the world." And, while the CDC has issued its own "travel alert," McDonald said it decided against the more serious "travel advisory" because, while "we are alerting the population that there is an outbreak of SARS, in terms of the criteria that we use to issue a travel advisory, we do not feel that has been met." McDonald said he's been "impressed with the overall level of commitment and standing up under stress that all the health-care workers in this city have done." Asked whether he feels safe here, the CDC doctor replied: "Very much so. I didn't bring any mask to wear on the street."
- **Dr. Richard Schabas – Chief of Staff at York Central Hospital Ontario's chief medical officer of health 1987-1997:** "The SARS outbreak in Toronto peaked in the last week of March. A review of the epidemic curve for SARS that appears in today's Globe and Mail clearly shows this. In the past four weeks, the rate of new cases has been steadily declining. Why is this the best-kept secret in town? The SARS outbreak in Toronto was a hospital-based problem. The vast majority of SARS victims have acquired their infection either directly in a hospital or by infected hospital staff, patients or visitors who infect other members of their household. This hospital-based problem has been brought under control. There have been very few cases of community-acquired SARS, and there is no evidence of a sustained community spread in Canada."
- **Dr. Colin D'Cunha –Ontario's Commissioner of Public Health and [Ontario's chief medical health officer](#):** "Toronto continues to be a safe place. Anyone who's travelling to Toronto, either for business or pleasure, should be reassured that it is safe to do so...Keep in mind there are 5 million people in the Greater Toronto Area and their risk continues to be low, except in those specific circumstances where they may have been in close, direct contact with a known case of SARS."
- **Dr. Sheela Basrur, Toronto's [Chief Medical Officer of Health](#):** "In my opinion, the facts of the matter do not warrant [a travel advisory], at this time. To categorize us close to Beijing or other parts of China is a gross exaggeration of the facts." Basrur continues to advise that the risk of SARS transmission among the general population is extremely low and extensive and strong measures are in place to prevent any further spread of the disease.
- **Anne McLellan - Canada's Minister of Health:** "I want to assure Canadians that the government of Canada will do whatever is necessary to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians. It has always been, and remains, our No.1 priority."

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- Health Canada will be making a formal protest through a letter to be sent today. The Centers for Disease Control in the US were invited to do an audit in Toronto, yesterday. Health Canada states that "CDC's assessment of the situation in Canada is accurate. It states that: 'Currently, all cases in Toronto are linked to Toronto's original index case and spread has been through person-to-person contact. SARS transmission in Toronto has been limited to a small number of hospitals, households, and specific community settings.'"

FACTS:

- Large numbers of high-profile public events and conferences continue to take place throughout the City of Toronto: the US National Association of School Psychologists and the Industrial Accident Prevention Association both held their conferences as scheduled in April with tremendous success; and, the 20th year of the Toronto Wine & Cheese Show had one of its biggest turn-outs ever.
- Ontario's Ministry of Health has advised that **132** patients receiving treatment for SARS have been discharged from the hospital.
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has issued an interim travel alert, advising those traveling to Toronto to avoid settings such as health care facilities caring for SARS patients. Please note that this is distinct from a travel advisory. The CDC states in its alert: "SARS transmission in Toronto has been limited to a small number of hospitals, households, and specific community settings. In response, CDC recommends that U.S. travelers to Toronto observe precautions to safeguard their health, see: [CDC- Travel Advice](#). This includes avoidance of settings where SARS is most likely to be transmitted, such as health care facilities caring for SARS patients. "
- The following two meetings have confirmed at the International Plaza Hotel The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs for May 4-8 with approximately 800 delegates and the The Canadian Centre for Emergency Preparedness with approximately 900 delegates June 23-25.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

- Leaders from Toronto's tourism industry announced the formation of the [Toronto Tourism Industry Community Coalition](#), to address the tourism business impacts of SARS and to develop a short-to medium-term industry response campaign. The action group, chaired by Tourism Toronto, is comprised of senior leaders from industry, labour and the business community through the Greater Toronto Hotel Association, the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association, Local 75 of the Hotel Employees, Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE), the Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre, the Toronto Board of Trade, the City of Toronto, the Government of Ontario – Ministry of Recreation and Tourism and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership.

Q. Where can I go for more information?

A. The following sites provide detailed information regarding SARS.

[Toronto Public Health](#)
[Health Canada](#)
[Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
[World Health Organization](#)
[Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia](#)

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