

# ***FTC Consumer Alert***

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## **Rx for Products that Claim to Prevent SARS? A Healthy Dose of Skepticism**

Produced in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and  
the Food and Drug Administration

The daily news coverage about the spread of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) has raised public anxiety, and spawned many Web site and email promotions for products that claim to prevent, treat or cure the disease. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, cautions consumers to be wary of all promotions related to SARS.

Because much is still unknown about the specific virus thought to cause SARS, the FTC says consumers should be skeptical of claims that products like pills, air filtration devices, and cleaning agents can kill or eliminate the virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), major consumer health agencies, say the best protection right now is to know the basic facts about SARS, practice good personal hygiene, and visit the CDC's Web site for travel information and guidance.

Federal health and legal authorities say consumers should be wary of SARS prevention, treatment, or cure claims for any products. They suggest that if and when consumers see advertisements touting prevention, treatment or cure claims for SARS, they should ask themselves one key question: if a medical breakthrough involving SARS has occurred, would they be hearing about it for the first time through an advertisement or sales pitch?

Although health authorities are searching for effective vaccines and treatment drugs, currently, no products are known to protect against, treat, or cure the virus thought to cause SARS. In addition, no dietary supplements claiming to prevent, treat, or cure SARS have yet been tested against the virus.

### **Know The Facts**

SARS appears to spread mainly by cough or sneeze, allowing droplets containing infectious virus to reach the respiratory tract of people close by. SARS also may be spread by touching objects contaminated with infectious droplets and then touching one's eye(s), nose, or mouth.

Symptoms of SARS usually begin with a fever of more than 100.4°F (38.0°C). Other symptoms may include headache, overall discomfort, and body aches. Some people may experience mild respiratory symptoms. After two to seven days, a SARS patient may develop a dry cough and have trouble breathing.

### **Keep Your Hands Clean**

Public health authorities advise that basic personal hygiene is the best protection against infection. They add that the best way to protect against SARS is frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water; waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizers also can be used. Health authorities currently do not recommend the use of masks, gloves, or similar gear to prevent SARS when healthy people are in public areas. But the CDC does

recommend that people with SARS should wear a surgical mask during close contact with uninfected people (for example, household members) to prevent the spread of infectious droplets.

### **Check Travel Advisories for Affected Areas**

To lower your risk of infection, the CDC suggests avoiding travel to those areas for which CDC has issued a travel advisory. The CDC's travel advisories are on their Web site, [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel.htm).

### **Seek Medical Attention**

If you think you may have SARS symptoms, or if you may have been in direct contact with someone with SARS, consult a health care professional immediately. Only qualified health care professionals should treat SARS symptoms.

### **Stay Informed**

For more information from the federal government about SARS, visit: the CDC at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/) or the FDA at [www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/sars/](http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/sars/).

### **Food and Drug Administration**

The FDA regulates over \$1 trillion worth of products, which account for 25 cents of every dollar spent annually by American consumers. It is part of the FDA's job to see that the food we eat is safe and wholesome and that the medicines and medical devices we use are safe and effective. For more information, call toll-free, 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332), or visit the FDA Web site, [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recognized as the lead federal agency for protecting the health and safety of people at home and abroad, providing credible information to enhance health decisions, and promoting health through strong partnerships. The CDC serves as the national focus for developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health, and health promotion and education activities designed to improve the health of the people of the United States. Recognized for expertise in Infectious Diseases, the CDC, located in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, is an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services. General information can be accessed at our Web site, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

### **Federal Trade Commission**

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

