


A Virus That CHANGED the WORLD



By Denise Yuen

An outbreak of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, first appeared in Guangdong, China, in November 2002. A few months later, it spread to other parts of Asia (including Singapore) and the rest of the world, taking human lives, sparking off fear and panic, and causing economic damage in its wake. Globally, there were more than 8,000 SARS cases and close to 800 deaths. In Singapore, there were 238 cases and 33 deaths.

SARS was truly a virus that changed the world. Since its advent, Singapore and many other countries have developed better response systems, so that we will all be well prepared should any other invisible intruders come knocking on our doors again.

The following timeline traces the outbreak of SARS in Singapore. **SMA**

Photos: iStockphoto and Dreamstime

2002

2003

16 November

An outbreak of an atypical pneumonia occurs in Guangdong, China.

10 February

China reports this outbreak to the World Health Organization (WHO).

14 February

China informs WHO that the outbreak in Guangdong is clinically consistent with atypical pneumonia, and also that it is coming under control.

1 March

Singapore's SARS index patient, Patient Zero, is warded at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) for suspected pneumonia. She had stayed on the ninth floor of the Metropole during the time Dr Liu Jianlun was there.

4 March

Dr Liu Jianlun dies of atypical pneumonia at Kwong Wah Hospital.



17 March

Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) takes various steps to control the outbreak.

21 March

There are now 39 SARS cases in Singapore.



22 March

TTSH and the Communicable Disease Centre are designated as SARS hospitals. A SARS hotline is set up.

27 March

All primary schools, secondary schools and junior colleges are closed until 6 April.

28 March

There are now 86 SARS cases in Singapore.

29 March

All passengers entering Singapore through Changi Airport must undergo temperature checks.

9 to 16 April

Schools reopen in phases.

14 April

Seven additional SARS cases are reported, while 62 SARS patients remain hospitalised and 84 have been discharged.



22 April

Dr Alexandre Chao, a vascular surgeon at SGH, dies of SARS.

28 April

No new probable cases are reported. 39 patients remain hospitalised, with 15 in intensive care, while six more patients have been discharged.



<p>21 February</p> <p>Chinese doctor Liu Jianlun, who had treated cases of the atypical pneumonia in Guangdong, arrives in Hong Kong, and stays in room 911 on the ninth floor of the Metropole Hotel.</p>			<p>22 February</p> <p>Dr Liu Jianlun is warded at the intensive care unit at the Kwong Wah Hospital in Hong Kong with respiratory failure.</p>
<p>12 March</p> <p>WHO issues a global alert on outbreaks of severe form of atypical pneumonia in Hong Kong, Vietnam and Guangdong.</p>	<p>14 March</p> <p>Six more patients are warded for the atypical pneumonia. All had been in close contact with Patient Zero and two other initial cases.</p>	<p>15 March</p> <p>WHO officially names the atypical pneumonia: severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS. Singapore now has a total of 16 cases.</p>	
<p>24 March</p> <p>MOH invokes the Infectious Diseases Act to quarantine people who have come into contact with SARS patients. More than 740 people are quarantined for the next 10 days.</p>			<p>25 March</p> <p>Patient Zero's father becomes Singapore's first SARS fatality.</p>
<p>5 April</p> <p>An outbreak of SARS hits SGH. 21 healthcare staff are referred to TTSH.</p>	<p>6 April</p> <p>School closures are extended, and institutions will stagger their reopenings.</p>	<p>7 April</p> <p>Dr Ong Hok Su, a medical officer training in Cardiology at TTSH, becomes the first healthcare worker to die of SARS.</p> 	
<p>19 April</p> <p>Pasir Panjang Wholesale Market is closed for 15 days, after a wholesaler at the market and a taxi driver (who ferried another SARS patient who worked in the market) are both diagnosed with SARS.</p>			<p>21 April</p> <p>Six additional SARS cases are reported, while 64 SARS patients remain hospitalised.</p>
<p>18 May</p> <p>One new case reported. He would become Singapore's last SARS patient.</p>	<p>30 May</p> <p>WHO removes Singapore from the list of SARS-affected areas. Singapore is officially SARS-free.</p>		