

SARS

How a global epidemic
was stopped



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific Region

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WHO Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

SARS: how a global epidemic was stopped

1. Severe acute respiratory syndrome -- prevention and control. 2. Disease outbreaks -- prevention and control.

ISBN 92 9061 213 4 (NLM Classification:WC 505)

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OVERVIEW

SARS shook the world. By some standards, the first emerging and readily transmissible disease of the 21st century was not a big killer, but it caused more fear and social disruption than any other outbreak of our time. As I write these words some two years later, memories of how Member States, our partner agencies, and we at the World Health Organization responded to this new threat to global health are still fresh in my mind.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was unique. It showed explosive power, setting off multiple outbreaks around the world, often zeroing in on hospitals, attacking doctors and nurses and bringing some public-health systems to their knees. It buckled economies, crippled international trade and travel, and sent stock markets into a slide.

More than 95% of the SARS cases took place in WHO's Western Pacific Region, where 12 countries or areas were hit, some with devastating force. All of them responded with courage and determination, from the leaders of government through public-health managers to health-care workers and laboratory experts. Many people pushed themselves to the limit, taking sleep only when going on without it would have been impossible. Family life was put on hold. Meals were scrambled affairs and often missed altogether.

I proposed this book because I believe that by identifying the successes and failures of the fight against SARS, our Member States, partners, and WHO will leave an enduring legacy for those who face similar challenges in the future. Already, since SARS, avian influenza has spread across South-East Asia and beyond to pose a new threat to mankind. What will come next? There is, of

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