

## Medical professionals urge SARS reality check



CTV.ca News Staff

Updated: Thurs. Apr. 24 2003 10:11 PM ET

As fear over the spread of SARS firms its grip on the world consciousness, a growing number of voices in Canada say the public is in need of a reality check.

In the wake of a World Health Organization announcement advising against non-essential travel to Toronto, Canadian public health officials are communicating a message seldom heard in recent weeks.



Dr. Richard Schabas

"Now's the time when I think everybody in Toronto should take a deep breath and calm down," Dr. Richard Schabas told CTV News.

Chief of staff at York Regional, one of the first Toronto-area hospitals struck by SARS, and a former Ontario public officer of health, Schabas believes the disease is on its way out.

"I think all the signs are that we are coming to the end of this outbreak."

Health Canada statistics lend his argument some weight. According to a chart tracking the number of probable SARS across Canada by symptom onset date, the outbreak peaked at the end of March. Since then, the number of new cases has gotten smaller and smaller.

- [SARS cases chart from Health Canada](#)

Schabas is frustrated that this message hasn't been getting through to the public.



Dr. Susan Richardson

"I don't understand the rhetoric... which is constantly telling people we are in crisis mode," Schabas said.

"What we should be telling the public is not what we are afraid will happen, but what *is* happening."

Dr. Donald Low agrees that the worst is over. "I think we are seeing the disease dwindle away in the community. We have not seen a community case for 19 days," Low, the chief microbiologist at the Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital, told CTV News.

With the last infection among Toronto health care workers occurring a week ago, public health officials are already counting down to an all-clear declaration.

"It's been about a week so far since we've had a new case in the community, so in my view the clock is already ticking on the 20 days," Dr. Sheela Basrur, Toronto's chief medical officer of health, told reporters.

Health officials have set 20 days with no new infections as the condition for declaring SARS under control.

According to Health Canada, as of April 23, the majority of Canadians diagnosed with probable SARS had been discharged from hospital. Of the close to 60 probable cases still hospitalized, more than 80 per cent are improving or in stable condition. And among the suspect cases reported across Canada, all patients have either recovered, or are now recovering, Health Canada says.

Despite the new positive outlook, even optimistic health care professionals remain wary. Hospital for Sick Children microbiologist Susan Richardson is one of those adjusting to life with SARS as part of the health care landscape.

"This is not a virus that is going to go away," Richardson told CTV News.

"Even if we control this particular outbreak it's very likely that it will be reintroduced into the population at other times in the future. We live in a global village that's hard to control."

MOL.A

GlobeinvestorGOLD.com

Serious tools for serious investors.

