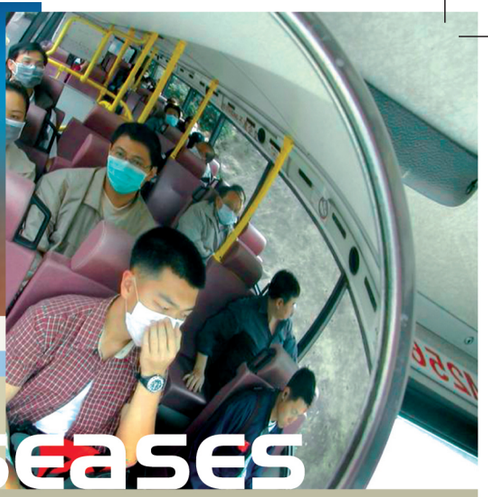
Scientific Support to Policies



Communicable diseases

Focusing on neglected killers

EPISARS

Towards a better understanding of SARS-related viruses

"To enable health workers and policy-makers to prevent or contain future outbreaks of SARS-like diseases, through rapid diagnosis and effective control."

The problem

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) could re-emerge in the future, posing a serious challenge to public health worldwide. The possibility that SARS could reappear during one of the upcoming influenza seasons makes the event difficult to control. Indeed, measures to control the spread of SARS (quarantine, isolation, infection control and contact tracing) cannot be systematically applied during the influenza season, complicating the efficient control of the disease. A better understanding of the mechanisms of SARS re-emergence will be of pivotal importance in restricting the spread of the disease during the early phases of an epidemic.

Overview:

EPISARS aims to prevent the spread of SARS in the human population through the control of animal and human SARS-like coronavirus (SARS-like CoV) infections.

The project will:

- Conduct animal surveys in China with the goal of identifying and monitoring (controlling) the animal reservoir of SARS-like CoV
- Analyse risk factors for SARS transmission in the human population, based on epidemiological data collected during the 2003 Chinese epidemic
- Conduct molecular epidemiological studies comparing SARS CoV found in animals and humans
- Issue guidelines for the monitoring (control) of the animal reservoir, and collect data and information to update the existing guidelines for the control of outbreaks in humans

Contribution to policy development:

- Detailed and reliable scientific evidence to be used by public health workers and policy-makers on which to update guidelines for surveillance and response to SARS
- Generation of data that could prove useful for consortia studying other communicable diseases, such as influenza
- Strengthening of scientific links between Europe and China, with a view to limiting the human, social and economic consequences of future SARS outbreaks

Project deliverables

- Identification of animal reservoir – start April 2004, end April 2006
- Identification of route and mechanism of transmission – start April 2004, end October 2005
- Initial report containing recommendations for preventing and controlling SARS infections
- Final report and recommendations – start April 2004, end April 2007

Dissemination

- Website update
- Publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals – start April 2004, end October 2006
- General meetings – beginning, middle and end of the project
- Interim activity report – quarterly
- Steering Committee meeting – quarterly
- Scientific Advisory Board meeting – middle and end of the project
- Final activity and management report – April 2007

Technical information

Project acronym: EPISARS
Project's official full title: 2.0 Providing health, security and opportunity to the people of Europe
Research priority: SARS
Specific webpage: Details not yet available
Proposal/contract no: 511063
Start date: 01/04/2004
Kick off meeting: December 2003
Completion date: 01/04/2007
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The list of all partners is available on the website
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