

# Lessons from SARS in an age of emerging infections

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## KEY WORDS

SARS; infections

## SUMMARY

*SARS, the first pandemic of this century, commanded the world's attention and required public health actions at the national and international levels. In an age of emerging infections, the lessons learnt from combating SARS can be used to improve our preparedness capabilities in three key areas to effectively tackle a public health emergency of international concern. The first area is in outbreak alert, which encompasses use of surveillance to detect, assess, notify and report events involving death or disease, and share information widely to enable proper risk assessment. The system must be able to build up a comprehensive picture with appropriate warning for zoonotic diseases, environmental health and food safety. The second area is in public health response. In the event of an outbreak alert, the authorities must be able to quickly investigate cases/deaths and institute comprehensive control measures to break the chain of transmission. Protection of healthcare workers and reducing the opportunities for spread of infection through contact tracing and quarantine are important. The third area is in international health. This comprises health requirements for inbound and outbound travellers at the border checkpoints and global information exchange to mitigate the risks of travel abroad. Extrapolating these lessons to a wider public health context, our rapidly changing global infectious diseases situation mandates that we evaluate all available public health tools and build institutional capacity to effectively manage emerging infections.*