

The APO's response to SARS

Since the outbreak of the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Asia earlier this year and its subsequent spread to countries outside the region, much has been said and written about it. Affected countries have introduced emergency measures to treat and eliminate it. When the SARS epidemic was at its height in Asia, the APO decided that it too should take steps to help contain the spread of SARS. To begin with, all its projects slated for implementation in April and May were postponed, including the APO Governing Body Meeting which was to have been in Fiji on 10–12 June. Most of the postponed projects have since been rescheduled (please see page 7 for details).


As the spread of SARS seemed to have been brought under control in most affected countries by the end of May, implementation of projects planned for June and July is being considered on a case-by-case basis. Their status will depend on the outcome of consultations by the APO Secretariat with the host countries concerned and the external technical experts to be dispatched to these projects. The APO has also issued a set of guidelines on precautionary measures for participants and technical experts attending APO projects. They are meant to supplement the advice and recommendations of the WHO and national health authorities. The gist of these guidelines is given below.

Pre-departure arrangements

- * Participants are requested to consult a physician within three days prior to departure for the APO project they are attending and to obtain medical certification that they are in good physical condition.
- * They are also advised to prepare and bring a medical kit with them which should include face masks, thermometer, disinfectant, and vitamin C supplements.

- * They should also check their temperature prior to their departure. If they have SARS-like symptoms, such as high fever of more than 38°C, dry cough, and shortness of breath or breathing difficulties, they must immediately withdraw their participation in the project and inform the NPO concerned and the APO Secretariat.

During project implementation

- * Participants should check their temperature daily and if any SARS-like symptoms occur, they should immediately inform the hotel management and project organizers by telephone and refrain from attending the project. They should wear a surgical mask and restrict their movements to minimize contact with others. In such a situation, arrangements will be made to provide appropriate medical facilities for testing and treatment.
- * During the project period, participants should refrain from private travel within the host country without prior consultation with the organizers.
- * They are also advised to abide by the health instructions of the host country and the organizers during the period of project implementation.
- * Deputing NPOs are requested to ensure that their participants comply fully with the APO guidelines. The host NPO is requested to extend the fullest assistance possible to participants in case they are quarantined.
- * Participants are also advised to travel by the most direct route to the host country of the project they are attending and to avoid transiting at the airports of countries for which the WHO has issued travel advisories .