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HEALTH INFORMATION

## New Facts Show Sars a Long-lived Virus

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Reuters Health

By Maggie Fox and Brian Rhoads

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WASHINGTON/BEIJING (Reuters) - The SARS virus can live for days in the stool and urine of patients, the World Health Organization said on Sunday in a new report that could shed light on the frightening spread of the disease.

Hong Kong scientists have suspected the virus could live in sewage -- something that could help explain an outbreak that affected residents at a large apartment complex.

Genetic material from the virus has been found in the stool and urine of patients. The test results posted on the WHO Web Site at <http://www.who.int> show the virus can live for days in human waste.

"Virus is stable in feces (and urine) at room temperature for at least one to two days," WHO said in a statement. "Virus is more stable (up to 4 days) in stool from diarrhea patients than in normal stool where it could only be found for up to 6 hours."

Acidity seems to be important -- stool in diarrhea is more alkaline and thus seems to be more hospitable for the virus. The stool of newborns, which is more acidic, kills the virus after three hours.

But standard disinfectants such as chlorine bleach killed the virus in five minutes, WHO found.

SARS, which has killed nearly 450 people and infected 6,700 worldwide, is caused by a new member of the coronavirus family. It is related to viruses that cause the common cold and gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases in animals.

There is no standard treatment and 6 percent to 10 percent of patients die. Air travelers have spread the disease across the world. During air travel, the virus can be passed by droplets from the nose and mouth through sneezing and coughing.

But if it acts anything like many other viruses that cause respiratory illness and stomach upset, it can live on surfaces and be passed on when one person touches a contaminated area and then touches his or her own nose, mouth or eyes.

The Washington Post reported that WHO doctors also found the viruses lived on plastic surfaces for 24 hours, although WHO did not post this information on its Web site.

### FIRST FACTS ON SURVIVAL OF VIRUS

"It's the first time we have hard data on the survival of the virus. Before, we were just speculating," WHO scientist Klaus Stohr was quoted by the newspaper as saying.