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Killer Flu Strain Spreads

The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) has issued the first global health alert in a decade due to a spreading atypical pneumonia called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (S.A.R.S.).

The disease, which is spread directly from person to person, has infected nearly 500 people and killed at least nine people worldwide. It does not respond to treatment and has no known cause.

W.H.O. experts suspect that the first case of S.A.R.S. appeared as early as November of 2002 in a southern Chinese province. In this province alone 305 people have become ill and five have died. The cases involve men and women in all age groups, but most occur among young adults. The disease has since spread, aided by international air travel, to Germany, Canada, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, and Vietnam.

CDC Director Julie Gerberding said that a potential epidemic of this nature serves to remind the world that “we really do live in a global village.” She added, “An emerging problem in one part of the world will soon be a problem to all of us.”

Experiences with past epidemics warn that the mystery to this disease could take a long time to discover. When Ebola first spread in Africa it took months to identify. When Legionnaire's disease struck in Philadelphia in 1976, it took six months to identify the causative bacterium. It took four years to figure out that HIV causes AIDS.