

Isolation & Quarantine

Information for the Public

What is isolation and quarantine?

Isolation and quarantine are two common public health strategies that are used to help prevent the spread of a highly contagious illness. Isolation and quarantine keeps people who are sick or who have been exposed to a highly contagious illness separate from people who have not been exposed.

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

Isolation is a strategy used to separate people who are sick with a contagious illness from those who are healthy. Isolation restricts the movement of people who are ill to help stop the spread of certain diseases. People in isolation may be cared for in their homes, in hospitals, or in designated healthcare facilities. Quarantine is used to separate and restrict the movement of people who may have been exposed to a contagious illness, but do not have symptoms to see if they become sick. These individuals may or may not be contagious.

When would quarantine be used?

Quarantine may be used when:

- A person or a well-defined group of people have been exposed to a highly dangerous and highly contagious disease,
- Resources are available to care for quarantined people, and
- Resources are available to implement and maintain the quarantine and deliver essential services.

What types of measures would be used to quarantine someone?

There are many different control strategies that can be used. This includes:

- Short-term, voluntary home confinement.
- Restrictions on travel for those who may have been exposed.
- Restrictions on passage into and out of an area.

Other measures to control the spread of disease may include:

- Restrictions on the assembly of groups of people (for example, school events),
- Cancellation of public events,
- Suspension of public gatherings and closings of public places (such as theaters), and
- Closure of mass transit systems or broader restrictions on travel by air, rail or water.

What else might public health do to help prevent the spread of a highly contagious disease?

In addition to isolation and quarantine, there are a number of other tools that public health departments can use to help prevent the spread of a highly contagious disease. This includes:

- Enhanced disease surveillance and symptom monitoring.
- Rapid diagnosis and treatment for those who become sick.
- Preventive treatment for quarantined individuals, such as vaccination or medicine, depending on the disease.

How are isolation and quarantine enforced?

In most cases, isolation and quarantine are done so voluntarily. Implementing isolation and quarantine measures require the trust and participation of the public; however federal, state and local health officials have the authority to compel isolation and quarantine within its borders.

What are some examples of isolation and quarantine?

Isolation is a modern procedure used in hospitals for patients with infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis. During the 2003 global SARS outbreak, patients in the United States were isolated until they were no longer infectious. This practice allowed patients to receive the appropriate care and helped contain the spread of the illness. Seriously ill patients were cared for in hospitals, while individuals with mild illness were cared for at home. Individuals being cared for at home were asked to avoid contact with other people and to remain at home until they were no longer contagious. In addition, the CDC advised people who were exposed, but not symptomatic, to quarantine themselves (i.e. stay at home), monitor themselves for symptoms and seek medical evaluation if symptoms appeared. This was effective in controlling the spread of the disease.

For More Information:

- Visit the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Isolation and Quarantine webpage at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/preparedness/quarantine>.