

Isolation and Quarantine

What is the purpose of isolation and quarantine?

The purpose of isolation and quarantine is to control the spread of contagious (infectious) illness. Public health officials use many different tools, two of which are isolation and quarantine. Both are common practices in public health, and both aim to prevent the exposure of well persons to infected or potentially infected person. Both may be undertaken voluntarily or compelled by authorities.

What is isolation?

Isolation is the separation of persons who are ill with specific contagious (infectious) illness from those who are healthy and the restriction of their movement to stop the spread of that disease. Isolation also allows for specialized medical care for people who are ill. People in isolation may be cared for in hospitals, in their homes, or in designated healthcare facilities. The length of isolation is the period of time during which the person is able to transmit the disease to others (period of communicability). Isolation is routinely used today by hospitals for patients with tuberculosis (TB) and other infectious diseases.

What is quarantine?

Quarantine refers to the separation and restriction of persons who, while not ill, have been exposed to an infectious agent and therefore may become infectious. Quarantine

may be used when a person has been exposed to a highly dangerous and infectious disease. There needs to be consideration for what resources are available to care for quarantined people and what resources are available to implement and maintain the quarantine and deliver essential services, such as food.

Quarantine can include a range of disease control strategies that may be used individually or in combination, including: short-term, voluntary home confinement; restrictions on travel by those who may have been exposed; and restrictions on passage into and out of a geographic area.

Quarantine can also include other measures to control the spread of disease, such as: restrictions on the assembly of groups of people (e.g., school events); cancellation of public events (e.g., concerts); suspension of public gatherings and closing of public places (such as movie theaters); and closure of mass transit systems or broad restrictions on travel by air, rail, or water. But quarantine is much more likely to involve limited numbers of people in a limited geographic region than to be widespread.

What is the ring method of quarantine?

Small areas in which people may be quarantined can be thought of as “rings” drawn around individual disease cases. Some examples are passengers on an airplane, students at a college, people who attended the same event at a stadium, or people who all entered the same building over a given period

of time. In the case of a very large disease outbreak, such as a flu pandemic, there may be a large number of these rings or more large-scale methods may be used, such as the restriction of the use of public transportation.

Who orders isolation or quarantine for someone?

In New Hampshire, the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has primary authority for ordering isolation and quarantine for persons within the State, though the requests are usually made by an official in the Division of Public Health Services at DHHS because they investigate infectious disease outbreaks. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), also has the power to detain, medically examine, or conditionally release persons suspected of carrying certain communicable diseases within the United States.

What if someone does not want to be put into isolation or quarantine?

Procedures exist under New Hampshire law that allow health officials to compel someone to cooperate with an order of isolation or quarantine or to face legal actions if there is sufficient threat to the public's health and safety.

Whose job is it to enforce isolation and quarantine orders?

It is law enforcement's job to enforce the legal actions.

For specific questions about isolation and quarantine, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.