

COMMUNICABLE OR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES

A communicable or infectious disease is one which is spread from one person to another or from an animal to a person. These diseases can be spread via the air, blood, intestinal tract, or by direct contact. The control and prevention of communicable diseases is a major focus of the Infectious Disease Control Program of the New Hampshire Department of Health & Human Services, Division of Public Health Services (DPHS). Access to health care and education are two important issues in the control of communicable diseases. The local health officers support this vital public health role with the provision of current information about the occurrence, transmission, and prevention of communicable diseases in their towns.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- **RSA 141-C:1-8, Communicable Disease** - <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/NHTOC/NHTOC-X-141-C.htm>

ROLE OF THE HEALTH OFFICER:

- Under [RSA 141-C:7](#), any Health Officer having under his observation a person afflicted with a communicable disease or who has reason to believe that a person was or might have been afflicted with a communicable disease (as listed in RSA 141-C:8) at the time of death, shall report to the commissioner the communicable disease.
- Under [RSA 141-C:5](#), assist with the commissioner of DHHS, when requested to do so, in the establishment and enforcement of isolation and quarantine in their respective cities and towns.
- May assist the DPHS Infectious Disease Control Program with educational information for their community.
- May assist the DPHS Infectious Disease Control Program with the control of an identified illness in their community. (i.e. posting signs regarding swimming in a contaminated public beach.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Communicable or infectious diseases spread from one person to another or from an animal to a person. The spread often happens via airborne viruses or bacteria, but also through blood or other bodily fluid. Because communicable diseases can have so much impact on the population, the surveillance and control of such diseases is an important part of protecting the public's health here in

New Hampshire. Examples of communicable diseases that you may be familiar with through the local media are Hepatitis, Salmonellosis, Influenza, West Nile Virus and Rabies.

REPORTING OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

In New Hampshire, under [RSA 141-C:1-8](#), any physician or other health care provider who assesses, diagnoses, or treats a person believed by him to be a case or suspect case of a reportable disease shall immediately report the same to the DPHS Communicable Disease Control Program by telephone, mail or electronic transmission on forms provided by the commissioner.

When no physician or other health care provider is in attendance, the person in charge, which could be a Health Officer, of any institution, public or non - public school, child care agency, hotel, restaurant, boarding house, labor camp or other camp, vessel, workplace, hospital, dispensary, pharmacy, or charitable, penal, or other institution or place of detention in which there is a case or suspect case of a reportable disease, shall report the same immediately to the Bureau of Infectious Disease Control.

Local Boards of Health shall report immediately to the DPHS Communicable Disease Control Program those cases or suspect cases of reportable diseases of which they have knowledge. [Reports](#) provided pursuant to (3) above shall include: The full name, age, sex, race, ethnicity, address, telephone number, occupation, and place of occupation of the patient; the name of the disease; the date of onset; and, the name of the person reporting.

ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE

Under [\(RSA 141-C:2, XII\)](#), certain terms, such as isolation and quarantine are clearly defined.

Isolation is defined as:

“the separation, for the period of communicability, of infected persons from others in such places and under such conditions as to prevent or limit the direct or indirect transmission of the infectious agent from those infected to those who are susceptible or who may spread the agent to others.”

Quarantine is defined in the law as:

“the restriction of activities of well persons who have been exposed to a case of communicable disease, during its period of communicability, to prevent disease transmission during the incubation period if infection should occur.”

The DPHS Communicable Disease Control Program per order of the Commissioner of Health & Human Services or his agent is the only agency that can issue a legal order of isolation or quarantine. The DPHS may

ask the Health officer for assistance in helping the individual or group of individuals with compliance and helping them fulfill their everyday needs. In most instances people who are infected with a disease that requires isolation will remain isolated on a voluntary basis.

COMMUNICATION WITH PUBLIC HEALTH

While the DPHS Infectious Disease Control Program makes every effort to keep the Health Officer informed when it comes to illness in their town, it is typically not necessary to inform a Health Officer regarding a single case of a communicable disease. Decisions about whether or not to inform the Health Officer about individual cases are made on a case-by-case basis. A Health Officer may be notified in situations that involve an outbreak or cluster of illness.

For more information:

Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health Services
Communicable Disease Control Program
29 Hazen Drive
Concord, NH 03301

1-800-852-3345 ext. 4496 (NH only), or 603-271-4496

NH Public Health Laboratories
1-800-852-3345 ext. 4496, or 271-4496

Disease Reports Emergency
603-271-5300 (24 hours)

NH State Veterinarian
603-271-2404

NH Fish and Game Department
1-800-852-3411, or 271-3361 (nights/weekends)