



FACT SHEET

Isolation and Quarantine

To contain the spread of a contagious illness, public health authorities rely on many strategies. Two of these strategies are isolation and quarantine. Both are common practices in public health, and both aim to control exposure to infected or potentially infected persons. Both may be undertaken voluntarily or required by public health authorities. The two strategies differ in that isolation applies to persons who are known to have an illness, and quarantine applies to those who have been exposed to a person who is ill but who may or may not become ill.

What is isolation?

Isolation is for people who are ill. Isolation separates people who have a specific infectious disease from those who are healthy. Isolation helps people from getting sick by keeping the ill persons away from others.

Where do people in isolation stay?

People in isolation may be cared for in their homes, in hospitals, or in designated healthcare facilities. Isolation is a standard procedure used in hospitals today for patients with tuberculosis and certain other infectious diseases. In most cases, isolation is voluntary; however, many levels of government (federal, state, and local) have basic authority to require isolation of sick people to protect the public. Although Isolation is a standard procedure generally used to contain the spread of a contagious illness, it should be used in the least restrictive manner to protect individual's rights.

What is quarantine?

Quarantine is for people who are healthy and had contact with an ill person. Quarantine separates and restricts movement of persons who, while not yet ill, have been exposed to an infectious agent and may or may not become ill.

Why is quarantine used?

Quarantine of exposed persons is a public health strategy, like isolation, that is intended to stop the spread of infectious disease. Quarantine is medically very effective in protecting the public from disease.

Where do people in quarantine stay?

People in quarantine are often asked to stay home, stay away from other people, check themselves for symptoms and call their healthcare provider if symptomatic.

Does isolation and quarantine really work?

During the 2003 global SARS outbreak, ill persons in the United States were isolated until they were no longer infectious. This practice allowed patients to receive appropriate care, and it helped contain the spread of the illness. Seriously ill patients were cared for in hospitals. Persons with mild illness were cared for at home. Persons being cared for at home were asked to avoid contact with other people and to remain at home until 10 days after the resolution of fever, provided respiratory symptoms were absent or improving.