

Isolation and Quarantine

What are emergency isolations and quarantines?

When people are sick or exposed to others who are sick, they may need to be separated from the general public during a health emergency. Both isolation and quarantine are common public health tools used to contain illnesses that spread from person to person.

What is isolation?

Isolation refers to the separation of people who have a specific infectious illness from those who are healthy.

What is quarantine?

Quarantine refers to the separation and restriction of movement of people who have been exposed to an infectious agent but who are not sick or showing symptoms.

What kinds of illnesses could prompt isolations and quarantines in Texas?

Any outbreak of a serious, highly contagious illness such as pandemic flu, plague or smallpox could cause isolations and quarantines. A terrorist attack involving radiation or chemicals also could trigger isolations and quarantines.

Are emergency isolations and quarantines mandatory?

Yes, you must obey isolation and quarantine orders made by a health authority. People who do not comply could be charged with either a misdemeanor or felony depending on the situation. Most people see that it is in their best interest to cooperate. In widespread emergency situations, people who suspect they are sick may choose to voluntarily isolate or quarantine themselves.

Who enforces isolations and quarantines?

Isolations and quarantines are overseen, and in some cases enforced, by health departments, law enforcement, transportation authorities and health care providers.

Where would I be isolated or quarantined?

Often, isolations and quarantines take place in your own home. But you also may be at another residence or in a medical facility or other institution. If an isolation or quarantine happens within an apartment complex or other multi-family dwelling, a separate air ventilation system may be needed.

How will I receive medical care or food if I am separated from other people?

Access to medical care, food, water, telephone, electricity and medicines must be considered in every isolation and quarantine situation. In large-scale emergency situations, health officials will work with military and retail stores to be sure that people have needed supplies and medical care.

Will my family and friends be allowed to get in touch with me?

Yes. If you are isolated or quarantined it is important that you have a way to use a telephone. But for the safety of the public and your family, it is best to keep some family members such as infants and the elderly away from you if you are sick or have been exposed to a communicable illness.

How do I know if I need to be isolated or quarantined?

If you have symptoms related to or feel you have been exposed to a serious, highly contagious illness, contact your doctor or local health authority. In large emergency situations, people will be told if they should be isolated or quarantined.

What is the public health system doing about the possibility of emergency isolations and quarantines in Texas? Local, state and federal public health agencies are working with local health care providers, hospitals, emergency response teams, laboratories, veterinarians and others to prepare for large outbreaks and disasters of all types.

If bioterrorism is suspected, the health departments notify the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Federal Bureau of Investigation and other appropriate authorities.