



Facts about Quarantine and Isolation

Quarantine and isolation are public health measures used to prevent or control the spread of communicable diseases which present a risk of serious harm to the public. The Iowa Department of Public Health (Department) and county boards of health (local boards) have the authority to impose quarantine and isolation in very limited circumstances to prevent the spread of certain diseases. Quarantine and isolation are used to protect the public by preventing exposure to infected persons or persons who may be infected.

Here are some facts about quarantine and isolation you should know:

The Department and local boards will impose quarantine or isolation only in the event of an outbreak of a "quarantinable disease," which means a serious and unusual or novel disease such as cholera, diphtheria, measles, infectious tuberculosis, plague, SARS, smallpox, certain viral hemorrhagic fevers, and other diseases spread person to person which present a risk of serious harm to the public's health.

Quarantine means confining a person who has been exposed to a quarantinable disease to see if they become ill and infectious to others. Quarantine is imposed for a period of time equal to the longest incubation period of the disease, which could range from a couple of days to two weeks, depending on the disease.

Isolation means confining a person who is actually infected with a quarantinable disease for the period of time that they are infectious to others, which could range from a couple of days to weeks, depending on the disease.

Prior to imposing quarantine or isolation, the Department and local boards will request that an individual voluntarily confine him or herself to their private home. Only if a person refuses to voluntarily confine themselves will the Department or local boards consider mandatory quarantine or isolation.

The Department and local boards are required by law to impose mandatory quarantine or isolation by the least restrictive means necessary to prevent the spread of the disease. Typically this means the exposed or infected person will be quarantined or isolated in their home.

Only if a person refuses to comply with voluntary home confinement and refuses to comply with quarantine or isolation in their own home will the Department or a local board consider imposing quarantine or isolation to a facility. If a person is quarantined or isolated in a facility the Department or the local board will ensure that the person is confined to a safe and hygienic facility and that they have access to adequate food, medical care, and a means of communication with those outside the facility.

Updated 11/15/12