

# Information About Isolation & Quarantine

## Introduction

Isolation and Quarantine are two actions that can be taken by health authorities to contain the spread of a contagious disease. The goal is to stop more people from becoming ill. Isolation and quarantine are different because **isolation** is for people who are known to have an illness or disease, and **quarantine** is for people who may have been exposed to an illness or disease but are not yet sick.

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department will be the local agency responsible for providing the public with information and isolation or quarantine instructions. This information is being provided to help you understand what you may be asked to do if the Public Health Department issues isolation or quarantine orders.

## Isolation: For People Who Are Sick

When people are placed in isolation, they are sick and have an infection that makes it necessary to separate them from people who are not sick. Having a sick person isolated (separated from others) can help to slow or stop the spread of disease. When isolated, the sick person will still be treated for his or her illness while healthy people will have some protection from getting sick. Isolation is a standard procedure used in hospitals for patients with tuberculosis (TB) and other contagious diseases. People who are isolated may be cared for in hospitals, other healthcare facilities and in their own homes.

In most cases isolation is voluntary, but federal, state and local health officials have the power to require the isolation of sick people to protect the general public's health.

## Quarantine: For People Exposed, But Who Are Not Sick

When people are placed in quarantine, they are also separated from others. Even though the person is not sick at the moment, he or she was exposed to a contagious disease, may still become infectious and then spread the disease to others. Quarantine can help to slow or stop the spread of a contagious disease and has been effective in protecting the public from disease.

Quarantine is often voluntary, particularly when home confinement is needed. Other quarantine measures include restricting travel for those who have been exposed to a contagious disease, and restrictions on people coming or going into a specific area. States have the power to enforce quarantines within their borders.

## What Other Measures Can Be Used to Limit the Spread of Disease?

Other public health measures that may be used to limit the spread of disease include canceling any event where large groups of people would gather. Some examples are school events such as basketball games, and public events like San Jose Sharks games. Another measure that may be used would be to close places such as schools, movie theaters and shopping malls temporarily. Mass transit systems may also be temporarily closed.

*(continued)*

**Public Health Department**

Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System



[www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org) | **Dedicated to the health of the whole community**

*The Public Health Department is a department of Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System, owned and operated by the County of Santa Clara.*

# Information About Isolation & Quarantine

These measures would be used in combination with other public health activities to help limit or slow the spread of disease. These activities include increased observation for the disease, monitoring people for symptoms, quick diagnosis of the disease, providing treatment for those who become ill, and preventive treatment for people who are quarantined. Depending on the type of disease, treatment could include medications or vaccination.

## Have Isolation & Quarantine Recently Been Used?

During the 2003 global SARS outbreak, patients in the United States were isolated until they were no longer contagious. These patients were able to get the appropriate medical care, and isolation helped contain the spread of SARS. Seriously ill patients were cared for in hospitals, and people with mild illness were cared for at home. People at home were asked to avoid contact with other people and to remain at home until 10 days after their fever and other respiratory symptoms had stopped.

Since there was limited transmission of the disease in the United States, quarantine was not used. The CDC advised people who may have been exposed, but didn't have symptoms, to monitor themselves for symptoms. If symptoms appeared, they were instructed to isolate themselves voluntarily at home and to get a medical evaluation. Quarantine was used effectively in other countries where there was extensive transmission of the disease.

Isolation & Quarantine have been used to contain outbreaks of tuberculosis (TB) and other contagious diseases. As mentioned above, isolation is a standard procedure used in hospitals for patients with contagious diseases.

For health-related questions or concerns, please contact the **Santa Clara County Public Health Department** at **408.885.3980**.

For more information about health issues and emergency preparedness, please visit the following Web sites:

- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org)
- [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)
- [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

## Public Health Department

Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System



[www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org) | **Dedicated to the health of the whole community**

*The Public Health Department is a department of Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System, owned and operated by the County of Santa Clara.*