

**Isolation and Quarantine to Prevent Transmission of Ebola Virus Disease and Other Serious Communicable Diseases (other than Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS\*):  
Consensus of Washington State Health Officers, December 12, 2014**

Summary

Isolation and quarantine are measures that restrict movement of individuals in order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as Ebola virus disease. Public health officials will first seek voluntary compliance with requests to restrict movement. However, if an individual does not comply voluntarily, and the local health officer has reason to believe that the individual would pose a serious and imminent risk if not restricted, the local health officer may issue an order or may apply to a superior court for an “ex parte” order. A health officer order is immediately valid for up to ten days ([WAC 246-100-040\[3\]](#)) unless upon appeal the court releases the individual. An “ex parte” order requires a hearing within 72 hours and is valid for up to ten days.

Background

Infectious diseases such as Ebola virus disease pose a serious risk to persons who may be exposed. The most effective way to prevent the spread of such diseases is to prevent exposure of active, communicable cases to susceptible persons. To this end, a person with an active, communicable disease should be isolated from others until he/she is no longer infectious. Similarly, a healthy person who has been exposed to a potentially rapidly life threatening communicable disease such as Ebola virus disease could in a short time frame become infectious and place others at risk; therefore, an exposed person may need to be quarantined until he/she is no longer at risk to develop the disease. Isolation and quarantine are generally preferable in a person’s own home or another non-institutional setting, with support (such as meals) provided as needed to enable the person to avoid contact with others. Limited movement in the community (such as walking in the neighborhood) may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. However, if a person refuses to comply, then additional public health actions may be required to restrict a person’s movements.

Public health must balance the rights of individuals against the need to protect populations. However, the fundamental principle is to employ the least restrictive measures necessary, meaning that we seek voluntary cooperation before instituting coercive measures. Thus, voluntary isolation or quarantine is the preferred first step when it is necessary to prevent a person from having contact with others in the community. At a minimum, this requires clearly requesting, explaining the rationale for, and stating the expected duration of isolation or quarantine. Moreover, public health should employ reasonable incentives to encourage voluntary cooperation before instituting coercive measures. This means assuring compliance will not overly burden the individual, while also not unreasonably taxing the resources of the public health jurisdiction.

Process to isolate or quarantine

When a health officer has determined that an individual poses a significant risk of transmission of Ebola virus disease and that isolation or quarantine is indicated, the following steps should be followed:

- 1) Issue a written request for compliance explaining the rationale and details about how the person should comply (e.g., staying at home, walking in the neighborhood), and stating the expected duration of isolation or quarantine.

- 2) If the person refuses to comply or agrees but subsequently violates the agreement to comply, consider issuing an order explaining the rationale for the order and details about how the person must comply (e.g., staying at home, walking in the neighborhood), and stating the expected duration of isolation or quarantine. As this starts the legal process, legal counsel should guide the choice and form of the order.
  - a. A health officer order is usually appropriate, as it takes effect immediately (although it can be appealed).
  - b. If the health officer order is not effective in gaining compliance or if the Health Officer has concerns about enforcement, an ex parte court order may be sought. Such an order may be more effective in gaining compliance, but requires reaching a superior court judge to issue the order and also arranging a hearing for the isolated or quarantined person within 72 hours.
- 3) Both the health officer order and the court order are effective for ten days. A health officer may petition the superior court for an order authorizing the continued isolation or quarantine of a person or group for a period up to thirty days.

Note: To assure that the steps to isolate or quarantine an individual are acceptable to prosecutors and the courts, local health jurisdictions should raise the issue for discussion and approval before the need arises. Similarly, although law enforcement is authorized to enforce both types of orders ([RCW 43.20.050\[5\]](#)), local health jurisdictions should also discuss enforcement issues with local law enforcement agencies before the need arises.

\*This consensus statement applies only to communicable diseases other than tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, for which specific RCW and WAC apply.