

Understanding Quarantine and Isolation

Joseph Parish



Today we have been experiencing many different, and strange diseases some of which science has no understanding of. It is very likely that if such an illness were to surface within our neighborhood that the federal government, or even the state for that matter, would either place us in a quarantine status, or isolate us from the rest of society. Although this response may not be conducted out of malice, but rather for the safety of the population as a whole, it still does not make us a happy survivalist. If and when this would take place, it would behoove us to understand a little bit about what quarantine and isolation actually is.

Quarantine is essentially the separation, and eventual restriction of a person or group of people in their free movement even though those individuals may not display an active illness. The key here is the word exposure. They may have likely to have been exposed to a contagious type of disease, but may not actually show progressive signs of infection. The primary purpose of quarantine is to prevent the transmission of the disease.

Quarantines can be broken down into several different designations such as absolute, or modified quarantines. An absolute quarantine places limits upon the movement of those being quarantined for a period of time consistent with the incubation period of the disease. Modified on the other hand provides a partial limitation upon the person or groups freedom of movement in relation to the risk factors involved.

When we speak of isolation, we refer to the separation, and ultimate restriction of movement involving an ill person who has contacted a contagious disease. Once again, the intent is to prevent transmission of the illness to others.

An example of quarantine took place in September of 2014 when defense secretary Chuck Hagel initiated a 21-Day Ebola Quarantine upon military members returning from West Africa. These measures served as a safety value to prevent the possible exposure to others of the deadly disease.

An example of isolation brings to mind the illness of TB. Isolation is a standard procedure typically employed in hospitals for tuberculosis patients as well as other infectious diseases. This process permits patients to receive the necessary care that they

need while containing the potential spread of a dangerous illness. The goal is to control, and prevent the unnecessary spread of an infectious disease.

I would now like to discuss the issue of trust as associated with quarantine and isolation. To effectively combat health related issues, it is imperative that the public health departments foster a measure of public confidence in their expertise, and judgment while making decisions and taking actions. This issue poses a crucial challenge to public health officials.

During major epidemics the public health professionals must rely upon expert knowledge to properly identify, and manage the health requirements of the population in as accurate manner as possible. The primary aim is to maximize the outward influence with accurate data accompanied by professional judgment. All decisions should be comprehensive, and as objective as possible. The problem seen here is that not all of their expertise is viewed by the public as inspiring. This brings into play the need to embrace the political process which weakens the impression provided towards professional neutrality.

This is important because even though the health agency may possess coercive powers by law in order to be successful, the agency must depend upon voluntary public compliance. There are simply not enough enforcement officials to implement, and insist upon compliance. Compliance without enforcement is an essential aspect of public health. To achieve this end result it is important to establish firm credibility for the health department involved. Without the proper trust, and confidence in our health departments ability to detect, and monitor infectious disease the programs would be in dire jeopardy.