



## Home isolation for tuberculosis (TB)

If you have TB disease that can spread from person to person (contagious active TB disease), your health care provider may tell you to go on home isolation. Home isolation means you avoid contact with other people. Home isolation will help stop the spread of TB to others. Young children and people with weak immune systems are at highest risk for getting sick with TB.

### What is TB?

TB is a serious disease caused by a germ (bacteria) that spreads through the air when a person with active TB disease in their lungs coughs, sneezes, sings or talks.

TB usually affects the lungs, but can also affect other parts of the body like glands, bones, joints, kidneys, the brain and reproductive organs.

TB can be cured. In B.C., medicines to prevent or cure TB are free through Provincial TB Services and public health units.

For more information on TB, see [HealthLinkBC File #51a Tuberculosis \(TB\)](#).

### What is home isolation?

Home isolation is when a person must stay at home because they have a contagious disease such as TB. If you are on home isolation it means you are not sick enough to need hospital care but you are able to spread TB to other people.

Home isolation helps prevent the spread of TB because you stay home and away from other people. In B.C., there are laws to limit the activities of people with contagious active TB disease. These laws are to protect other people from getting TB. These laws are part

of the B.C. Public Health Act. For more information, visit

[www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws\\_new/document/ID/freeside/00\\_08028\\_01](http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/00_08028_01).

### What does home isolation mean?

- Remain in your home and avoid contact with others
- Take your TB medicines as directed, eat healthy foods, and get plenty of rest
- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth if you must go to medical appointments and when health care providers come to your home
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough, sneeze or laugh
- Air out rooms you are staying in by opening the window (if the weather allows)
- Tell any new health care providers (such as ambulance paramedics) that you have contagious active TB disease
- Do not have visitors, especially children and people with weak immune systems
- Do not use buses, trains, taxis or airplanes
- Do not go to public places like work, school, church, stores, shopping malls, restaurants or movie theatres
- Cancel or reschedule non-medical appointments (such as the dentist or hair dresser) until after your home isolation has ended

### How long will I need to be on home isolation?

The amount of time needed for home isolation is different for each person. Your health care provider will let you know how long you need to stay at home. Tests of your sputum will help your health care provider know when your home isolation can stop. Sputum is mucous or phlegm that you cough up from deep inside your lungs. If you take your medication, your TB will get better. Once tests show you are no longer able to spread TB, you will be able to do the same things you did before you became sick.

For more information on sputum collection, see [HealthLinkBC File #51b Sputum testing for tuberculosis \(TB\)](#).

### **How can I protect my family and friends from TB?**

You can protect your family and friends by following the home isolation instructions and by taking your TB medications. You can also help protect your family and friends by making sure they get tested for TB.

### **What if I need to go somewhere?**

Being on home isolation means you must stay at home unless you need medical care.

If you are going to a medical appointment, tell the clinic that you are under home isolation for TB. You must wear a mask until you return home. If you travel to an appointment in a car with other people, keep the windows open as much as possible.

### **What if I need emergency medical care?**

It is very important that you tell the health care providers (paramedics, doctors, nurses) that you have active TB disease. This will help them to protect themselves and other people nearby.

### **Can TB spread to others by shaking hands, kissing or sex?**

TB is not spread by direct physical contact, such as shaking hands, kissing or sex. TB is spread through the air when a person with active TB disease in their lungs coughs, sneezes, sings or talks. If you are often in close contact with someone who has TB, there is a risk you could catch the disease.

### **Can TB spread to others from my dishes, clothes, linens or furniture?**

TB is not spread by sharing glasses, plates, utensils, clothing, sheets, furniture or toilets. These items do not need any special cleaning.

### **Can I spend time outside without wearing a mask?**

Check with your health care provider about whether you are well enough to spend time outside. You do not need to wear a mask when you are outside but you should stay away from other people.

### **How should I dispose of masks and tissues after I use them?**

Your used masks and tissues can be put in the regular garbage. Be sure to wash your hands frequently, especially after taking off your mask or using a tissue. For more information on proper hand washing, see [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control  
Provincial Health Services Authority

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