

Home Isolation for Tuberculosis (TB)

If you have been diagnosed with contagious tuberculosis (TB), your health care provider may tell you that you need to be on home isolation. 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 tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis, also known as TB, is a serious disease. TB is caused by bacteria that spread through the air when a person with contagious TB 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 British Columbia, medicines to prevent TB, or to cure TB are free through Provincial TB Service Clinics 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 is required to 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 restrict the activities of people with

contagious TB. These laws are to protect other people from getting TB.

How do I comply with home isolation?

- Remain in your home.
- Take your TB medicines, 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 TB.
- 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.
- Do not go to non-emergency 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. If you take your medication, your TB will get better. Once tests show you are no longer contagious, 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 Collection for Tuberculosis \(TB\) Testing](#).

How can I protect my family and friends from TB?

You can protect your family and friends by following the home isolation instructions given to you and by taking your TB medications as instructed by your health care provider. 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, 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 contagious TB. 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.

However, since TB is spread through the air, 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](#).

For More Information

To learn more about the laws that can restrict the activities of people with contagious diseases such as TB, visit the B.C. Public Health Act: www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/00_08028_01



BC Centre for Disease Control
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

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