

Home isolation for Tuberculosis (TB)

If you have untreated TB disease that can spread from person to person (TB disease in the lungs or throat), your health care provider may ask you to stay in home isolation. Home isolation means you avoid contact with other people. Home isolation will help stop the spread to others. Young children and people with weak immune systems are at the highest risk of getting sick.

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is a serious disease caused by a germ (bacteria) that spreads through the air when a person with untreated TB disease of the 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.

It is curable. In British Columbia, medicines to prevent or cure TB are free through Provincial TB Services and public health units.

For more information, visit [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. If you are in home isolation it means you are not sick enough to need hospital care, but you are able to spread TB bacteria 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 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.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_08028_01.

What does home isolation mean?

- Remain in your home and avoid contact with others
- Take your 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 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 hairdresser) until after your home isolation has ended

How long will I need to be on home isolation?

The length of time for home isolation is different for each person. Your health care provider will let you know how long you need to stay at home. The duration of treatment and results of your sputum tests will help your health care provider decide when you can stop home isolation. Sputum is mucous or phlegm that you cough up from deep inside your lungs. If you

take your medication, your TB will get better and you will be able to do the same things you did before you became sick.

For more information on sputum collection, visit [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 on home isolation for contagious TB disease. 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 disease. This will help them to protect themselves and other people nearby.

Can TB spread to others by shaking hands or kissing?

TB is not spread by direct physical contact, such as shaking hands or kissing. TB is spread

through the air when a person with contagious TB disease of the lungs coughs, sneezes, sings or talks. A person must be in close contact with someone with untreated TB disease of the lungs for a long period of time and needs to breathe in TB germs for infection to occur.

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, visit [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs](#).

For more information

For more information, including information about BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) TB clinics, visit www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/tuberculosis.



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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