

# Quarantine

## Noun

- A period of time during which a vehicle, person, or material suspected of carrying a contagious disease is detained at a port of entry under enforced isolation to prevent disease from entering a country.
- Enforced isolation or restriction of free movement imposed to prevent the spread of contagious disease.

My inclination is to say the word comes from the Latin *quadráginta* which means "forty." Latin being the foundation of many languages. However, it's a big leap to go from a word that means "forty" to a word meaning "isolation." The leap was arguable formed due solely to the Black Death.

The city of Dubrovnik has archives indicated it was the first place to name something "quartine." Originally, Dubrovnik was considered part of Croatia with a heavy Slavic population, but between 1205-1358 it was a province of Venice, then part of the Hungarian empire. In 1909 the city's name was changed to Ragusa - but documentation from Dubrovnik showed a law that stated ships must wait 30 days before coming to shore to prevent the spread of disease. If the crew was still alive and healthy at the end of the period, it was assumed they could not spread any infectious disease.

Most specifically, the Black Death. From 1348-1359 the Black Death wiped out between 30-60% of the known world's population. It is arguably the worst pandemic that ever hit. It is documented that in 1377 Dubrovnik stretched the period of time ships had to wait to come to shore from 30 days to 40 days and called it *quaranti giorn*. Borrowing from the Latin, of course, but a Venetian dialect, nonetheless.

This definition continues, and by 1663 *quarantine* is commonly thought of as a "period a ship suspected of carrying disease is kept in isolation." This is probably due to the fact that the Black Death was a world-wide event and many, many ports probably adopted the same method for combating the disease (and others) and preventing it from spreading into sea-facing cities.

However, there is another meaning. In 1523, *quarantine* appeared as a term for a specific law. This law was documented in England and in English. Shakespeare even alluded to it in Hamlet. The "quarantine law" or a "widow's quarantine" stated a woman whose husband had died was permitted to stay in her late husband's house for a period of 40 days from the day he died. I imagine this is where most dictionaries pick up the word and say it is French - *quarante* (forty) and the French suffix *-aine* which would roughly translate into English as "forty-ish." However, I could only find actual documentation of the word in English.

It wasn't until 1680 that the word's definition extended to mean "any period of isolation." And I believe the word's attachment to the law has become very arcane with modern marriage.