



GUIDANCE FOR MANAGING FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY COLLECTIONS SAFELY DURING COVID-19

September 3, 2020

This updated guidance is to provide the latest information to FDLP library coordinators and their staff on how to safely maintain services to users and safeguard collections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research continues on how long COVID-19 remains virulent on a variety of library materials. As libraries open to provide needed services to users, each library coordinator should ensure these best practices to avoid spreading the virus or damaging library materials.

COVID-19 and Library Materials

Project REALM (Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums) continues to test types of library materials and simulated library environments to determine how long the COVID-19 virus remains viable and a potential source of contamination.

Test 4 results, published September 3, 2020 replicate the material types tested in Test 1, with the difference that after contamination, the test samples were stacked together to simulate how library materials are typically handled in book returns and on carts. The results of the test show that stacking materials significantly increases the time that the COVID-19 virus is viable from three to more than six days. These test results suggest a quarantine time of at least seven days for stacked materials.

Test 3 results, published August 18, 2020, tested the viability of the COVID-19 virus on plastic surfaces common to libraries. Talking book USB cassettes, DVD cases, storage bags, storage containers, and plexiglass were tested. Results of the test showed that the virus was viable on these surfaces more than five days after exposure. However these non-porous plastic surfaces may be cleaned with disinfectants, unlike paper and film-based collection materials.

Test 2 results published on July 20, 2020 covered library materials not examined during Test 1. These results showed that four days of quarantine are needed for some library materials before the virus was fully undetectable. Testing continues to demonstrate that standard office temperature and relative humidity, conditions typically achievable by any air-conditioned office space, provide an environment that allows for the natural attenuation of SARS-CoV-2, also known as COVID-19, on all of

the tested materials after four days of quarantine, rather than three days, previously recommended based on the results of Test 1.

Test 2 was conducted by applying the virulent SARS-CoV-2 virus on five typical library materials held at standard room temperature and humidity conditions. The materials tested included the following items, which were provided by the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress*; Columbus Metropolitan Library**; and the National Archives and Records Administration***:

- Braille paper pages*
- Glossy paper pages**
- Magazine pages**
- Children's board book**
- Archival folders***

The materials examined in Test 1, published on June 23, 2020, included the following items, which were provided by Columbus Metropolitan Library:

- Hardback book cover (buckram cloth)
- Softback book cover
- Plain paper pages inside a closed book
- Plastic book covering (biaxially oriented polyester film)
- DVD case

The COVID-19 virus may be transferred to materials by infected users. Books collected from return book bins, study tables, and tables by copiers should be considered potentially infected. Staff working with these materials should use personal protective equipment such as disposable nitrile gloves and masks that cover their nose and mouth.

Disinfection vs. Quarantine for Library Materials

While alcohol gels, disinfecting wipes, and spray sanitizers are great for removing the virus from your hands, door handles, desks, telephones and computer keyboards, they should not be used on library materials. The chemicals in them can discolor, bleach, and degrade, book covers, paper, and film emulsions. While ultraviolet radiation (UV) has also been shown to kill coronaviruses, the suggested treatment time is extensive (up to 40 minutes) to destroy the virus on surfaces, and UV surface treatment will not reach the interior pages of a book. UV also degrades cardboard, adhesives, paper, and plastics.

The most cost-effective and sure way of treating infected library materials is to quarantine them for at least four days and let the virus die by itself.

Setting up a Quarantine Area for Books and Microforms

With a little modification, your normal procedure for sorting and returning books to library shelves can be turned into an effective quarantine area for eliminating the virus from books, fiche, and other library materials. Staff collecting or handling returned materials should wear a mask and gloves and follow CDC guidelines for wearing this equipment for their safety. When finished working with the materials, staff should remove the gloves and wash their hands to avoid contaminating other surfaces in the work area.

Quarantined books may be sorted for shelving or simply placed on a book truck. A file card or piece of cardboard can be used as a visible marker with the date, written in advance on it, to let staff know when those books are safe to shelve. A clear plastic drop cloth could be used to cover the book truck while the books are in quarantine. At the end of the quarantine period, the books are safe to shelve, and the drop cloth is also safe to be used again.

Microfilm and fiche can be put into a bag or a box marked with the end date of the quarantine period when the items will be safe to handle again.

Accounting for Materials in Quarantine

If you typically charge materials back into the library after users have checked them out and need to track them during the quarantine process, consider creating a pseudo patron card called “quarantine” with a due date at the end of the designated quarantine period. This will account for quarantined materials in the shelving queue for library users and staff. At the end of the quarantine period, the materials may be safely checked-in as they normally would be.

Sources

1. **REALM Project Round 4 Test Results Available:**
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3. **REALM Project Round 2 Test Results Available:**
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4. **REALM Project Round 1 Test Results Available:**
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5. **Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) Information Hub: A COVID-19 Research Project** <https://www.webjunction.org/explore-topics/COVID-19-research-project.html>
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