



HANDLING MATERIALS DURING COVID-19

This guide is a resource for the current best practices on handling materials in the safest manner during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maryland State Library Resource Center
Enoch Pratt Free Library

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The Maryland State Library Resource Center and Enoch Pratt Free Library is committed to the safety of our staff, customers, and state partners. The following best practices are in accordance with the most current and credible resources available. This guide will be updated as more information becomes available.

SAFETY PRACTICES

Practice frequent handwashing after handling returned materials (e.g. book drop returns, over-the counter returns, internal material deliveries, etc.).

Using gloves while completing tasks like emptying book drops and delivery totes is not necessary if hands are properly washed after handling. Staff who prefer to use gloves must be mindful to use and remove them properly. Be sure to avoid face touching while wearing gloves. Hands should be washed immediately after removing gloves.

Please be sure to wear face coverings while handling materials. Surgical grade masks are not required - a proper face covering must cover the nose and mouth, and ideally homemade coverings are thick enough that sunlight does not easily filter through.

Continue practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet while working with staff and customers alike.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS + GENERAL PRACTICES

The presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been tested on various library materials through the REALM (REopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums) Project. The Project does not provide recommendations for quarantine periods.

After reviewing the results of the REALM Project, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has provided the following guidance:

Library materials should be handled and circulated in ways that reduce risk to both staff and patrons, even when the risk of infection due to handling these materials is felt to be low. Viral particles on surfaces will eventually die, but even if they are present, it is possible to prevent infection after touching the surface by thoroughly washing or sanitizing one's hands. MDH recommends the following actions that libraries can take to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. These recommendations should not substitute for wearing facial coverings and social

distancing of at least 6 feet in the facility.

- After being returned by patrons, library materials should be quarantined in a clean, dry location for at least **48 hours** prior to being returned to general circulation. Conditions that favor faster viral degradation include unstacked materials exposed to natural light.
- Employees should wash or sanitize their hands after handling materials. Generally, if hands are washed or sanitized after handling materials, gloves are not necessary for infection prevention purposes. Care should always be taken to wash or sanitize the hands prior to touching the face (especially eyes, nose and mouth) or eating.
- MDH does not recommend applying disinfectant to circulating materials.
- Newly acquired materials do not need to be quarantined upon delivery before being placed in general circulation. Materials donated by the general public should follow the same standards as returned library materials for quarantine.
- Patrons should be advised to refrain from reshelving materials. Library staff who are reshelving materials should always wash their hands after handling returned materials. Materials in the stacks or shelves generally do not need to be quarantined after being handled by a library patron and returned to the shelf.
- Hand sanitizer should be provided at the entrance and throughout the facility.

QUARANTINE PROCEDURE

1. Establish a quarantine area for returned materials and ensure staff know where it is located.
2. Prepare a sign for the cart for incoming materials, noting the date and time of return.*
3. Retrieve materials from the book drop or delivery tote. Place items on the cart or in their designated space.
4. Move the cart to the identified quarantine area.
5. Promptly wash hands after handling material.
6. After items have been quarantined for a minimum of 48 hours, they may be returned in the ILS.

*Systems or locations may find it easier to note when the quarantine will be complete on a set of items rather than just note when the quarantine period began (or may want to note both).

The procedures above are a guide and can be altered based on individual needs like limited space or available equipment (like book trucks). For instance, if you do not have enough space to quarantine items on carts in a workroom, you can use bags or containers (not totes used for ILL deliveries) to contain the items at the location. Some libraries are using their meeting and study rooms in the interim for holding areas.

QUARANTINING VS. SANITIZING

At this time, quarantining items has been the most recommended action for handling returned library materials. Liquid or powder disinfectants, chemical fogging, UV radiation, and microwave radiation may damage materials.¹

For the plastic-based materials tested in round 3 of the REALM Project, “suitable liquid disinfection methods may promote a more rapid decontamination than the quarantine method,” but it’s also noted that materials like the USB cassette could become damaged from application of disinfectants.² More durable items like plexiglass and plastic-based storage totes and bags did not note the same concern for damage.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Quarantine periods delay item discharge and increase customer wait times for holds. Efforts should be made to communicate to customers early on regarding any service changes or delays.

To offer the best customer experience during this crisis, libraries should also consider extending loan periods, increasing item limits, and waiving fines and fees for library materials. OCLC due dates should be shortened by the length of your quarantine period to account for delays in return.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/ARTICLES

- [Handling Library Materials and Collections During a Pandemic](#) (ALA)
- [REALM Project Research & Resources](#) (OCLC, IMLS, and Battelle)
- [Public Libraries Preparing to Reopen - Examples from the Field](#) (REALM Project)
- [COVID-19 Updates](#) (IMLS)
 - Webinar - [Mitigating COVID-19 When Managing Paper-Based, Circulating, and Other Types of Collections](#) (IMLS)
- [Disinfecting Books and Other Collections](#) (Northeast Document Conservation Center)
- [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) (CDC)
- [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#) (EPA)
- [Use of Cloth Face Coverings](#) (CDC)
- [How to Remove Gloves](#) (CDC)
- [Handwashing](#) (CDC)
- [Why Soap Works](#) (The New York Times)

REFERENCES

1. Disinfecting Books and Other Collections. (2020, September 18). Retrieved from <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/3.-emergency-management/3.5-disinfecting-books>
2. OCLC, IMLS, and Battelle. (2020, August 18). Test 3: Natural attenuation as a decontamination approach for SARS-CoV-2 on five paper-based library and archives materials. Retrieved from <https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/realm/test3-report.pdf>