



# 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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## **SAFETY FIRST**

Please be sure to wear face coverings at all times 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.

Using gloves while completing tasks like emptying book drops and delivery totes may be preferred by staff as these items must be quarantined. Staff must be mindful to use and remove gloves properly. Avoid face touching while wearing gloves. Hands should be washed immediately after removing gloves.

Frequent handwashing while handling materials otherwise (e.g. new item processing, handling in delivery totes, etc.) is preferred. Gloves may also be worn while handling materials for these purposes, but staff must practice proper removal and handwashing.

Continue practicing social distancing while working with others.

At this time, please handle materials using the same caution - items from the book drop and deliveries should be treated the same. A separate procedure for new items from vendors was incorporated in this guide to account for processing workflow. In addition to the safe physical handling of materials, quarantining at the point of reception (e.g. customer returns, new materials, mail, and ILL) is an essential component of safe library operations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **RETURNED MATERIAL - QUARANTINE PROCEDURE**

1. Establish a quarantine area for returned materials and ensure staff know where it is located to avoid contact.
2. Put on gloves. Prepare a slip for the cart for incoming materials, noting the date and time. Add additional signage to the cart as needed so that staff do not accidentally handle the material.
3. Retrieve materials from the book drop or delivery tote. Place items on the cart.
4. Avoid contact with door handles and other contact points after you've touched materials - keep doors propped open where possible while maintaining security for staff. Move the cart to the identified quarantine area.
5. Remove gloves and promptly wash hands.
6. After items have been on the cart for a minimum of 96-120 hours\*, you can return the items in the ILS and handle them as normal.

In lab testing, the presence of the virus has been shown to last for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel and 24 hours on cardboard<sup>1</sup>.

Results of library related materials have been tested through the REALM (REopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums) Project with the presence of the virus varying on the type of material.

Materials tested through the first test included a hardback book cover (buckram cloth), softback book cover, plain paper pages inside a closed book, plastic book covering (biaxially oriented polyester film), and a DVD case. Testing showed that “SARS-CoV-2 virus was not detectable on the materials after three days of quarantine.”<sup>2</sup>

From the second test, the following items were tested: braille paper pages, glossy paper pages from a coffee table book, magazine pages, children's board book, and archival folders.<sup>3</sup> The virus showed no presence after “two days of quarantine for archival folders and four days of quarantine for the book pages.”<sup>3</sup>

From the third test, the following items were tested: talking book (USB cassette), DVD disc, storage bag (flexible plastic), storage container (rigid plastic), and plexiglass.<sup>4</sup> “Results show that after five days of quarantine... the SARS-CoV-2 virus was not detected on the storage bag (flexible plastic) or the DVD. The storage container (rigid plastic), plexiglass, and the USB cassette all showed detectable virus at five days. Day five was the final timepoint tested.”

\*Based on the information above, locations may want to quarantine for a minimum of 96 hours for books and 120 hours for audiovisual materials. This would work especially well for locations that have individual book drops for books and audiovisual materials. Locations with centralized book drops (where all types of material are accepted) may prefer one quarantine period for all materials if resources are limited. Locations may sort out the materials based on type and apply quarantine periods accordingly if staff time and available carts or spaces for sorting are not limited.

## **NEW MATERIAL DELIVERIES - QUARANTINE PROCEDURE**

1. Establish a quarantine area for new incoming materials from vendors and ensure staff know where it is located to avoid contact.
2. Put on gloves. Prepare a slip for the cardboard box of new materials, noting the date and time. Add additional signage as needed so that staff do not accidentally handle the box before the quarantine period is over.

3. Place the box in the designated area.
4. Avoid contact with door handles and other contact points after you've touched the cardboard box - keep doors propped open where possible while maintaining security for staff.
5. Remove gloves and promptly wash hands.
6. After the cardboard box has been quarantined for a minimum of 24 hours for books and 48 hours for audiovisual materials (assuming a standard shipping being a minimum of 3 business days), you can remove the items from the box and process them as normal.

As materials in cardboard boxes have likely not been touched while in transit, the quarantine period has been shortened compared to other incoming materials.

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Systems or locations may find it easier to note when the quarantine will be complete on a set of items rather than 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.<sup>5</sup> Some libraries are using their meeting and study rooms in the interim for holding areas.

## SANITIZING MATERIALS

At this time, quarantining items has been the most recommended action for handling incoming library materials. Disinfectant wipes or liquid disinfectants may damage books.<sup>6</sup>

“There is very little research on the effects of medically effective sterilization and sanitization measures on the condition of library materials, another reason to favor quarantine.” - Jacob Nadal, Director for Preservation, The Library of Congress<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> More durable items like the plexiglass and plastic-based storage totes and bags did not note the same concern for damage.

Surfaces like plastic DVD cases are an appropriate use of EPA-approved disinfectants,<sup>5</sup> but quarantining may still be preferred depending on the volume of materials or to lessen contact with the material.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/ARTICLES

[REALM Project's Round 1 Test Results](#) (OCLC, IMLS, and Battelle)

[REALM Projects Round 2 Test Results](#) (OCLC, IMLS, and Battelle)

[REALM Projects Round 3 Test Results](#) (OCLC, IMLS, and Battelle)

[Handling Library Materials and Collections During a Pandemic](#) (ALA)

[COVID-19 Updates](#) (IMLS)

Webinar - [Mitigating COVID-19 When Managing Paper-Based, Circulating, and Other Types of Collections](#) (IMLS)

[Recommendations for Disinfecting Books](#) (Northeast Document Conservation Center)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) (CDC)

[Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#) (EPA)

[Use of Cloth Face Coverings](#) (CDC)

[Adding A Nylon Stocking Layer Could Boost Protection From Cloth Masks, Study Finds](#) (NPR)

[Why Soap Works](#) (The New York Times)

[How to Remove Gloves](#) (CDC)

[Handwashing](#) (CDC)

[Coronavirus Can Live For A Long Time In Air, On Surfaces](#) (NPR)

[How long does coronavirus live on different surfaces?](#) (The Guardian)

## REFERENCES

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