



Guidance on the Handling of Library Materials during COVID-19

October 23, 2020

This guidance is provided to libraries in Maryland on the handling of library materials in circulation. It is a supplement to other Maryland Department of Health (MDH) guidance related to COVID-19, and specifically provides recommendations on how long to quarantine library materials before reintroducing them into general circulation. While person to person transmission of COVID-19 is the most important source of infection, recent studies¹ have suggested that COVID-19 viral particles can persist on surfaces for several days, depending on the material and environmental conditions. Viral particles in a dark and highly controlled environment may last much longer than particles in ventilated and well-lit environments.²

Library materials should be handled and circulated in ways that reduce the 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 returned 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.

¹ REALM Project, <https://www.oclc.org/realm/home.html>

² Riddell, S., Goldie, S., Hill, A. et al. The effect of temperature on persistence of SARS-CoV-2 on common surfaces. *Virology* 17, 145 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12985-020-01418-7>

- Hand sanitizer should be provided at the entrance and throughout the facility.