



Oregon

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Updated Advice on Handling Library Materials during COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to questions received from local libraries, the State Library of Oregon sought the advice of experts from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) on how to handle and circulate library materials safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those questions arose as libraries independently interpreted the results of the REOpening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) project, which studied the viability of the novel coronavirus on surfaces typically found on circulating library materials. The REALM project's intent is to provide information, not to give specific recommendations on materials handling.

OHA staff reviewed the results of tests 1-4 of the REALM project, together with studies and commentary from other experts analyzing the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Staff reviewing the information included Deputy State Epidemiologist Ali Hamade, PhD, DABT; Public Health Physician Claire Poche, PhD; Public Health Physician Ann Thomas, PhD; and other analysts from the Oregon Health Authority. Below is Dr. Hamade's response to the State Library's inquiry. Italics added.

"We considered the testing results, the commentary in The Lancet, and some of the studies cited therein and came to the conclusion that an overnight quarantine period of materials is likely sufficient and 24 hours is even more precautionary. This would be ideally combined with advice to library workers to wash hands with soap and water regularly especially if they are prone to touching their faces.

For this conclusion, we accounted for almost complete virus loss of viability within 1-6 days in the REALM studies despite the high amounts of viable virus used that are not reflective of most real-life scenarios.

With that in mind, when considering the relatively low amount of virus transferred to a surface, how much virus becomes nonviable within a day, how much the next person picks up, and how often they touch eye/nose/mouth, our conclusion of quarantine between overnight and 24 hours is reasonable."

This advice may differ from libraries' current practices, which are informed by individual interpretations of the REALM results, analysis of other research, and consultation with local public health professionals. OHA's recommendations are intended to assist libraries in making local decisions about handling and circulating materials safely. As such, the State Library recommends that libraries do the following:

- Compare above OHA's advice to current practice. Note how implementing the recommendations may change workflows, if at all.
- Share this information with library staff, decision makers, local health departments, and anyone else involved in establishing the library's pandemic protocols.
- Discuss the recommendations and determine if any changes to current practice are warranted, based on local situations and needs.

As Dr. Hamade noted, libraries can continue helping mitigate the spread of novel coronavirus by adopting policies and procedures to encourage pandemic best practices:

- Wearing masks/face coverings,
- Washing or sanitizing hands frequently,
- Avoiding touching one's eyes/nose/mouth, and
- Maintaining at least 6 feet of physical distance from others.

Libraries seeking further information and support to respond to the pandemic may access the State Library's page on COVID-19 information for Oregon libraries at <https://libguides.osl.state.or.us/coronavirus>. Questions may also be directed to Buzzy Nielsen, Program Manager for Library Support and Development Services, at buzzy.nielsen@state.or.us or 971-375-3486.