REALM TEST RESULTS

How Long SARS-CoV-2 Lives on Common Library Materials

1 DAY

- **Hardback book cover** (buckram cloth), unstacked
- **Softback book cover,** unstacked
- **DVD case,** unstacked

2 DAYS

- **Archival folders,** stacked

3 DAYS

- **Plain paper pages inside a closed book,** unstacked
- **Plastic book covering,** unstacked

4 DAYS

- **Braille paper pages,** stacked
- **Glossy paper pages from a coffee table book,** stacked
- **Children's board book,** stacked
- 4+ DAYS **Magazine pages,** stacked

5 DAYS

- **DVD,** unstacked
- **Storage bag** (flexible plastic), unstacked
- 5+ DAYS **Talking book USB cassette,** unstacked
- 5+ DAYS **Storage container** (rigid plastic), unstacked
- 5+ DAYS **Plexiglass,** unstacked

6 DAYS

- 6+ DAYS **Hardback book cover** (buckram cloth), stacked
- 6+ DAYS **Softback book cover,** stacked
- 6+ DAYS **DVD case,** stacked
- 6+ DAYS **Plastic book covering,** stacked
- 6+ DAYS **Expanded polyethylene foam,** unstacked

8 DAYS

- 8+ DAYS **Leather bookbinding,** unstacked
- 8+ DAYS **Polyvinyl chloride "vinyl"** (upholstery), unstacked

Our collective knowledge of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, continues to evolve as researchers across the world work to understand and combat the virus. In such an uncertain information landscape, establishing best practices isn't easy; it requires library workers to balance community needs with the best available guidelines for limiting the virus's spread.

Since May, the REopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) project—an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)–funded collaboration between OCLC and the research and development organization Battelle—has been studying surface transmission risks of common library and museum materials.

Results from the first five rounds of tests, illustrated above, show that the virus's survival time varies widely. A plus sign denotes items that still had detectable levels of virus particles at the final check. For those items, trace amounts of virus may be detectable after that time point. As REALM researchers have indicated, disinfection and cleaning agents can be used on more durable materials as an alternative to quarantine. Subsequent tests will examine other items and surfaces, such as counters and fixtures.

"Our goal was [to provide] the best scientific information to guide libraries and museums in reopening swiftly," said Crosby Kemper III, director of IMLS, during an October 22 ALA Connect Live webinar called "COVID-19 Research and REALM Project Update" (bit.ly/ALAConnectLiveREALM). "The study is designed to give clear, accurate information, but there are no certain answers yet when it comes to probability of infection on an individual level."

Intended to convey a growing body of evidence, the project's research and literature reviews are coming (metaphorically speaking) "chapter by chapter rather than the whole book at once," according to Sharon Streams, REALM project director for OCLC. Much about the virus is still unknown, including how much of it is needed to make someone sick and how much of it contagious people emit. "You're not going to have all the perfect, thorough answers out there," Streams says. Best practices for mitigation include a layered approach that accounts for local factors.

As outlined in the REALM project's October review of existing research, direct person-to-person spread via droplets expelled by an infected person's breath or speech is the primary pathway of transmission, followed by aerosols (smaller droplets suspended in the air, often from a sneeze) and fomites (surfaces contaminated by virus, the subject of the REALM tests).

The REALM project will continue its research and scientific summaries through 2021, with a total of 10 materials tests planned. For details about the study and for latest test results, visit bit.ly/REALMResearch. ●

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