

4 September 2020

TO: RAILS

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: 7 Day Quarantine Q & A

1. How long does RAILS plan to continue the 7-day quarantine? Is it until there is a vaccine? Is it until all traces of the virus are gone?

We will continue with the 7-day quarantine period as long as we believe it is in the best interests of RAILS staff and the staff at our member libraries to do so, and as long as the only official research available about how long the COVID-19 virus stays on library materials makes this a reasonable course of action to follow.

The recent update from the REALM study provided evidence that the COVID-19 virus lives on materials 6 days in a stacked configuration. Since RAILS Delivery staff handle 23,375 items in stacked configurations each day, this is of particular concern to us. It is also of concern to the other organizations responsible for overseeing delivery in Illinois.

Yesterday, I met with Greg McCormick, Director of the Illinois State Library, as well as representatives of the Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) and CARLI. IHLS currently has a quarantine period of five days. Though Greg made it clear that he could not mandate that IHLS extend this period, he strongly supported the 7-day time period, and IHLS decided to extend their quarantine period to 7 days in light of the current REALM research. CARLI was in full support of this decision. We will continue to meet regularly with our partners in providing delivery service to Illinois libraries and will collaboratively work with them on any decisions to change the 7-day quarantine period.

2. What is RAILS rollback strategy?

Our rollback strategy is to continue to examine the best scientific evidence we have at any given point and to work collaboratively with our delivery partners to make the best decisions we can based on this data. There are still many things we do not know about COVID-19, and this uncertainty seems bound to continue. As long as that is the case, we will continue to act on the best advice or data we have available to us. At this point, that is the REALM study data. And we will continue to put safety above all else.

3. What is RAILS plan to help member libraries promote that their materials are safe to use?

RAILS fully supports individual library decisions about providing access to library services and materials. Each library is different and each must make their own decisions based on their local community of users. The 7-day quarantine occurs after a patron has used the materials and it is designed to be put into play before those materials go into RAILS delivery to be sorted and then made available to other library patrons.

Many libraries have told us that their patrons appreciate the safety concerns that they have put into place thus far: requiring masks, maintaining social distancing, and keeping their buildings clean. When these libraries explain why there is an additional wait for materials due to the 7-day quarantine, most of their patrons understand.

The REALM study is also working on some communication pieces to share with boards and governing authorities to explain decision-making. A sample is [here](#).

I found it very helpful to read this article from the [British Journal of Medicine](#). It lays out the difficulties of managing and making decisions when there is great and continuing uncertainty. It's really worth reading but here is what I found most useful, and what we have been trying to do at RAILS since last March.

Five simple rules for managing uncertainty in a pandemic

Most data will be flawed or incomplete. Be honest and transparent about this.

For some questions, certainty may never be reached. Consider carefully whether to wait for definitive evidence or act on the evidence you have.

Make sense of complex situations by acknowledging the complexity, admitting ignorance, exploring paradoxes, and reflecting collectively.

Different people (and different stakeholder groups) interpret data differently. Deliberation among stakeholders may generate multifaceted solutions.

Pragmatic interventions—carefully observed and compared in real world settings—can generate useful data to complement the findings of controlled trials and other forms of evidence.

I hope that you all have looked at the REALM Project [FAQ](#). To me, the most important questions and answers are the following two:

Are all the virus particles that are detected on the materials in the lab testing merely present, or are they also viable and infectious?

All virus recovered and measured by this test are viable infectious materials. The lab testing uses a cell-based assay method, so virus particles are recovered and quantified by their ability to infect cells.

How much virus is needed to infect someone? Is the amount below the limit of detection safe?

The amount of virus needed to infect someone is not yet known; that amount could fall close to or below the LOQ (limit of quantitation) or well above it. Without that knowledge to draw conclusions from, the REALM Project is providing data that shows the rate of natural attenuation of the virus over time and how long before it becomes undetectable (<LOD). Because the infectious dose in humans remains unknown, it is not yet possible to correlate the amount of virus surviving on a surface as being "safe" or "unsafe." We could look at this in the context of other coronaviruses (SARS or MERS), which have an infectious dose around 100 to 1000 particles; or, COVID-19 could be similar to the flu, which is infectious around 10 particles. We simply don't know yet.

Thanks for everyone's continued support and understanding as we navigate this incredibly difficult time.