

26 August 2020

TO: RAILS

FROM: Deirdre Brennan

SUBJECT: Extension of Quarantine for items in RAILS delivery

RAILS staff have been closely monitoring information from the REALM study (Test 3 results released on August 18 are the most recent), as well as increasing infection rates in Illinois as reported by Governor Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH).

After very careful and detailed analysis of all of this information, we have made the very difficult decision to increase our quarantine requirements for items moving through RAILS Delivery from 3 to 7 days, effective Monday, August 31. Our primary motivating factor is the health and safety of our staff. The following is a brief recap of the REALM research and other factors that led us to this decision.

Battelle, the scientific laboratory actually conducting the REALM research, has now completed three tests and is in the process of a fourth, which is a redo of Test 1 materials in a stacked configuration. The results of Test 4 are expected in mid-September.

Test 1

Test 1 dealt with these materials: hardback book cover, softback book, plain paper pages inside a closed book, plastic book covering, and DVD case. [Review Test 1 results.](#)

Test 2

Test 2 included braille paper pages, glossy paper pages from a coffee table book, magazine pages, children's board book, and archival folders in a stacked configuration. *“Samples from each item were inoculated and placed inside the closed book or magazine. The items were then configured to mimic common storage conditions such as stacked or shelved books, or a pile of folders or magazines.”*

After two days of quarantine, the SARS-CoV-2 virus was not detectable on the archival folders. After four days, it was not detectable on the braille pages, glossy book pages, and board book. The magazine pages showed a trace amount of the virus at four days (the final timepoint tested). *“Compared to the results of Test 1, the results of Test 2 indicate that a longer quarantine time for these types of cellulose-based paper materials may be required to render SARS-CoV-2 undetectable.”* [Review Test 2 results.](#)

Test 3

Test 3 included library materials (including cases for talking books and DVD discs), storage materials (storage bags and tubs like RAILS uses to transport materials for delivery), as well as plexiglass, which could be partitions in display cases and other areas. These materials were not stacked. Results show that *“after five days of quarantine in an unstacked configuration, 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.”*

“Compared to the results of Test 1 and 2, this data suggests that a slightly longer quarantine time for these types of plastic-based materials may be required to render SARS-CoV-2 undetectable through natural attenuation alone. Alternatively, based on the materials’ nonporous nature, suitable liquid disinfection methods may promote a more rapid decontamination than the quarantine method.” [Review Test 3 results.](#)

After studying all of this information, as well as the overall progress of the pandemic in Illinois, RAILS has made the decision to increase our quarantine requirements from 3 to 7 days, beginning August 31. With the overarching goal of ensuring the health and safety of our staff, these two major points are driving our decision:

1. Test 2 showed the virus remaining detectable longer in a stacked configuration. Our delivery, of course, is stacked. This is different than in individual libraries where materials can be given more space.
2. Throughout Illinois, the number of COVID-19 cases is rising. As summer comes to an end and schools and colleges resume (some in person), people begin to retreat inside and historically illnesses increase throughout the general population. We can only assume that COVID-19 infections will also increase, even more than they have in the past few weeks.

We hope we are wrong and will continue to monitor the situation closely and will make changes to our quarantine period as necessary moving forward. Hopefully, future test results will allow a more optimistic outlook, and infection rates and deaths will decline again. But, for now, we see no other reasonable option than to extend our quarantine requirements to 7 days.

We also recognize that not everyone will agree with this decision. However, until there is certainty about what level of virus is safe on materials that RAILS and library staff and library users handle, we believe we have no other choice than to take the most conservative approach possible.

When making decisions about their own collections, libraries may also want to consider a generally longer quarantine of at least four or five days for their materials as they are returned from patron contact. Based on the limit of quantitation in Test 2 and Test 3, this seems like a prudent practice. When concerning items from Test 3 like plexiglass and plastic cases, it is well documented that a very viable way to kill the virus quickly is to use an acceptable cleaner and wipe down items.

Thank you for your continued attention and dedication to your library staff and communities during these times of uncertainty. We will continue to provide you with the best information and recommendations that we can, and we are grateful that the REALM study is ongoing.