

Recommendations for Handling Physical Material in Libraries in Relation to COVID-19

April 21st 2020

Note on recommendations

The following recommendations have been reviewed by Deputy Chief Medical Officer Alan Smith at the Department of Health. It is his recommendation that they are appropriate to support the handling of books and other physical library materials (e.g. CDs, DVDs) during the COVID-19 period.

The recommendations were prepared by Libraries Development, Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) in line with available international best practice regarding the handling of books and other physical library materials during the COVID-19 period. Additional feedback was sought from County Librarians already working with physical materials at this time, consultation with the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCDC), and research into current guidelines being followed by libraries in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia. Where guidance does exist regarding the length of time the COVID-19 virus is active on surfaces (particularly cardboard, paper or plastic), it has been acknowledged and interpreted in a conservative manner to allow for as safe an environment for library staff as possible¹.

County and City librarians are advised to use their discretion in utilising the following recommendations, and if in any doubt at all, exercise the utmost caution when making available physical materials to the public during the COVID-19 period.

Existing Workplace Guidelines

Advice from the Health Service Executive (HSE):

- Appropriate physical distancing must be applied (at least 2 metres distance between people).
- Anyone with a fever or cough should stay at home, regardless of travel or contact history.

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http://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/NEDCC%20recommendations%20for%20disinfecting%20books_Mar2020-converted.pdf;
<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.09.20033217v1.full.pdf>;
<https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries>; <https://www.ims.gov/webinars/mitigating-covid-19-when-managing-paper-based-circulating-and-other-types-collections>

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See further information in the guidelines below regarding conditions where movements should be restricted.

Handling Physical Library Materials

To ensure the safety of staff and library users, all physical materials will be handled by staff applying physical distancing guidelines. After handling materials, hands should be washed for 20 seconds as per HSE guidelines.

Recommended quarantine period for library physical material

The recommended quarantine period for physical lending material (books, DVDs etc.) at risk of contamination from the COVID-19 virus is **72 hours**. For this period, the materials should be placed in boxes, sealed and date marked and where possible, stored in a separate location.

- Library materials within the library which have not been handled since the closure of libraries on March 12th 2020 are ready for lending as the 72-hour quarantine period has now passed.
- Library materials that were returned before the closure of libraries on March 12th 2020, and have not been handled, are ready for lending as the 72-hour quarantine period has now passed since the item's return.
- Material may be at risk of contamination when returned to the library at any point after the closure of libraries on March 12th 2020, or if they have been handled by library staff following this date. When making an assessment of risk, staff should consider:
 - When was the item returned?
 - When was it last handled?

If staff can confirm that an item has been isolated (i.e. quarantined or not handled) for 72 hours or more, then it can be considered for use in any delivery service that may be feasible.

Library Materials Delivery Service

Where feasible, local authorities can introduce, or continue to provide a limited service for the delivery of physical materials to members of the community. A delivery service is intended to provide access to reading material for members of the public most in need during this time, including the elderly, isolated and self-isolated. The members of the community to be offered the service can be identified from a local authority library service's existing housebound service list or by working in conjunction with the HSE and other appropriate partners in the community.

Any service should be delivered in accordance with the following guidelines:

Preparation of physical material for distribution

- Physical material identified for distribution must meet the 72-hour quarantine period whether selected from stock within the library or returned from loan.

- Care should be taken in the handling of physical items for distribution. These should be packaged securely in a dedicated area in the library branch.
- Deliveries for each individual member of the public should be packaged separately and securely to avoid risk of cross-contamination en route.
- Appropriate physical distancing (at least 2 metres distance between people) must be maintained in the preparation for delivery of physical material by any means.

Delivery of Physical Material

- Packages of library material should be delivered only by library staff or other authorised personnel (staff / authorised volunteers from partner organisations).
- Appropriate physical distancing measures and other measures as advised by the HSE (see <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/protect-yourself.html>) to protect against the spread of the virus must be adhered to in the delivery of the items.

Return of physical material

- Any physical items returned since the closure of libraries on March 12th (e.g. by book drop or as part of the delivery service) are subject to a 72-hour quarantine. Items should be placed in a separate area where possible in boxes sealed and date marked on the day they are returned for the 72-hour quarantine period. After moving materials, hands should be washed for 20 seconds as per HSE guidelines.

This procedure applies to any items returned between now and the resumption of normal service.

Libraries Development, LGMA, will provide City and County Librarians with models for different materials delivery services that can be implemented at local level, resources permitting.

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General guidelines from the Department of Health (published 26 March 2020):

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub if your hands are not visibly dirty
- Practice good respiratory hygiene, that is, when coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – discard tissue immediately into a closed bin and clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- Maintain physical distancing, that is, leave at least 2 metres (6 feet) distance between yourself and other people, particularly those who are coughing, sneezing and have a fever
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth – if you touch your eyes, nose or mouth with your contaminated hands, you can transfer the virus from the surface to yourself
- If you have a fever or a cough, you should stay at home regardless of your travel or contact history
- If you've returned from any other country, you should restrict your movement for 14 days
- All household contacts of a suspected case (that is, a person who is awaiting a test or test result) should restrict movements until the test is reported negative or for 14 days
- All non-essential indoor visits to other persons' homes should be avoided

Read more here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/472f64-covid-19-coronavirus-guidance-and-advice/#protect-yourself>