



Janet T. Mills
Governor

**Maine State Library
LMA Building
64 State House Station
Augusta, Maine
04333-0064**

**James Ritter
State Librarian**

COVID Quarantine Guidance and Best Practices for Maine Public Libraries

October 7, 2020

COVID Quarantine Guidance and Best Practices for Maine Public Libraries

The Maine Library community collectively agrees that:

- *Safe handling with washed/disinfected hands and wearing masks is practiced in all libraries and is the primary way to keep library staff and patrons safe*
- *All library collections on the shelves are safe, have been quarantined 72 hours* and therefore any item in a library's collection is safe to circulate and is safe for Interlibrary Loan and Van Delivery. Quarantining library materials for 72 hours is an additional way to disrupt the natural flow of the virus*
- **Combining** these two practices together makes it highly unlikely library staff or patrons would contract COVID-19 from library materials

The proposed quarantine best practice is based upon **where a patron last touched the library book/item.**

Quarantine Summary:

Any item returned to the library by a patron must be quarantined for 72 hours at the library where the item is returned. **Reason: This is the highest and most likely risk point for that item to have COVID-19 and the optimum point to quarantine.**

Once quarantined, the items are lendable to local patrons, available for interlibrary loan, or ready to be returned to a lending library.

How to treat Outgoing Interlibrary Loan items for Van Delivery

- Any item touched by library staff will be safely handled and thus safe to pack and send through interlibrary loan
- Totes are wiped down by both libraries and Freedom Xpress as a cooperative cleaning practice
- Bags are handled by FX staff and library staff who are wearing masks and with washed/disinfected hands and *need no quarantining*

How to treat Incoming materials from Van Delivery

- Contents of totes delivered by FX and processed by library staff can immediately be re-shelved or checked out to a patron. **Reason: All materials have been quarantined for 72 hours and have been safely handled by library staff and FX.**

* The 72- hour time frame for quarantine will be re-evaluated in December 2020. Thereafter, evaluations will be conducted every quarter until there is no longer a need for the quarantining of materials.

Details:

Guidance for Library Collection and Circulation to the Community

1. All items returned from patrons should be quarantined for 72 hours before they are re-shelved. Note: The Maine State Library is using a 72-hour quarantine as an agreed upon standard at this time. This has been our guidance, and additionally, represents a midpoint of national practices of 24 hours to 7 days.
2. If patrons browsing the library's collection have disinfected hands prior to touching books/library materials, or if your library policy is to have patrons place touched items on a "to be quarantined" table if not checked out, you can consider these materials safe for patrons and safe to circulate via Interlibrary Loan. Note: The Maine State Library believes that casual touching of books in the collection presents a low possibility of infection and is comfortable with libraries determining their own policy around quarantine in these circumstances.
3. All library staff need to comply with safety protocols: hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing while working among others in the library and handling library materials. *Result: Books on shelves have been handled safely and likelihood of virus on books is minimal.*

Processing Guidance for **Outgoing and Returning Interlibrary Loan Items**

1. The expectation is that all items on a library's shelves are safe to **circulate via ILL** just as they are safe to check out to your library's patrons. If these items were to be checked out to patron, they would have been quarantined 72 hours before being re-shelved.
2. The expectation is that all ILL books/materials **returned** to a library are safe to **send back via delivery** because they have undergone a 72- hour quarantine when returned to the library. Note: *Current research suggests that the point of return of any item touched by a library's patrons is the **optimum point to quarantine**, because this is where the highest risk occurs.*
3. Items received in delivery can be immediately processed by library staff.
4. Library staff who process ILL materials are safe because they are following safe handling of their collection and ILL items. Note: *Local library leadership may need to reassure staff that when materials are handled with masks, washing hands or disinfecting before and after handling items, and not touching faces, that they are as safe as any of us are during COVID. There currently exists no documentation that anyone has ever contracted COVID-19 from a library book, mail, or food from a store.*
5. Transit bags are being handled by staff following safe handling protocols (hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing).
6. The tops and handles of totes are wiped down/disinfected and bags are placed in totes by library staff following safe handling with masked and clean hands.
7. Totes are picked up by Freedom Xpress (FX) driver. FX sorters are following their procedures for handwashing, disinfecting, gloves and masks.
 - a. Drivers and sorters wear masks and practice handwashing and/or disinfecting. *(Please report to FX via [Feedback Form](#) if your driver is not masked.)*
 - b. The top and handles of totes are wiped down in the sorting facility
 - c. Trucks go to Portland for southern routes. Northern routes go to Brewer depot then to Portland for sorting. Bags are removed from totes and sorted at Portland sorting facility into library bins.

- d. Bags are removed from bins and staged in Portland trucks – or for transport to Brewer to be staged from that location to deliver to libraries.
8. Totes in trucks are delivered to libraries via routes from Portland and Brewer.
9. Library staff follow safe handling protocols (hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing) while removing bags from totes.
10. The Maine State Library asks that you do not use van delivery totes to quarantine. **No incoming items need be quarantined following the practices outlined above. Please make safety a priority in ILL practices.**

Results of this Guidance

The process described above results in the following:

1. Items have received a minimum of 72 hours quarantine plus any time traveling via the delivery system.
 - a. Some items traveling through ILL will have additional time due to variances in delivery days for libraries.
2. Ensures that all items received at each library can **immediately** be checked in, circulated, and/or processed.
3. Staff are kept safe.

A Note Regarding Liability Issues and COVID

The Maine State Library has checked with the Maine Attorney General’s Office who noted that nobody really knows where litigation over liability in the case of contracting COVID will go. The important legal concepts and phrases are highlighted in yellow and MSL comments are in bold.

Any library with specific liability concerns should consult a lawyer.

- The **major impediment to successfully suing anyone is causation** . . . how can you know that your case of COVID was caused by the negligence of another? If one day, I go to the grocery store, the gas station, and take a walk outdoors with friends -- always with a mask on – and yet test positive for COVID – how would I ever show where it came from? **How could it be tied to a library book?**
- **Maine has not enacted any sort of protection from liability around COVID via legislation or Executive Order.** There is [existing law](#) regarding general immunity for municipalities.
- Despite the many issues pertaining to schools, while separate supplies have been referenced, **the issue of common touch items has not been as big of a topic of discussion**. See the [Maine CDC Guidance for schools](#).
- **If MSL establishes a “quarantine” period for books in the ILL system, you are essentially creating a “standard of care” for handling ILL materials.** What that means is that if a participant follows the quarantine period you established, they can argue that they have followed **the applicable “standard of care”** and are, therefore, **not acting negligently** – which would be the **core of the complaint**. *Therefore, a library can say they treated their collection and ILL materials according to established guidance from the Maine State Library.*