## COVID Quarantine Best Practices for Maine Public Libraries

The Maine Library community collectively agrees that:

* *All library collections on the shelves are safe, have been quarantined 72 hours\* or more, and therefore any item in a library’s collection is safe to circulate and is safe for Interlibrary Loan and Van Delivery*
* *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*
* *Quarantining library materials is an additional way to disrupt the natural flow of the virus*
* *Combined these two practices together, it is highly unlikely library staff or patrons would contract COVID-19 from library materials*

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

**Quarantine Summary:**

Any item retuned to the library by a patron must be quarantined for 72 hours at the library who takes in the returned item. Once quarantined, the items are lendable to local patrons, available for interlibrary loan, or ready to be returned to a lending library. **Reason: This is the highest and most likely risk point for that item to have COVID-19 and the optimum point to quarantine.**

**How to treat Outgoing Interlibrary Loan items for Van Delivery**

* Any item touched by library staff will be safely handled and thus safe to prepare for and go through interlibrary loan
* Totes are wiped down
* Bags are handled by FX staff and library staff wearing masks with washed/disinfected hands and need no quarantining

**How to treat Incoming materials from Van Delivery**

* Totes delivered by FX and processed by library ILL staff may be unpacked and immediately 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 with ongoing evaluations every quarter until there is no longer a need for the quarantining of materials

**Details:**

**Library Collection and Circulation to the Community**

1. Books 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 based that is 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 your library policy is to have patrons place touched 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: **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 be in compliance by practicing hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing while working in the library and handling library materials.

***Result:***

*Books on shelves have been handled safely and likelihood of virus on books is minimal.*

**Library collection and processing for Outgoing and Returning Interlibrary Loan Items**

1. The expectation is that all books/materials on a library’s shelves are safe to circulate via ILL just as they are safe to check out to your library’s patrons because if checked out to patron, they have been quarantined 72 hours before being re-shelved. Note: The Maine State Library believes that all practices at the local level and any book a library would circulate to a patron is safe for ILL.
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 received at your library. Note: The Maine State Library believes that upon 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. Books/materials may be removed quarantine for returns and from shelves for interlibrary loan processing by library staff that are following safe handling protocols (hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing).
4. Library staff who process ILL materials are safe because they are following safe handling of their collection and ILL items. Note: The Maine State Library believes that 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 exists **no documentation** that anyone has ever contracted COVID-19 from a library book, mail, or food from a store.
5. Place library materials in transit bags
6. Transit bags are being handled by staff following safe handling protocols (hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing)
7. Totes are wiped down/disinfected and bags are placed in totes by library staff following safe handling with masked and clean hands.
8. **SAFETY is a priority – not speed or number of requests filled. Note: ILL staff are particularly goal driven to fill all requests. MSL asks that library management look at fulfilment goals and realign with COVID in mind.**
9. Totes are picked up by Freedom Xpress (FX) driver. FX sorters are following their procedures for handwashing, disinfecting, gloves and masks.
   1. Driver wears mask. (Please report to FX via [Feedback Form](https://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/interlib/illfeedback.htm) if your driver is not masked.)
   2. Totes go from trucks to either directly to Portland or via a truck from Brewer depot
   3. Bags are removed from totes and sorted at Portland sorting facility into library bins.
   4. Bags are removed from bins and staged in Portland trucks – or for transport to Brewer to be staged from that location.
10. Totes in trucks are delivered to libraries via routes from Portland and Brewer.
11. Drivers deliver material in totes to libraries.
12. Library staff follow safe handling protocols while (hand washing; hand sanitizing; mask wearing) removing bags from totes.
13. The Maine State Library asks that you do not us van delivery totes to quarantine. No incoming items need be quarantined following the practices out lined above.

**Result of this Guidance:**

The process described above results in:

1. A minimum of 72 hours quarantine plus any time traveling via the delivery system.
2. Some items traveling through ILL will have additional time due to variances in delivery days for many libraries.
3. Ensure that items received at each library can immediately be checked in, circulated, processed.
4. Keeps staff safe

**Note on Liability Issues and COVID**

The Maine State Library checked with the Maine Attorney General’s Office who noted “nobody really knows where litigation over liability in the case of contracting COVID will go.”

The important legal notes and phrases are highlighted in yellow and my comments are in bold.

Any library with 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.**
* 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.](https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/School%20Guidance%209.15.20.pdf)
* 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 MSL.**