

How safe are your library items?
By Paulina Poplawska, Library Director

As we continue through these challenging and interesting times, New Ulm Public Library has stayed committed to providing top notch services that are safe for both staff and library patrons. One of the common concerns that we had as we began to loan out library items dealt with the safety of handling them.

Based on recommendations of health experts, the library's procedure is to place all library items in quarantine for 72 hours before they are checked into our system. Findings conducted by the REALM (Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums) Project has found that the virus SARS-CoV-2 that causes COVID-19 is not detectable on five common library materials after three days. These five common library materials include the cover of hardcover books, the cover of softback books, plain paper pages inside a closed book, mylar protective book cover jackets, and plastic DVD cases.

The REALM Project is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the primary source of federal funding for museums and libraries; by OCLC, a nonprofit library technology and research organization; and in partnership with Battelle, a not-for-profit global scientific research and development organization.

This is the reason that our drive up book drop is open on Mondays and Thursdays for items to quarantine before they are checked in. On days that the drive up book drop is not open, you can return items to the bin located inside the library at the southwestern door. Please do not bring items to the service desk for check in. This is why you will notice items still on your library account after you return them. It will take at least 72 hours for items to clear your library account after you bring them back. The library is fine free so no late charges will be assessed.

REALM Project Test 2 Results were made available on July 20. In this sampling, materials were provided by the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress, Columbus Metropolitan Library, and the National Archives and Records Administration.

The Test 2 Results show that the SARS-CoV-2 was not detectable on archival folders, braille pages, glossy book pages, and board books. It did show a trace amount of the virus at four days on magazine pages. Day four was the final time point tested.

These tests show that standard office temperature (68°F to 75°F) and relative humidity conditions (30-50%) provide an environment that allows for the natural lessening of the SARS-CoV-2 present on these materials. Compared to the results of Test 1, the results of Test 2 indicate that a slightly longer quarantine time for some types of cellulose-based paper materials sitting in a stacked configuration may be required to render SARS-CoV-2 undetectable.

Since we opened to library patrons, magazine subscriptions have been available to patrons for check out. This includes the current issue as well. They undergo the same 72 hour quarantine as other library materials. We have newspapers available for reading on top of the current magazine shelving and they are for use at your own discretion.

As we work through our reopening phases, we hope to slowly start increasing library services and hours. Thank you for your patience and flexibility as we ensure the safety of patrons and staff. As always, we look forward to seeing you in the library soon!