

How to Quarantine Books in Your School Library

Disclaimer: This article is for educational purposes only. It does not supersede the rules and recommendations of local authorities and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

School librarians have found various ways to manage their collections during the pandemic. Some schools are still handing out books along with free lunches, others are accepting returns during pickup of students' belongings at the end of the year. And still others are allowing books to stay with readers until they come back to school.

No matter how you're managing your collection, staff and student well-being is paramount, and you may be wondering how to quarantine books and safely start circulating them again when students come back to school.

It can be a challenge to sift through all the resources on safely handling books. To help you along, we gathered a roundup of the research on how to quarantine materials. The steps below are based on recommended guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Library Association (ALA), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT).



Collect Materials for Quarantine

If your school is providing free lunches or is planning a pickup day near the end of the school year for students' belongings, encourage families to return any materials they have checked out from the library at that time. Designate clearly marked bins or booktrucks to gather and house those materials for quarantine.

If you are planning to collect materials when students return, set out specific **booktrucks**, **bins**, or a designated **book return** in an area of the library and clearly mark this spot for the return of books. Explain the procedures clearly and repeatedly to all students, with direction not to remove books from these places. Provide hand sanitizer in this and other key areas of the library.

Quarantine for the Recommended Time

At this time, there are various guidelines for how long to quarantine library materials. ALA's Handling Library Materials and Collections During a Pandemic page has a wealth of information. Their sources for how to disinfect books include the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NDCC), which recommends a 24- to 48-hour quarantine of returned books. The Institute of Museum and Library Services suggests following the Centers for Disease Control's recommendation of a 24-hour quarantine.

The preliminary research cited by ALA indicates that COVID-19 can survive on harder surfaces for up to three days. However, the NCPTT cites an article from the Journal of Hospital Infection that states the virus can live on paper four to five days and on plastics for up to nine days. Depending on the surface and your comfort level, items should be quarantined for the recommended number of days.

As your book returns, booktrucks, or bins fill up, label them with the date and move them to a dedicated quarantine area if you are able. Use the date the materials were placed in quarantine to help track when they can be circulated again.

Limit Transfer of Germs

The NDCC recommends wearing gloves to transport items into quarantine and removing them immediately after so as not to transfer the virus to other surfaces. Staff should also wear masks when working with quarantined materials and wash their hands for at least 20 seconds after handling materials, per CDC guidelines.

Surfaces such as tabletops, chairs, door handles, book drops, booktrucks, bins, and any other surfaces that have been touched should be disinfected thoroughly between transfer of materials.

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Disinfect Before Reshelving

The quarantine time is designed to eliminate the need for disinfecting, as the virus should no longer live on the surface of those materials. However, after quarantining for the allotted number of hours, you may wish to clean items with a sanitizer spray or wipes if the surface is able to withstand it (e.g., **book jacket covers** or **DVD cases**).

Follow these same procedures with books loaned to classroom teachers, and share your protocol with teachers who are lending from their classroom libraries.

Follow the Research

For further information, watch pediatrician and children's librarian Dr. Dipesh Navsaria's presentation "COVID-19: Safety Tips for Reopening Your Library."

As researchers learn more about COVID-19, we'll continue to monitor the studies and keep you informed about the best ways to manage your circulating collections to keep everyone safe.



About The Author

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Liz is the Marketing Content Manager for Demco. Her background includes editorial management and product development of innovative and time-saving tools for schools and libraries, with an emphasis on Common Core, literacy and math. The products she and her team have developed, including classroom games, learning centers and professional development resources, have garnered 46 industry awards for excellence in education. Liz is passionate about promoting literacy through her work and the work of others.

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