INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

December 10, 2020

Greetings,

Thank you for the work you are doing to help protect and guide communities during this continued pandemic. It is so important as America continues to navigate life with COVID-19.

As Director of the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, I wanted to make you aware of research and resources to help assess how to mitigate exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus in collections-based institutions. As your team considers when and how to open public spaces, we hope you find the recent science-based findings of our COVID-19 related research useful in helping to inform your policies and recommendations for museums, libraries, and archives.

Since May, IMLS—the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums—has been working on the REopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) research project alongside our partners OCLC, a global library cooperative, and Battelle, a global research and development organization. Project results help libraries, museums, and archives assess how to handle materials to mitigate exposure to COVID-19 and strategies for reopening their premises to the public.

Our goal for this ongoing research is to provide an up-to-date, fuller understanding to policymakers and the museum, library, and archival communities regarding how long the SARS-CoV-2 virus can remain on common materials and surfaces found in their often high-trafficked public spaces. Many of the findings may be relevant as you develop policies for reopening other public institutions as well.

To date, the REALM research team has conducted and released results from six natural attenuation studies, as well as two comprehensive literature reviews.

The tests found that SARS-CoV-2 was still viable on the materials between 1 day and in some cases longer than eight days. Thus far, the team has tested books with different types of covers, plain paper pages inside a closed book, DVD and CD cases, archival folders, glossy pages, children's board books, braille paper, and magazines, as well as four common fabrics used for upholstery and crowd management, marble, brass, wood, leather, and more.

We have learned that the length of time the virus remains on each of these materials varies, especially in the unique operational considerations of libraries and museums. While the spread of COVID-19 via contaminated objects (also called fomites) is not currently believed to be a primary method of transmission, we know that additional research is needed to better understand this route of transmission.

To explore these findings further, you can access and share all current REALM project research and raw data sets from the laboratory tests at https://www.oclc.org/realm.

If you or a colleague would be interested in learning more, please reach out to me directly at crosby@imls.gov and we can connect you with our REALM project researchers.

While there is still a lot to learn about the coronavirus and its spread, we hope that this research is helpful as you determine the best reopening guidelines for public institutions.

Stay well,

Crosby Kemper
Director, IMLS