

COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) and Paper Product Safety



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised questions about the lifespan of the virus on a variety of surfaces, including paper and paper-based packaging products. Some service providers are capitalizing on consumer uncertainty by suggesting or requiring that their customers go paperless for safety reasons. Such a change is not welcomed by many and can be especially challenging for those who have difficulty using electronic technologies or who simply need paper communications, including older adults, people with disabilities, low-income earners and those with no home internet or computers. As information is developed in this rapidly evolving environment, Keep Me Posted North America has compiled the latest available science and guidance related to COVID-19 and the safe use of paper products.

THE SCIENCE

The latest and most referenced research on COVID-19 is an article published in the **New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)** by Doremalen et al, “**Aerosol and Surface Stability of HCoV-19 (SARS-CoV-2) compared to SARS-CoV-1.**” Published on April 16, this research evaluated the surface stability of the COVID-19 virus on plastic, stainless steel, copper and cardboard across a range of household and hospital situations, and compared it with the SARS-CoV-1, the most closely related human coronavirus. **On cardboard, no viable SARS-CoV-2 was measured after 24 hours.** Viable COVID-19 could be detected in aerosols up to three hours post aerosolization, up to four hours on copper, and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel. Both viruses show relatively long viability on stainless steel and polypropylene (plastic) compared to copper or cardboard. The median half-life estimate for COVID-19 is around 13 hours on steel and around 16 hours on polypropylene (plastic). <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMc2004973>

The Lancet, Chin et al, "Stability of SARS-CoV-2 in different environmental conditions." A study published in the May 2020 issue of The Lancet reported on the stability of SARS-CoV-2 on various surfaces in different environmental conditions. **No infectious virus could be recovered from printing and tissue papers after a 3-hour incubation,** whereas no infectious virus could be detected from treated wood and cloth on day 2. By contrast, SARS-CoV-2 was more stable (survived longer) on smooth surfaces. No infectious virus could be detected from treated smooth surfaces on day 4 (glass) or day 7 (stainless steel and plastic). The authors also note that special techniques were required to recover the virus from objects and, therefore, this recovery of the virus does not necessarily reflect the potential to pick up the virus from casual contact. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666524720300033>

National Council on Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI), “Coronavirus Information Relevant to the Forest Products Industry.” The NCASI website includes summaries of scientific studies on coronavirus residency time on packaging and other paper materials. <https://www.ncasi.org/coronavirus-information-relevant-to-the-forest-products-industry/>

GUIDANCE ON THE SAFETY OF PACKAGING, MAIL AND OTHER PAPER PRODUCTS

James O. Lloyd-Smith, Ph.D., author, “Aerosol and Surface Stability of HCoV-19 (SARS-CoV-2) compared to SARS-CoV-1.”

“In a laboratory experiment, the conditions are pretty carefully controlled and constant. By comparison, in the real world, conditions fluctuate — conditions like temperature, humidity and light. So the survivability may vary, too. For instance, if the virus contaminates a sunny windowsill or countertop, it may not last as long.”
<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/14/811609026/the-new-coronavirus-can-live-on-surfaces-for-2-3-days-heres-how-to-clean-them>

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GUIDANCE CONTINUED ...

Daniel Kuritzkes, infectious disease expert, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston

"Ultraviolet light can be a really powerful disinfectant and we get a lot of UVA light from the sun. Direct sunlight can help rapidly diminish infectivity of viruses on surfaces. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/14/811609026/the-new-coronavirus-can-live-on-surfaces-for-2-3-days-heres-how-to-clean-them>

World Health Organization

"The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled and exposed to different conditions and temperature is also low." <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control

"In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods." https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/faq.html#anchor_1584386949645

U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams:

"There is no evidence right now that coronavirus can spread through mail. No other coronavirus has been spread through mail." <https://www.foxnews.com/media/can-coronavirus-spread-through-your-amazon-packages>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

"Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19." <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

"There is no known risk of coronaviruses entering Canada on parcels or packages. In general, because of poor survivability of coronaviruses on surfaces, there is a low risk of spread from products or packaging shipped over a period of days or weeks. Currently, there is no evidence of COVID-19 being transmitted by imported goods or packages." <https://www.canadapost.ca/cpc/en/our-company/news-and-media/corporate-news/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.page>

Keep Me Posted (KMP) is an advocacy campaign led by independent, non-profit organization Two Sides North America to protect the right of all consumers to choose, free of charge, how they receive important information – on paper or digitally. The KMP coalition includes consumer advocacy groups, charities and businesses that represent North Americans who are disadvantaged by a lack of communications choice or who simply prefer to retain the option for paper-based communications at no charge.

CONTACT

Keep Me Posted North America

330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60611
855-896-7433
info@keepmepostedna.org



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