

# Re-entering a collection that was closed by Covid-19



Containment strategies for the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in short-notice closures at museums, libraries and archives. This is a changing situation and future cycles of closures or social distancing measures may occur. A thorough assessment of collections upon re-entry is essential to identify changes and collection needs following this unprecedented event.

## Possible Staffing Levels:

- **full:** normal operations
- **reduced:** staff may be furloughed, working from home, or on staggered shifts or reduced hours so **prioritization** and **communication** are key
- **skeleton:** one or few staff members have intermittent access to check on collection spaces
- **lockdown:** no access to any staff

## Before re-entry:

- Ensure adequate stocks of personal protective equipment
- Gather any available information from monitors or previous on-site visits
- Plan a thorough **collection assessment**, prioritized by type of object

## What to look for in an object-level assessment?

- visible mold
- insect or rodent holes, dust, or droppings
- accumulated dust or dirt
- distortion of housings or objects due to moisture
- persisting areas of dampness
- stains/transfer/adhesion from moisture
- missing objects
- new or worsened cracks, tears, or stresses

Gather information systematically using a survey tool such as [this sheet](#).

## Keep a Covid-19 Collection Diary



Record in a central location:

- *date, time, and reason for staff entry in collection spaces*
- *any known environmental events*
- *periods of unknown environment conditions*
- *evidence of damage related to closures*
- *object or box level observations*
- *photos*

## Collections with possible virus contamination:

Methods of sanitization such as alcohol, chemical agents, or UV light can harm collection materials. The Covid-19 virus will naturally deactivate over time, which is the safest, easiest, and least expensive method. The recommended time for quarantine varies by material, and definitive studies have not been produced. In all cases, the first part of the quarantine period provides the most benefit, with diminishing returns over time. Published recommendations include:

- 24 hours for paper materials (IMLS/CDC)
- 3 days (NEDCC)
- 6-9 days for mixed collections (CCI)
- 14 days for library collections (National Libraries of Spain)
- min. 24 hours, preferably 14 days (American Libraries Magazine)

## Cleaning after re-entry:

- Address mold growth immediately
- Dust collection objects with a soft brush as needed
- Follow standard collection housekeeping guidelines
- Open housings and exhibit cases as needed
- Do not apply disinfectants to collection materials
- Clean all evidence of pest activity



### Should staff use hand sanitizer?

Research at the Library of Congress suggests that hand sanitizers can cause discoloration when they are applied directly to paper. The effects of trace transfer following normal use are unknown, however, water-based formulations with fewer ingredients appeared to be less harmful than alcohol-based formulas.

**Handwashing is preferable when possible.**

## Planning for the future:

Even after re-entry, collections may experience future cycles of full or partial closure or extended staff absences due to Covid-19. Based on observations of this closure, create a plan for future events:

- prepare a master plan for future safe closure to protect artifacts and human health
- add a section on pandemic disease to the collection disaster plan
- cross-train additional staff in collections critical tasks such as monitoring and disaster salvage
- improve housings and storage to protect objects when unattended
- use boxes, sealed packages, plastic sheeting, Tyvek, and other layers to protect collections
- consider remote monitoring options including water sensors, temperature and RH monitors

## References

### Housekeeping and temporary closures

[Closed by Covid19? A Practical Guide](#). Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material.

[Collection Housekeeping Guide](#). Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts.

[Collection Re-Entry Object Documentation List](#). Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts.

[Closing a Museum for the Winter](#). Canadian Conservation Institute.

[Preparing for Closure of Heritage Sites and Institutions](#). International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property.

### Responding to viruses in collections

[Cultural Resources and Covid-19](#). National Center for Preservation Services and Training, National Parks Service.

[Disinfecting books and other collections](#). Northeast Document Conservation Center.

[How to act with books against the risk of contagion with Covid-19](#). National Library of Spain.

[How to Sanitize Collections in a Pandemic](#). American Libraries Magazine.

[The Impact of Hand Sanitizers on Collection Materials](#). Library of Congress.

[Mitigating COVID-19 When Managing Paper-Based, Circulating, and Other Types of Collections](#). Institute of Museum and Library Science/Centers for Disease Control.