

3/26/2020

## **ARE MY PACKAGES AND LETTERS SAFE? COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Letters and packages are classified as having a low risk of transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19. There are no reported cases where a patient is known to have contracted the disease after handling or opening a letter or package. On the other hand, nobody has proven they cannot carry disease.

Letters and packages that arrive through the US Postal Service (USPS) and other private delivery services are mostly paper or cardboard with either paper or plastic tape. They are handled by the sender, the clerk at the mail or delivery service, and then go through a largely automated handling process until they arrive at their destination. They are then hand-delivered. Thus, most of the trip involves little or no human touch. The contents are packed 3 or more days before delivery in most cases.

Nobody can say the mail or packages are proven 100% Coronavirus-free. There are no studies on that exact topic to date. Any such study would be very difficult to do and impossible to control.

A study published in a letter to the editor in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on 3/17/2020 looked at the viability (was it alive and detectable?) of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (the COVID-19 virus) in an aerosol, on plastic, stainless steel, copper, and cardboard. The details get rather esoteric. The bottom line is that this virus can remain viable in an aerosol for at least 3 hours and on hard surfaces for at least 3 days (though the quantity diminishes significantly). It seems to live longer on stainless steel and plastic surfaces than on cardboard. In fact, they found no viable SARS-CoV-2 virus on cardboard after 24 hours. If this study can be extrapolated to letters and packages, any virus that got on the letter or package along the way will be inactive or dead by about 24 hours on the paper or cardboard surfaces but could live longer on plastics, such as plastic wrapping tape.

One thing you can do to help not inoculated letters you send is to not lick the glue on the tab. Use tap water on a paper towel to seal the envelope and use self-adherent stamps and labels.

Until there are studies that address the topic better, you might consider the following. Leave letters unopened in an open area for 24 hours before opening them. The same with cardboard packages. If the package is sealed with plastic/cellophane tape, spray or wipe the tape with disinfectant before opening it. Consider wearing disposable gloves when opening packages and use them to lift out and dispose of plastic wrapping materials. Paper or cardboard contents can then be lifted out and opened. This recommendation is not based on any studies and is only an opinion.

The USPS statement regarding Coronavirus is here:

<https://about.usps.com/newsroom/statements/usps-statement-on-coronavirus.htm>

The risk of Coronavirus spread by mail or packages is considered to be very low to low. Cleaning of letters or packages is not recommended by USPS or other services at this time.