

9/15/2020

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.

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.

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 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.

We suggest you let mail sit for 24 hours before opening, and then wash your hands after opening packages and envelopes.

The USPS statement regarding Coronavirus is here:

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