

Newspapers not transmitter of Covid19

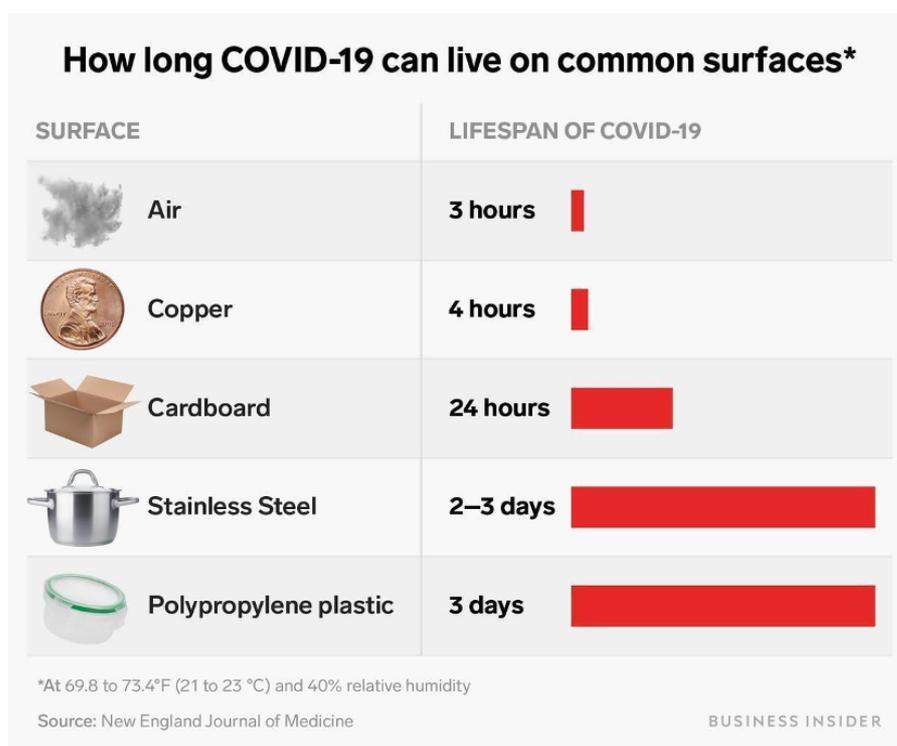
Vincent Peyregne, CEO, WAN-IFRA

Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the entire world, and social distancing and lockdown has become the new normal. Reduced workforce, working from home, makeshift workplace are practised by several businesses, if not shutting down the operation.

Fortunately for the newspaper business, governments all over the world have considered newspaper as an essential service and have enabled journalists to continue reporting and facilitated hindrance-free distribution of the newspaper. The role of newspaper as the primary provider of trusted news is more important than ever now and news publishers are rightly doing this role.

This pandemic situation has also raised debate among people about the **tenacity of the virus** and how it could spread. A study from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control (CDC), UCLA, and Princeton University scientists published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) showed the varying stability of the coronavirus on different surfaces. New England Journal of Medicine has reported that the lifespan of Covid19 could last 3 hours in air, to 3 days in plastic surfaces.

Is it possible to contract Covid19 from contact with contaminated surfaces alone? Is it safe to handle newsprint? As always in science, it is impossible to give a definite answer. Nevertheless, in the present state of our knowledge, it seems very unlikely and we are not aware of any case of contamination proven by transmission that would have been carried by newsprint.



The report implies that the virus will not live longer on surfaces that are not smooth and porous in nature.

In spite of these, there is apprehension about the printed newspaper carrying and transmitting the virus to people who come in contact with the paper. In the study described in the Journal of Hospital Infection up to half a millilitre of 100 million pure virus particles were used to study the stability of the virus, which does not reflect reality at all.

The viral load dispersed on contact under real-world conditions would be infinitely lower than that produced in the laboratory. In the same study we see that below 10,000 particles, the virus resists for less than 5 minutes, whatever the surface. It is therefore necessary to take laboratory tests for what they are and put them into perspective according to the use cases.

World Health Organisation (WHO) said recently "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 temperate is also low. »

The U.S. National Library of Medicine also reported about the possible role of dry surface contamination and said 'The importance of indirect contact transmission (involving contamination of inanimate surfaces) is uncertain compared with other transmission routes, principally direct contact transmission (independent of surface contamination), droplet, and airborne routes'.

Today, modern newspaper production is fully automated from end to end. There is hardly human intervention till the last mile distribution point. The ink and solvent used in newspaper printing act as disinfectant to a large extent and there is no evidence to show that newspapers are carriers of the virus.

Newspapers world over have responded to this challenge and most have provided their delivery vendors with gloves and Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), and the newspapers are presumably safe when it reaches the reader. During a webinar hosted by WAN-IFRA on 'Covid19 and how do we address concerns about newsprint', Dr. Rick Stunt, Group Paper Director at dmg-media in London said "*Virus itself is infective agent made up of nucleic acids – RNA or DNA. The molecule can be destroyed by destroying the protein coating, or by using alcohol. They spread primarily through droplets in human breathing traveling through air*' and concurred that newspaper as source of transmission of virus is very remote." the idea of a virus stuck to paper is not seriously considered because it is an enveloped virus that is extremely susceptible to drying out. transmission can occur but decreases over time as the virus breaks down. Thus, the persistence of the virus on the cardboard would be 24 hours.

In these times of crisis, it is important to carry the right message to the people and to allay any fear regarding virus transmission through newspaper.

With misinformation about covid-19 in circulation, news publishers should continue to devote their attention to combat them. Also, precautionary steps to keep up the well being of our employees, readers and other stakeholders are paramount during these times.

WAN-IFRA has an exclusive website, www.corononewsroom.org, for knowledge on managing news publishing during covid19 crisis. Several webinars with leaders in the news publishing business are scheduled to provide clarity on managing our business.

Sources

[World Health Organization \(WHO\).](#)

[The Journal of Hospital Infection.](#)

[National Institute of Allergy and Infection Diseases \(NIH\).](#)

[John Innes Centre](#)

[Hartford Healthcare](#)