

COVID-19 open access and open research: good progress and what is missing

Posted by Heather Morrison-2020-Mar30

Update April 1: added: NISO's meta-collection of COVID-19 responses by the information community. In future updates will be moved to the bottom of the post in order to focus on resources.

Update March 31: to avoid confusion, I've added a list of the key resources for policy-makers, the general public, researchers and practitioners at the top of this post. The original post is now named "details for open access and scholarly communication specialists" and is intended to help specialists contribute to the fight against COVID-19 and to use COVID-19 as an ad hoc case study to understand why open access to scholarship matters, assess and further progress on OA. I've also added Emerald, an example of best practice in providing free access to a broader range of information such as social sciences and supply chain management.

Key resources

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- Government policy-makers, practitioners, general public, and researchers: World Health Organization *Coronavirus Disease 2019 page*
- For researchers and practitioners: PubMed (free index with links to full-text, other relevant data resources)
- For publishers and researchers: Wellcome Trust Jan. 31, 2020

Sharing research data and findings relevant to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Details for open access and scholarly communication specialists

Major publishers are making research and data directly related to COVID-19 freely available. This is good news, and may reflect progress towards open access over the past two decades, because the arguments for free sharing of information in the context of pandemic are so compelling, as I touched on in [this post](#).

A few examples, current best practices and gaps, will follow, but first, a few notes to explain why we need to move beyond open sharing of **directly related resources** to include **all resources**.

- Scientists working on COVID: while the greatest need is research and data directly on COVID per se, some pieces of the puzzle of solving any scientific problem can come from any branch of scientific inquiry. For example, basic research on how the respiratory system works, viruses and their transmission, may provide clues that will help COVID scientists. Some of this knowledge may be locked up in the print collections of libraries that are closed to limit spread of the virus.
- Practitioners dealing with the more severe cases are often dealing with patients who have other health issues. Clinical research on the other issues and relevant comorbidity studies (e.g. when people with the other illness have other types of pneumonia) might save some lives.
- Educational institutions and governments that want to speed up training of health professionals to cope with the pandemic need the full range of knowledge relating to the health professions, in addition to COVID-specific resources. This includes all of the basic sciences (biology, chemistry, physics), much of the social sciences, as well

as arts and humanities for a well-rounded education (e.g. foster creativity through arts, cultural understanding for clinical care through humanities).

- The pandemic per se raises a great many major secondary challenges, particularly the social challenges of helping entire populations cope with lock-down and the short and medium-term economic challenges. To address these challenges, we need all of our knowledge about communications, information, psychology, culture and history, along with classical and political economics. Part of the immediate solution to help people cope with lockdown is culture and arts. Like the COVID resources, many arts organizations and individual artists are making their works freely available. This is welcome and useful, but raises questions about economic support for artists and the arts so that this can continue; these are economic questions as well as challenges for the arts. We need open access to all of our knowledge to move forward with these secondary challenges. Right now is an excellent time to do this, because some of these secondary challenges are critical to dealing with the pandemic and limiting short and medium-term damage, and because so many researchers everywhere are working from home and would be able to benefit from this access.
- Libraries are an essential service and have been providing online services for many resources. In the short term, one way to contribute even further: It should be possible to have people work at scanning stations to digitize material not yet online while maintaining social distancing. Correction: safety is a priority. Staff should not be asked to take this on if travel to work presents a risk of infection, for example. This might have to wait until the pandemic is over.

Examples of major publisher COVID-19 related initiatives for comparative purposes follow. Note that I use parent company names first as part of an ongoing effort to help people understand the nature of these organizations, whether publicly traded corporations or privately held businesses, often with multiple divisions of which scholarly publishing forms just one part.

NISO: *COVID-19: Response from the Information Community*. NISO is developing and growing a meta-collection of responses that include all of the following, and much more. This site is recommended for those looking for resources. The following analysis is limited to a few select examples of good practices.

RELX (Elsevier +): COVID responses across all company divisions, featured prominently on home page; Novel Coronavirus Center “;with the latest medical and scientific information on COVID-19. The center has been set up since the start of the outbreak and is in English and Mandarin. Elsevier has provided full access to this content for PubMed Central”; COVID-19 clinical toolkit; free institutional access to ClinicalKey student platform until the end of June; rapid publication (preprints and data) of COVID-19 related works; data visualization of the impact of the virus on the aviation industry; LexisNexis free, comprehensive COVID-19 related legal news coverage; turned exhibition space in Austria into a functional hospital.

SpringerNature: “As a leading research publisher, Springer Nature is committed to supporting the global response to emerging outbreaks by enabling fast and direct access to the latest available research, evidence, and data.”

informa (Taylor & Francis +): no mention of COVID on parent company home page; **Taylor & Francis COVID-19 resource center**: microsite that provides “links and references to all relevant COVID-19 research articles, book chapters and information that can be freely accessed on **Taylor & Francis Online** and Taylor & Francis ebooks in support of the global efforts in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and further research into COVID-19”; prioritizing rapid publication of COVID-19 research.

Wiley offers free access to resources until the end of the Spring 2020 term to help with online education; "making all current and future research content and data on the *COVID-19 Resource Site* available to PubMed Central".

Emerald: free access not only to resources directly related to COVID-19, but also other coronaviruses such as SARS, also "explores the wider impact on society and includes research on healthcare, education, homeworking, SCM and tourism."

Discussion

Some best practices beyond making directly relevant resources free from different companies that others could follow:

- Meta-collection of a discipline-specific list of resources: NISO's COVID-19 response from the information community
- Comprehensive, company-wide COVID-19 response: RELX (Elsevier +)
- Help for educational institutions facing the challenge of suddenly moving online: Wiley
- Rapid publication: informa (Taylor & Francis +), RELX (Elsevier +)
- PubMedCentral deposit, facilitating search by researchers and best long-term solution: Wiley, RELX (Elsevier +), Emerald (also available on WHO website)
- Including wider impact on society: Emerald Gaps
- No hospital for countries most in need (another hospital in Austria is welcome, but there are many other countries with greater needs).
- Resources beyond those most directly and obviously related to COVID-19.
- Language: the only language mentioned besides English is RELX / Elsevier, and only Mandarin is mentioned.

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<https://sustainingknowledgecommons.org/2020/03/30/covid-19-open-access-and-open-research-good-progress-and-what-is-missing/>

See also:

Additional publisher resources:

American Association of Publishers (AAP) *What publishers are doing to help during the coronavirus*. (thanks to the [Open Access Tracking Project](#))

Related SKC / IJPE posts:

Morrison, H. (2020). COVID-19, open access and open research: good progress and what is missing. *Sustaining the knowledge commons*.

<https://sustainingknowledgecommons.org/2020/03/30/covid-19-open-access-and-open-research-good-progress-and-what-is-missing/>

Morrison, H. (2007). Needed: open access, open science. *The Imaginary Journal of Poetic Economics*

<https://poeticeconomics.blogspot.com/2007/07/needed-open-access-open-science.html>

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