



Protecting Worker Health

Reopening: Guidance for **Libraries**

Guidance Document

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Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact library services. Libraries play a critical role (both in person and virtually) in communities and in higher education institutions and schools. In many areas, libraries have closed voluntarily or have been closed by state and federal governments; yet, many have continued to provide virtual or remote library services. While some libraries have remained open, others remain closed (but still have books or other library materials being returned) or are planning to reopen. Thus, there is a need for guidance on maintaining safe library facilities, for both library employees and patrons. This document is intended to provide guidance and considerations for a range of libraries including community, higher education or school libraries.

With stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders being lifted and library facilities possibly opening, library employers, employees and patrons are faced with difficult questions pertaining to preparing the premises in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, such as:

- How can we protect the health and safety of library employees and patrons?
- What communication is needed to keep everyone informed of the preventive steps being taken?
- What training is needed for library employees?
- What do we do if an employee or library patron has tested positive for or is suspected to have a case of COVID-19?
- How do we handle crowd management throughout the library, including during peak times?
- How do we deal with cleaning and sanitizing high-contact surfaces such as check-in desks, computer keyboards and door handles regularly during the day?
- How do we effectively and safely clean library materials, such as books or DVDs?

- What are the best practices for drop-off and pick-up of library materials?

The purpose of this guide is to provide clear and actionable guidance towards the safe operation of library facilities through prevention, early detection, and control of COVID-19. Libraries may consider a phased opening approach, whereby, employees are allowed to return to work in the library first (patrons can check out items “curb-side”); and then later, libraries may open to the public on a limited basis.

What should an Employer do to protect themselves, their employees, and library patrons?

Employers should continually monitor international (World Health Organization (WHO)), federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines for updates and changes in recommendations, cleaning and disinfecting strategies, and other best management practices. They should seek guidance from regional, national, and international leaders relative to health policy and best practices. Employers should consider forming a team of knowledgeable staff to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available. In addition, employers should consider the following strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in regards to physical distancing, enhanced cleaning practices, ventilation, restrooms, employee wellness, training, waste and laundering, and risk communication.

Due to the wide variety of library facilities (e.g., functions, sizes, physical layout), it may not be possible to implement all of the following recommendations; however, trying to tackle the problem from multiple angles and with multiple layers can help reduce health risks. For libraries with food service (i.e. restaurant, cafe, coffee shop, and/or dining space), please refer to the [Restaurant guidance document](#) for additional information.



Physical Distancing Strategies

- Regulate the use of common areas with clear signage (including maximum occupancy) and physical distancing measures in accordance with public health rules and guidelines, for those who are not in the same family unit.
- Place marks on floor wherever a line may develop to assure proper physical distancing. Consider providing infographic sheets on your website or posting signage as a visual reminder of the appropriate social distancing protocol.
- Consider limiting the capacity (number of patrons) in the library at one time.
- If physical distancing is not possible for librarians or library staff, etc. then partitions should be considered between staff/desks.
- Consider closing or eliminating shared common areas to avoid crowds.
- Remove all paper brochures, flyers, etc. from common areas such as lobby or front desk.
- If possible, automate certain library services (such as check-out) to limit contact.
- Consider allowing library patrons to pre-order books or other library materials ahead of time and pick up at a secure outdoor location.
- Cancel or postpone library events such as read-alouds, story time, community gatherings/meetings, or tutoring. These events may be conducted virtually.
- If possible, arrange for administrative staff to work from home.
- Encourage staff not to linger or socialize in common areas or break rooms.
- Position library computers or desks and chairs to ensure appropriate physical distancing. Consider staggering computer access times.
- Encourage staff and families not to linger or so-

cialize in library. Consider limiting amount of time patrons can spend in the library, and/or limiting the hours of library operation.

Enhanced Cleaning Practices and Ventilation

- Provide cleaning supplies for employees to utilize before/after they use common spaces and contact surfaces.
- Don't mix different EPA registered chemicals together. The combination could be toxic by inhalation.
 - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) and follow manufacturer specifications for cleaning and surface contact duration.
 - Consider consulting an Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) Science Professional or Industrial Hygiene expert if additional advice is needed. AIHA has a [consultants list](#) of such qualified professionals.
- All cleaning materials should be kept secure and out of reach of children.
- Disinfect all surfaces and commonly touched equipment and educate employees on common high-touch surfaces. These high-touch, non-porous surfaces (e.g., plastic, metal) may include doorknobs, door or faucet handles, railings, light switches, computers, mouses, CDs, etc.)
- Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time. All items should be allowed to dry thoroughly after cleaning.
- Perform normal routine cleaning of outdoor areas, like playgrounds or benches.
 - Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds — it is not an efficient use of supplies and is not proven to reduce risk of COVID-19 to the public.
 - High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings, should be cleaned routinely.



- Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
- Develop strategies to minimize contact with commonly touched surfaces, and wash hands/utilize hand sanitizer before and after touching high-touch surfaces.
- Do not disinfect sidewalks or roads.
 - Spread of COVID-19 from these surfaces is very low and disinfection is not effective.
- There is no need to disinfect floors, carpets, or rugs.
- Establish a disinfection routine so that common areas/surfaces (e.g., lobby, computer stations) can be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
 - Disinfect all hard, non-porous surfaces and commonly touched surfaces and equipment.
 - Seating, doors, restrooms, common areas, etc. should be disinfected at the end of each day.
 - Do not use a wet rag approach (use disposable products instead).
 - Use disposable paper towels or other artifacts to wipe surfaces clean. Hard surfaces can air dry rather than wiping.
 - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time.
- Consider developing a standard operating procedure, a checklist, or audit system to consistently train staff on enhanced cleaning practices or to track when and how cleaning is conducted.
- Have processes in place for minimizing exposure to waste (trash cans, sanitary bins, etc.).
- Library patrons should be encouraged to practice good hygiene (hand washing, covering mouth when sneezing or coughing, etc.) when in the library. Signs can be posted around library as reminders.
- Books and other paper-based materials are not considered a high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection. However, cardboard or plastic-covered books can be disinfected after use.
 - If a library patron sneezes or coughs on a book, or other library material (e.g., book, magazine, or newspaper), or if the individual is suspected to have a case of COVID-19, that library material should be disinfected (if possible) and should go into a dedicated cart/bin to be left alone for 24 to 72 hours.
- Empty outdoor book return boxes often. Returned books should be disinfected (outer surface if possible) and left alone for 24 hours (or 72 hours if it is suspected that the materials were exposed to COVID-19).
- Refer to additional guidance for [disinfecting books](#) and other [library collections](#).
- Clean and disinfect all HVAC intakes and returns daily.
- Ensure there is an adequate flow of fresh air to library rooms and optimize the ventilation system settings. Some ways to do this or seek help:
 - Open doors and windows if possible.
 - Maximize fresh air through your ventilation system.
 - Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
 - If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see [ASHRAE](#) updates for more information.
 - Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
 - If fans such as pedestal fans or hard mounted fans are used, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly at another individual. If fans are disabled or removed, employers should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent [heat hazards](#).



Restrooms

- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles if at all possible.
- Place a trash can by the door if the door cannot be opened without touching the handle.
- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- For single restrooms, provide signage and materials (paper towels and trash cans) for individuals to use without touching the handles, and consider providing a key so disinfection measures can be better controlled.
 - If a key is used, it too should be disinfected after each use.
- Place signs above toilet lids (if present) to indicate that they should be closed before flushing.
- Remind library employees and patrons to wash their hands before and after using the restroom; place signage when appropriate.
- Provide disposable paper towels in restrooms and disconnect or tape-off hand air dryers.
- Common restrooms should be cleaned and disinfected frequently during the day and at closing. Maintain a cleaning schedule.
- Optimize the ventilation system in restrooms, including maximize fresh air and ensure restroom is under negative pressure and proper filtration is being used.

Employee Wellness

- Communicate to staff the importance of being vigilant for symptoms and staying in touch with library management if or when they start to feel sick.
- Establish routine, daily wellness health checks on arrival (such as temperature screening and symptom screening of staff). Conduct screenings safely, respectfully, and with measures in place to ensure confidentiality, as well as in accordance with any

applicable privacy laws or regulations):

- Perform a temperature check to ensure that any employee with a fever is not admitted to the library. Additional screening information/guidance can be found on the [CDC website](#).
- Perform a visual inspection for other signs of illness (e.g., flushed cheeks, rapid or difficulty breathing without recent physical activity, fatigue, extreme fussiness, cough).
- Employees who have a fever of 100.4 F (38C) or above, or other signs of illness should be sent home.
- Options for daily health check screenings are provided in the [CDC's General Business FAQs](#) for screening staff.
- Keep sick staff separate from well staff until they can return home.
- Stagger employee shifts, start times, and break times (as feasible).
- Ask employees to consider the following if they commute to work using public transportation:
 - Use other forms of transportation.
 - Change their commute time to less busy times.
 - Wash their hands as soon as possible after their trip.
- Provide employees adequate time and access to soap, clean water, and single use paper towels for handwashing.
 - Remind employees to [wash their hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, they should use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Any use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers should follow local and State guidelines.
 - Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissues) to support healthy hygiene practices.



- [Post signs and reminders](#) at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. This should include signs for non-English speakers, as needed.
- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Remind employees if someone coughs or sneezes, they should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. Learn more about [coughing and sneezing](#) etiquette.
- Remind employees that people may be able to spread COVID-19 even if they do not show symptoms.
- Request library staff wear cloth face coverings to cover their nose and mouth when around others, and in times when physical distancing is not possible.
 - Staff should be frequently reminded not to touch their face covering and to wash their hands frequently. Information should be provided to all staff on proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings. Additional information on cloth masks can be [found here](#).
 - Cloth face coverings may prevent people who do not know they have the virus from transmitting it to others; these face coverings are not surgical masks, respirators, or personal protective equipment (PPE).

Training

- Employers should notify employees of new workplace policies and changes prior to reopening and upon resuming operations.

- Train employees on new or modified working schedules, how they can stay up to date on new scheduling requirements, and how to make requests for schedule changes if a need arises.
- Employees should receive, at minimum, awareness training on cleaning and disinfection products used in the workplace following OSHA Hazard Communication Standards. For employees who will use disinfectants and cleaners, training should also include proper use, PPE, disposal, and all precautionary measures.
- Health checks and reporting requirements of individuals infected with COVID-19 should be explained to employees prior to reopening and again once operations have resumed.
 - Employees should evaluate their health constantly; if they are sick, have a fever, symptoms, or someone at home is sick, then they should remain home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**

Waste and Laundering

- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- Single-use items and used disinfection materials can be treated as regular waste, following regular safety guidelines.
- Any reusable cloth materials can be washed with detergent and dried on the highest temperature setting for the fabric.
- Ensure all commercial laundry services are aware of the potential for SARS CoV-2 viral exposure before laundering.

Communication

- Communicate to the staff and library patrons about what is being done to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies for staff, physical distancing, and health and safety measures in place).



- Consider communicating the visible symptoms of COVID-19 exposure.
- Platforms for verbal/written communication can include the use of social media, websites, and posting information on indoor/outdoor bulletin boards.
- Communicate the importance of good personal hygiene through clear signage around the library (i.e., hand washing, covering nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, etc.).

Other Control Measures

- Although perhaps not necessary if hand-washing protocols are rigorously followed, consider providing disposable gloves to staff, especially when cleaning and disinfecting the building, removing waste materials, and cleaning the restrooms.
 - If gloves are worn, they must be changed regularly, and they are not a substitution for hand-washing.
 - Remove or replace any gloves that are torn or damaged. Users should check their gloves frequently for damage to avoid exposure.
- Consider offering temperature and health screenings before patrons enter library.
- Plan for staff absences by developing flexible attendance and sick-leave policies, plan for alternative coverage, and monitor and track COVID-19 related staff absences.
- Stay informed about local COVID-19 information and updates in your geographic area from local or state health departments.

What should a library **Employee do to protect themselves and patrons visiting the library?**

- Evaluate your health constantly. If you are sick, stay home. If you have a temperature, stay home. If someone at home is sick or you came into contact

with someone who became sick, stay home. If you have allergies or other medical illness, stay home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**

- Wear a face covering when in public and during the workday and maintain physical distancing with library patrons.
- Wash your hands when you arrive at work, throughout the day after various activities (e.g., after touching high-touch surfaces, after touching a computer someone else may have used, after handling garbage, after using the bathroom, etc.), after touching your face covering, when you leave work, and when you arrive home.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about the PPE that may be provided to you and ensure that you are properly instructed on how to use it.

What can **Library Patrons do to minimize the transmission of COVID-19?**

- Evaluate your own and your family's health constantly. If either of you are sick, stay home. If either of you have an elevated temperature, stay home. If someone at home is sick or you came into contact with someone who became sick, stay home. If you have allergies or other medical illnesses, stay home.
- Library patrons should inform the library if they or a family member has been diagnosed with or in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 after visiting the library.
- Wear a face covering when out in public and maintain physical distancing (maintain 6-feet of separation from others).
- Wash your hands throughout the day, and after touching your face or face covering.



- Carry a towel; if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth, and mask to prevent the spread of droplets or aerosol transmission. If the symptoms persist, leave immediately. Wash your hands and face thoroughly and replace your mask before going back to work or reentering the library.

Resources

- American Library Association (ALA) [Pandemic Preparedness](#).
- ALA [COVID-19 Response](#).
- CDC [General Business Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- CDC [Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs](#).
- CDC [Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities](#).
- CDC [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).
- CDC [Schools and Child Care Programs: Checklist for Teachers and Parents](#).
- CDC [Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-emergency Transport Vehicles](#): Interim Recommendations for U.S. Non-emergency Transport Vehicles that May Have Transported Passengers with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).
- Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) [Mitigating COVID-19 When Managing Paper Based, Circulating, and Other Types of Collections](#).
- Public Library Association: [Free Webinar Series](#).
- AIHA's Indoor Environmental Quality Committee developed these guidance documents about reopening and cleaning buildings after closures due to COVID-19: [Recovering from COVID-19 Building Closures](#) and [Workplace Cleaning for COVID-19](#).

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Occupational health and safety (OHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice

the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

Get additional resources at AIHA's [Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center](#).

Find a qualified industrial hygiene and OHS professionals near you in our [Consultants Listing](#).



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