

# Public Library Pandemic Response

## Alberta's Relaunch Strategy and Frequently Asked Questions

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The Government of Alberta has announced the province's relaunch strategy, *Opening Soon*. [View the full strategy document.](#)

As part of that strategy, the Government of Alberta is beginning to carefully and gradually lift restrictions imposed as part of the COVID-19 response.

Public libraries are included as part of Stage Two of the relaunch. Stage Two began on June 12th, 2020.

### Board Governance and Decision-making

Your public library board can choose whether or not to re-open to the public when Provincial restrictions are lifted and what services to offer at that time.

Sections 7 and 12.5 of the Libraries Act state that municipal and intermunicipal library boards in Alberta have "full management and control of the municipal library" and also have responsibility to "organize, promote and maintain comprehensive and efficient library services" in the community. The Libraries Act also determines that municipal and intermunicipal library boards are corporations, meaning that boards have the authority and the responsibility to independently manage their own procedures and services.

Thus, library boards are able to make decisions about how to deliver public library service in the community, subject to public health orders, and a Provincial relaunch.

As of June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, library re-opening can take several forms. Boards may choose to:

- Continue delivering service virtually (e-content & online programming)
- Open the library to staff, but with no patron access (i.e. if you choose to offer curbside service)
- Open the library, with limited patron access (adhering to physical distancing). See our

"Checklist for Resuming Public Library Service: A Worksheet for Alberta Public Libraries" attached to this email for more details on best practices

Each of these options will require significant work on the part of the board to plan and implement.

Therefore, it is critical that boards continue to meet. It is recommended that boards meet virtually to reduce risk of person-to-person virus transmission.

Library boards need to make good choices within the context of the regulatory framework within which they operate. This framework includes the Libraries Act and the Libraries Regulation. It also includes public health orders and other provincial directives related to the current pandemic. [View the full list of orders and relevant legislation.](#)

Pertinent orders include the following:

- Minimum mandatory 10 day isolation for anyone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or who exhibit symptoms
- Minimum mandatory 14 day isolation for people who are a close contact of a confirmed case
- [Order 25-2020](#) now allows Albertans to attend public libraries as part of Stage Two of Alberta's relaunch strategy, with the following requirements:
  - implement practices to minimize risk of transmission
  - provide procedures for rapid response if a person develops symptoms
  - ensure people maintain high levels of sanitation and personal hygiene
  - comply, as much as possible, with guidance found on [Biz Connect](#)

As employers, library boards are also accountable for being compliant with the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Act, Regulation and Code, as well as Employment Standards.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### When can public library boards choose to open libraries?

Boards can opt to open their library doors during or after Stage Two of Alberta's Relaunch Strategy. Stage Two began on June 12th, 2020.

It is vital for boards to work with their partners and community stakeholders (e.g. fellow tenants in a shared facility, community liaisons, municipality) to determine the best timeline for re-opening.

### What are the best practices for sanitizing books being returned and going back out?

While research on this topic is ongoing, current best practices suggest that time is the most effective and practical means of eliminating SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) from the surface of library materials. Therefore, it is recommended that all returned library items undergo a quarantine period before being put back into circulation.

While preliminary research suggested that a 72-hour quarantine period would be sufficient in eliminating the virus from the surface of library materials, the latest data from the [REALM Project](#) suggests that a longer period may be necessary for certain types of materials. Glossy book pages and board books, for example, required 96-hours before testing virus-free and magazine pages showed trace amounts of the virus even after this period. Research is ongoing with additional test results expected in early August.

In light of this new information, **libraries may wish to increase their item quarantine period to 96-hours to further reduce the risk of transmission.** Regardless of the quarantine period, library staff and patrons should still take personal precautions (e.g. regular hand washing) when handling materials.

Quarantined materials should be kept in a designated area away from other collections, public areas of the library, staff workspaces, and other high traffic areas. Staff handling materials to be quarantined should employ sound hygiene practices; at a minimum, washing hands thoroughly before and

after handling materials. Use of PPE is recommended whenever possible.

Use of [Health Canada approved disinfectants](#) is effective in killing SARS-CoV-2. However, libraries may wish to consider potential damage to materials before implementing any sanitization procedures. While use of disinfectants on plastic surfaces (e.g. DVD cases, Mylar book jackets) is likely not an issue, paper-based materials may be susceptible to damage. Always refer to manufacturer-provided information and instructions before using a disinfectant on any surface.

Finally, use of UV light to disinfect materials is not currently considered effective or practical. Research suggests that exposure of at least 40 minutes is required to kill the virus. Furthermore, UV rays can be damaging to library materials and are only effective on exposed surfaces.

### How many people can be in the library at one time once we have re-opened to the public in Stage Two?

The number of patrons who can safely be in the library will depend on your space.

We recommend libraries plan for an adjusted capacity for Stage Two **using a guideline of one person per 10 square metres** to calculate a maximum capacity.

You can also find examples of how to support distancing and reduce the risk of transmission included in the Government of Alberta's [Workplace Guidance for Business Owners](#) and [Guidance for Museums and Art Galleries](#) documents.

### Can we offer in-person programs in Stage Two?

Boards can choose to begin in-person programs in Stage Two of Alberta's Relaunch Strategy.

Subject to public health orders, library boards are responsible for public library service in their communities. The decision to offer in-person programming should be made by the board in consultation with the library manager.

In-person programs must comply with Alberta public health orders around physical distancing.

Some ways library boards can reduce the risk at in-person programs include:

- Screening attendees for COVID-19 symptoms as they arrive. This can be done via a self-assessment. Those who display COVID-19 symptoms should be told to return home and not participate.
- Do not allow library users or staff in high-risk categories to participate in program activities (e.g. individuals over 60 years old, individuals with chronic health conditions)
- Stagger the time of arrivals and departures from programs
- Increase access to handwashing stations or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Increase the frequency of cleaning of surfaces that are touched often
- Promote personal protective practices (coughing and sneezing etiquette, hand hygiene)

Boards offering in-person programs should avoid program activities that are at a high risk of spreading COVID-19. These high-risk activities include but are not limited to:

- Singing
- Cheering or other forms of loud speech
- Handshaking or high-fives
- Preparing and sharing food or drink. This includes buffet-style meals where participants bring food from home to share

## How can we offer Summer Reading Programs?

Boards may choose to offer summer reading programs. This could include in-person programs that adhere to Alberta public health orders around physical distancing, online programs, or a combination.

Libraries are encouraged take advantage of the free, online resources available from the [Alberta Virtual Summer Reading Club](#) (ABSRC). A collaboration between Alberta's seven regional library systems, with support from The Alberta Library and Public Library Services Branch, ABSRC offers program and activity guides, promotional materials, and other

resources to support and supplement summer reading programs in libraries across the province.

Additional resources are available from the [TAL Library Toolshed](#) and the [TD Summer Reading Club](#).

## When will the Province resume interlibrary loan delivery?

Interlibrary loan delivery resumed on July 20, with the launch of our new delivery model. The staff side of *Relais* is also available at this time, giving libraries the opportunity to clear up ILL backlog. The patron side of *Relais* will relaunch on September 1.

We also need to consider that while public libraries are included in Phase Two of the Province's reopening, some libraries in the province are housed in schools and may not be able to open until Phase Three. This may impact interlibrary loan services.

## My public library is in a co-located facility (a school, community centre, recreation centre, multiplex, etc.). Who decides when we can reopen?

Many libraries who share space will face issues re-opening as public libraries, schools, museums & galleries, and recreation centres are included in different Stages of the relaunch.

While the library board has full management and control of public library service, those boards with libraries in co-located facilities should consult and/or coordinate with their facility partners prior to opening. This is to ensure that all parties are aware and in agreement, especially in instances where the library is permitted to open sooner than the other partner(s).

The library board will also need to ensure that the facility is safe and accessible, with all appropriate infrastructure in place, such as access to washrooms, lighting, maintenance/janitorial services, and security systems. The formal agreement that the library board has with the partner(s) may cover some of these aspects, so it is recommended to consult what you have in writing, as well.

## We are going to start providing curbside delivery. What do we need to consider?

As a workplace, a library that offers curbside delivery/pick-up of materials is responsible for keeping both patrons and workers safe.

The library must put measures in place to reduce the risk of transmission from handling books and other items. A sanitization plan should be in place for materials being returned (*refer to the above question-and-answer on book sanitization*) to protect both staff who are handling materials and patrons who will be borrowing these materials.

Vehicle and road safety should also be considered when providing curbside delivery/pick-up.

## When can we resume in-person board meetings?

Many in-person board meetings will meet the current requirement of limiting gatherings to 15 people or fewer. Therefore, face-to-face board meetings technically may take place now, as long as physical distancing requirements can also be met.

We recommend that you continue to have virtual board meetings to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

## Should we change our public library policies to address the COVID-19 pandemic?

Library boards create policies to ensure operational consistency for themselves and their staff. Library operations have changed substantially due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Library boards should review their policies and make changes to reflect operations during the pandemic. This will ensure new processes are implemented consistently and will help keep staff and patrons safe. Boards can choose to make permanent changes to their policies or temporary changes for the duration of the pandemic. Boards should revisit policies as public health orders change and new information becomes available.

Policies required by the Libraries Regulation that boards may wish to review include:

- Finance policies (Who has the authority to make changes to the budget? Does the manager have authority to make changes within a certain dollar amount? Or must all changes go to the board?)
- Conditions of employment under personnel policies, especially medical leave policies (Ensure that staff who must self-isolate have clear direction to do so. Address any questions about payment during leave)
- Receipt of gifts and donations under collection development policies (Ensure that staff members can safely receive donations. This could mean temporarily refusing donations).
- Hours of opening policies

Other policies boards may wish to review or create:

- Virtual board meeting policy (to ensure consistency in how meetings are conducted)
- Patron behavior in the library (to ensure physical distancing is maintained by library users)
- Sanitation policies (Ensure high-touch surfaces are cleaned regularly)
- Policies under which the public may be admitted to the building (ensure the library can ask those who are displaying COVID-19 symptoms to leave the building. This may require the board to make changes to its bylaws.)
- Boards may also wish to use/develop a business continuity policy that addresses pandemics if they do not have one already

[View sample required policies for library boards.](#)

## Will government provide PPE to libraries?

As of mid-July, public libraries are part of the distribution of “Masks for Albertans.” Government is ensuring that close to a million masks will be available through public libraries across the Province (at no cost to libraries). Please contact Public Library Services Branch or your regional library system with specific questions.

Libraries will be able to use some of the masks from the “Masks for Albertans” program for their own staff. In addition, libraries should look at environmental and engineering solutions to protect staff and patrons before acquiring additional PPE.

This may include the following (please see our **“Checklist for Resuming Public Library Service:**

**A Worksheet for Alberta Public Libraries”**  
**attached to this email** for more suggestions):

- Adjusting how you deliver services, i.e. curbside pick-up
- Adding plexiglass barriers
- Removing extra chairs and tables to ensure physical distancing
- Putting distancing signage and stickers in place
- Enhancing cleaning procedures.

Libraries should have a supply of extra cleaning supplies.

If you have a 3D printer, you may also want to print PPE. *Library Journal* has published an [article with instructions](#).

### If a library staff member tests positive for COVID-19, do we have to close our physical space to the public?

No, it is not mandated that libraries close should a staff member receive a positive COVID-19 test result; however, that staff member **must** isolate for a minimum of 10 days. The library board has the authority to decide whether any further action, including a temporary closure of the library, should be taken in this situation. Best practice would suggest that, at a minimum, the library undertake a deep clean of the space after becoming aware of a positive test result.

Boards may also wish to consult the Government of Alberta’s [Workplace Guidance for Business Owners](#). This document contains information about measures to take when workers are diagnosed with COVID-19.

### My library board has decided not to re-open the physical space to the public during Stage Two. How else can we serve our patrons?

Public Library Services Branch has been collecting data from public libraries and regional library systems regarding services offered to patrons during library closures. The results of this survey demonstrate that there are many services libraries are still offering, as well as many virtual resources that are already funded/can be accessed for free.

You may want to consider replicating some of these creative ideas from the Alberta library community.

Survey responses relevant to patron services have been collated into a Google spreadsheet along with a number of additional resources that are available digitally to patrons at this time.

[Check out the spreadsheet](#) to see the variety of services libraries are offering during the closure of physical spaces. Libraries are free to share this resource.

If you would like to add your library to the spreadsheet, [please fill out this form](#).

## Resources

[Opening Soon: Alberta’s Relaunch Strategy](#)

[Government of Alberta: Workplace Guidance for Business Owners](#)

[Government of Canada, Public Health Agency – Coronavirus Guide](#)

[World Health Organization, Advice for Public / Getting Workplace Ready](#)

[Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic:](#)

[Alberta Health Services, Donning and Doffing Gloves](#)

[Centre for Disease Control, Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

[Morneau Shepell, Mental Health Toolkit includes resources for communicating with staff, managing teams during COVID-19 etc.](#)

[Imagine Canada, COVID-19 Non-Profit Resources](#)

[Galaxy Digital: COVID-19 Recovery: Preparing Your Organization and Volunteer Program](#)

[Best Practices for Ohio’s Public Libraries under COVID-19](#)

[West Virginia Library Commission Guidance Statement: Reopening the Library](#)

[New Jersey State Library: COVID-19 Pandemic Resources and Plans for Library Reopening](#)