

# Recommendations for Library Services During The Covid-19 Pandemic

Regents Public Library Advisory Council (RPLAC)

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Stacy Brown, Leslie Clark, Stephen Houser (Chair), Cynthia Kilby, Anna Lyle, Lisa MacKinney, Mary Lin Maner, Beth McIntyre, Gary McNeely, Holly Phillips, Kathy Pillatzki, Richard Sanders

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## **I. Introduction and Purpose:**

In order to assist with the difficult decisions that Georgia's public libraries will have to make about appropriate levels of service and staffing during Covid-19, the Regents Public Library Advisory Council (RPLAC) has created a Pandemic Service Level Chart to guide libraries in deciding how to implement phased expansion of services. Additionally, RPLAC has included recommendations on creating a Pandemic Task Force, recommendations for safely handling library materials, and a Pandemic Service and Staffing Plan Template, which systems may use to create their own plans.

Because public libraries are open to all and serve the most vulnerable populations in a non-medical setting, pandemic planning guidance for public libraries may differ from other organizations or businesses. Public library systems should exercise their discretion in using any of the following recommendations. The recommendations in this document should in no way be interpreted as legal advice, nor should it supersede any orders or directives by local, state, or federal agencies.

## II. Service Levels During Pandemic Phases

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that communities take a phased approach in dealing with COVID-19<sup>1</sup>, with the phases corresponding to current [Levels of Community Transmission](#). Additionally, the CDC and the White House have provided [Gating Criteria](#) in their joint guidelines for reopening services.<sup>2</sup> This phased approach will be used for recommendations within this document for both library services and staffing in library buildings.

At their most basic level, the CDC gating recommendations correspond with a **decrease in the number of active cases in a community**. For example, a decrease in the number of active cases in a community over a **14 day period** would trigger an expansion of services from level 1 to 2, an **additional 14 days** would trigger the move from level 2 to 3, etc. Though other factors are recommended for consideration (like hospital visits, amount of testing, etc.), case numbers are, at present, the most readily criteria available to public library systems. For determining **increases in community**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community-mitigation-strategy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/#criteria>

**transmission level**, refer to your local public health departments for guidance. **Each increase in community transmission level will necessitate a decrease in library service level**, i.e. a change from Minimal Transmission to Moderate would mean a closure of library buildings to the public.

<b>Service Level</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CDC Gating Criteria Period</b>	0 days	14 days	28 days	42 days	
<b>CDC Community Transmission Level</b>	Substantial	Moderate	Minimal	None	
<b>Public Services</b>	Complete Building Closure, All services virtual	Complete Building Closure, All services virtual	Partial Building Closure, curbside or drive through services only	Buildings Open, Social Distancing Practices Enforced, No Large (>10) Gatherings or Events	Full Services
<b>Staffing Practices</b>	No more than one staff member in buildings, all other staff remote working	Minimal staff in buildings, remainder remote working	Minimal staff in buildings, remainder remote working	Most staff return to buildings, teleworking encouraged when possible	Regular staffing

### III. Local Pandemic Task Force

It is recommended that all library systems create a local pandemic task force comprised of team leaders in order to effectively create internal processes and procedures in response to the pandemic. Depending on the size of the library system, the team may vary in number. A sample team might include: Board Chair, Library Director, Assistant Director(s), Facilities Manager, HR, IT Supervisor, and Patron Services Supervisor. We recognize that for smaller systems the task force may only be comprised of two or three.

Library systems should create and amend their service and staffing plans based on the advice of their task force and approval of their governing board. A service and staffing plan template is included here as a resource; given the variety of situations, funding agencies and other factors, library systems are encouraged to modify it to meet local needs and/or directives.

The Pandemic Task Force should be responsible for determining when to transition from one service level phase to another. Library Boards may choose to empower the Pandemic Task Force with these service level determinations.

#### **IV. Safe Handling of Materials**

Quarantine of library materials is the most effective known method of disinfection.<sup>3</sup>

The COVID-19 virus can persist for varying lengths of time on different material types. [Recent research](#)<sup>4</sup> published in the *Journal of Hospital Infection* indicates<sup>5</sup> the following durations<sup>6</sup>:

Surface	Length of Time
Metals	5 days
Wood	4 days
Paper	4-5 days
Glass	4-5 days
Plastics	6-9 days
Ceramics	5 days

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<sup>3</sup> While the *Journal of Hospital Infection* article also tests the effects of various disinfectants on the novel coronavirus, these chemicals are not safe to use on library and historic materials. While expensive "book sterilization" or "book disinfection" equipment is now being marketed to libraries, archives, and museums, there is no evidence or studies to suggest that these technologies are effective *or won't cause unnecessary damage* to collections. Even methods for UV sterilization have not been standardized.

<sup>4</sup> Kampf, G., Todt, D., Pfaender, S., Steinmann, E., "Persistence of coronaviruses on inanimate surfaces and their inactivation with biocidal agents." *The Journal of Hospital Infection*. February 6, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhin.2020.01.022>

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on April 16, 2020 suggests shorter duration of virus viability on surfaces, but has not gone through a review process: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc2004973?articleTools=true>.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the durations noted in the table above are under ideal laboratory conditions, and that, "Data on the transmissibility of coronaviruses from contaminated surfaces to hands were not found." In a March 30, 2020 [IMLS webinar](#), CDC epidemiologist Dr. David Berendes states, "...we are not concerned at all about paper based materials like books being a transmission route ... The virus, if it's present, would be present in very low quantities and would die off pretty quickly."

Suggested quarantine periods for paper-based materials range from 24<sup>7</sup>-120<sup>8</sup> hours. Quarantine periods for non-paper-based library materials, such as CDs, DVDs, plastic-covered books, etc., also range from 72<sup>9</sup>-216 hours. It will be up to the individual library to decide the duration of quarantine for each material type.

It's recommended that libraries set up an area of the building as a materials isolation zone for those items that may have recently been exposed to the COVID-19 virus:

- This area could be a cleared range of shelving, a series of multiple book carts, or even piles of books on a table.
- Materials should be labeled with dates of when those items entered quarantine and when they are safe to reshelve.
- Color-coding or grouping by material type may be useful here.
- Courier totes and bins should also be quarantined.
- Consider amassing or purchasing additional book carts.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Striegel, M., "COVID-19 Basics: Disinfecting Cultural Resources." National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, National Parks Service. March 25, 2020. <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/covid-19-basics-disinfecting-cultural-resources/>

<sup>9</sup> Northeast Document Conservation Center, "Disinfecting Books and Other Collections." March 26, 2020. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/3.-emergency-management/3.5-disinfecting-books>

## V. Pandemic Service and Staffing Plan Template

*Note: RPLAC provides this template as a starting point for local systems to create their own recommendations.*

### **[Example Library System] Pandemic Service and Staffing Plan**

The headings below describe [Example Library System]'s service and staffing levels during phases of the pandemic matching the Service Level Chart in Section II of this document. The General Safety Precautions will be adhered to during all phases of this pandemic, until a vaccine or other cure is in place that would not place our staff, patrons, or most vulnerable community members at risk.

#### **General Safety Precautions, Adapted from the Office of the Governor<sup>10</sup>:**

1. Screening and evaluating workers who exhibit signs of illness, such as a fever over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, cough, or shortness of breath.
2. Requiring workers who exhibit signs of illness to not report to work or to seek medical attention.
3. Enhancing sanitation of the workplace as appropriate. Providing disinfectant and sanitation products for workers to clean their workspace, equipment, and tools. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Governor Kemp's Shelter in Place Order from April 2, 2020:  
<https://gov.georgia.gov/document/2020-executive-order/04022001/download>

<sup>11</sup> EPA List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

4. Placing notices that encourage hand hygiene at the entrance to the workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen. Requiring hand washing or sanitation by workers at appropriate places within the business location and training staff on the proper implementation of safety procedures.
5. Providing personal protective equipment as available and appropriate to the function and location of the worker within the business location.
6. Permitting workers to take breaks and meals outside, in their office or personal workspace, or in such other areas where proper social distancing is attainable.
7. Implementing teleworking for all possible workers.
8. Implementing staggered shifts for all possible workers.
9. Holding all meetings and conferences virtually, wherever possible.
10. Delivering intangible services remotely wherever possible.
11. Discouraging workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment.
12. Prohibiting handshaking and other unnecessary person-to person contact in the workplace.
13. Suspending the use of Personal Identification Number ("PIN") pads, PIN entry devices, electronic signature capture, and any other credit card receipt signature requirements to the extent such suspension is permitted by agreements with credit card companies and credit agencies.
14. Encourage social distancing of patrons while present on a library's leased or owned property.
15. Increasing physical space between workers' worksites to at least six (6) feet.

**[Example Library System]  
Pandemic Service and Staffing Plan**

**Library Service Levels 1 and 2: Services during Complete Building Closure**

<b>Service Level</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CDC Gating Criteria Period</b>	0 days	14 days
<b>CDC Community Transmission Level</b>	Substantial	Moderate
<b>Public Services</b>	Complete Building Closure, All services virtual	Complete Building Closure, All services virtual
<b>Staffing Practices</b>	No more than one staff member in buildings, all other staff remote working	Minimal staff in buildings, remainder remote working

**Public Services:**

1. Internet Access: Provide, wherever feasible, free and open public wi-fi. This may take the form of Wireless Access Points, mobile hotspots, or other implementations that provide public internet access, especially for school-age children. Social distancing of patrons utilizing wi-fi should be encouraged via signage or splash page.
2. Digital Materials: Purchase, promote and make available as many digital materials as possible, including e-books, e-audiobooks, databases, and digital magazines.
3. Cardholders: Expanding the number of cardholders, either via temporary digital cards, student digital cards, or other means, is greatly encouraged. Additionally, a temporary fines and fees embargo will be put in place. Due dates for materials shall also be extended until library buildings are reopened.

4. Programming: Transition programming to a virtual environment (Facebook Live, Instagram TV, Zoom, etc.) for vital connection and learning opportunities with patrons. These programs can include virtual storytimes, book club hangouts, virtual escape rooms, stay-at-home classes, etc.
5. Physical Materials: Physical materials will be quarantined a sufficient amount of time (see Safe Handling of Materials).
6. Marketing and Outreach: Promote their services through advertising channels and partnering with other community organizations during this time.
7. Physical Locations: Library buildings should be closed to the public during this phase.

**Staffing:**

1. During substantial community transmission levels, only one staff member will be allowed in a building at a time, in order to provide minimal basic operations.
2. During moderate community transmissions levels, a minimal amount of staff should be present in a library building at any one time.
3. When handling returned library materials, staff should wear gloves and avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth. Materials that have been quarantined for an adequate amount of time may be handled without gloves. Avoid cross-contamination of returned materials and quarantined materials. Consult the [OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#) for additional safety procedures<sup>12</sup>.
4. If multiple library staff are working, temperature checks before beginning work, maintenance of a 6 ft. distance, and the wearing of face masks are recommended (see General Safety Precautions). Any safety masks that a library provides should be accompanied by training on the correct way to wear and use them<sup>13</sup>. This training should also be well-documented. OSHA has stated that employers make good faith efforts to comply with its standards<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> OSHA provides a guide on the use of PPEs here: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/eyeandface/ppe/impact.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.osha.gov/memos/2020-04-16/discretion-enforcement-when-considering-employers-good-faith-efforts-during>

5. The American Library Association<sup>15</sup> maintains that the most effective way to kill the COVID-19 virus is to simply quarantine materials. Returned library materials should be quarantined for an adequate amount of time (see Safe Handling of Materials).
6. Teleworking or Working-From-Home (WFH) is highly recommended for library staff. Remote working hours should be tracked to be in compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ala.org/alcts/preservationweek/resources/pandemic>

**[Example Library System]  
Pandemic Service and Staffing Plan**

**Library Service Level 3: Services During Partial Building Closure**

<b>Service Level</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CDC Gating Criteria Period</b>	28 days
<b>CDC Community Transmission Level</b>	Minimal
<b>Public Services</b>	Partial Building Closure, curbside or drive through services only
<b>Staffing Practices</b>	Minimal staff in buildings, remainder remote working

**Public Services:**

1. Services 1-5 as described in Library Service Levels 1 & 2.
2. Curbside or drive through services, including holds pickups for materials.
3. Staff may also receive and deliver faxes and other documents through curbside or drive through service.

**Staffing Practices:**

1. Encourage staff to telework (when feasible), particularly individuals at increased risk of severe illness.
2. Implement social distancing measures, including increasing physical space between workers at the worksite, staggering work schedules, decreasing social contacts in the workplace (e.g., limit in-person meetings, meeting for lunch in a break room, etc.), and limiting large work-related gatherings (e.g., staff meetings, after-work functions).
3. Limit non-essential work travel.

**[Example Library System]  
Pandemic Service and Staffing Plan**

**Library Service Level 4: Services During Open Buildings**

<b>Service Level</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CDC Gating Criteria Period</b>	42 days
<b>CDC Community Transmission Level</b>	None
<b>Public Services</b>	Buildings Open, Social Distancing Practices Enforced, No Large (>10) Gatherings or Events
<b>Staffing Practices</b>	Most staff return to buildings, teleworking encouraged when possible

**Public Services:**

1. Limited access to library buildings is acceptable if accompanied by the implementation of social distancing measures, including offering video/audio of events, canceling all gatherings of more than 10 individuals, limiting the number of patrons in the building at once, using tape to separate patrons during checkout, and/or plexiglass barriers for high-use areas. Other precautions may also be utilized.
2. Provide many in-person services by appointment, including notary, faxing, and scanning services.
3. Computer use will be restricted in order to facilitate proper sanitation of computer devices.

**Staffing Practices:**

1. Remote work should be encouraged when feasible.
2. Limits on the number of staff in place and monitoring of staff for signs of illness should continue.