

# Public Library Pandemic Response

## Follow-up to June 1 Town Hall Meeting

This is a supplemental document to address questions that were not asked or answered due to time constraints.

### Questions Organized by Theme\*

#### Quarantine and handling of library materials

**Dr. Hinshaw: recommendations for quarantining materials? Member libraries are very concerned about how to handle materials when they are returned.**

**Could you please comment on protocols related to used book sales given many libraries have been culling their collection while closed for COVID.**

It is possible for the virus that causes COVID-19 to persist on surfaces, including the surfaces of library materials. While research is ongoing, with library-specific studies being conducted, currently available information suggests that the virus may live on surfaces for up to 72-hours depending on the type of material. Therefore, it is recommended that libraries quarantine returned materials for 72-hours before re-shelving or re-circulating. Please refer to the accompanying documents (*Public Library Pandemic Response: Alberta's Relaunch Strategy and Frequently Asked Questions* and *Checklist for Resuming Public Library Service*) for more information about disinfecting library materials and quarantine procedures.

It is important to note that the quarantine of library materials reduces the risk of transmission but does not eliminate the risk entirely. Library staff and patrons should be encouraged to practice proper hand hygiene (e.g. regular and thorough washing, avoid touching the face) when handling library materials.

Signage placed in strategic areas throughout the library (near shelves, displays, checkout, book sale tables, etc.) may be effective in reminding

individuals of their personal responsibility to take care when handling any materials.

#### Public libraries in shared-use facilities

**We have been put into a stage 3 opening (such as rec centre) We are looking for guidance on opening during stage 3. Will there be delays?**

**Our library is in a community centre will our library be able to open if the community centres are not allowed to?**

**Minister Madu, will school based libraries be allowed to open or will that be dependent on school opening?**

**We are a very small library in rural Alberta we share common space with a school. Will we have to take any extra precautions because we do not have full control of our space?**

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. Recreation Centres were included in Stage Two so this should alleviate some concerns for these co-located libraries.

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.

If the public library is unable to open, patrons can take advantage of the Alberta-wide borrowing program, ME Libraries, which allows public library cardholders to borrow materials at participating public libraries in the province. Full details are available at <https://melibraries.ca>.

PLSB is offering webinars specifically for school-housed public libraries during the last week of June and first weeks of July. Libraries in this situation have been contacted directly and invited to attend.

Please also refer to the accompanying documents (*Public Library Pandemic Response: Alberta's Relaunch Strategy and Frequently Asked Questions* and *Checklist for Resuming Public Library Service*).

### Physical distancing measures in the library

***With 1 person per 10 sq. meters our library could facilitate about 250 people. Does this create a mass gathering?***

***If based on modeling AHS is doing around COVID is there an estimate when the 2m physical distancing guideline will be removed (with full understanding the situation is fluid). Any ideas at all***

***Speculating on the safety of relying on bookshelves as separation of people as the shelves of the bookshelves are open?***

As we stated in our document *Public Library Pandemic Response: Alberta's Relaunch Strategy and Frequently Asked Questions*, 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 at relaunch. Note that this is only a guideline, and library boards and staff should also consider how the presence of fixtures and furnishings such as desks, bookshelves, tables, couches and other items will affect the ability of library users and staff to maintain safe physical distance in their library, and reduce the maximum capacity if they feel it is needed. Libraries should also remember that non-public space such as utility rooms, janitorial closets, and meeting rooms not normally open to the public may reduce the amount of space that can be included in this calculation.

When calculating physical distance between library users in their library boards and managers must apply established provincial guidelines to their specific library space, and know that it is impossible to reduce the risk of transmission to zero in any public space. If their library has bookshelves with empty space that would allow the transmission of air from one side of the shelf to the other, boards may not wish to consider such shelving a barrier to transmission when establishing physical distancing practices in their facility.

Because personal physical distancing requirements remain in place in all stages of Alberta's relaunch plan, library boards and staff should expect that these requirements will remain in place for an extended period of time.

### Staffing considerations

***Will libraries be expected to use plexiglass screens at their reference desk?***

***Will libraries be provided with specific requirements before we are able to reopen? If a staff member shows symptoms at work would all staff be forced to self-isolate/shut down for 2 weeks? Can we force employees to be tested if they have been ill?***

Staff who exhibit symptoms at any time are required to self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days. There is no requirement for other staff to self-isolate if they are not exhibiting symptoms.

Industry-specific guidance, including a checklist for best practices, has been distributed to library board chairs and library managers for their reference and use. Please refer to these documents (re-sent as an attachment to this email) for guidance on re-opening requirements.

## General library access

***Are libraries able to utilize volunteers to screen patrons at the door? Will screening of patrons be allowed? Is it suitable to set an age limit for people coming into library? Just having parents come in at this point.***

***Will there be a differential guideline for toddlers and young children accessing the library?***

***Will there be any recommendation to operate with specific hours for specific groups of the population IE: specific hours for seniors' hours for children?***

***Conflict between needing to track incoming contacts along with the privacy concerns under the legislation of the library.***

Section 7 and 12.5 of the *Libraries Act* states that municipal and intermunicipal library boards in Alberta have “full management and control of the municipal library”. 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. Boards may decide whether they feel prepared to open during Stage Two, and delay reopening if not. Boards decide if they wish to limit open hours, have special hours for specific populations with special requirements, or restrict the use of washrooms by the public. Boards must also determine whether they have enough staff available to manage the library while maintaining physical distancing.

For public safety and liability reasons, please do not engage volunteers for physical activities in the library until after Stage Three of the provincial relaunch strategy has commenced. Volunteers can of course interact and offer their time to virtual library services if appropriate.

In making these decisions, the board must take care not to disregard section 36 of the Act. For example, we do not recommend tracking patrons, as this likely would require patrons having a card to access the library. Many libraries in the province charge a fee for a card. By requiring patrons to have a card to access the library, the library may contravene Section 36 of the Act regarding free access to the library space.

## Serving vulnerable populations

***Will there be guidelines on how to work and support homeless and socially vulnerable in our community? We are often the last public space for these individuals.***

***How people use library spaces - marginalized people who use libraries in other ways than other businesses. Time limits etc. for when we have restrictions on numbers of patrons in library***

Providing service to vulnerable populations is an important aspect of a public library's work. Your board may want to consider having specific hours set aside for people who identify as being at higher risk of COVID-19 complications, such as seniors and other socially vulnerable groups. If you choose to do this, it is suggested that time be set aside first thing in the morning (or when first opening) to allow for proper sanitization before and after visits. This is similar to what many retail spaces have done.

You may also want to consider providing access to public use computers by appointment. Since computer use and digital literacy assistance is something that has been identified by librarians as a service that is particularly valuable, offering public computer service by appointment can help 1) ensure physical distancing can be met, 2) allow for optional mask wearing by library staff when physical distancing cannot be met (ie. while helping patrons on computers), 3) clearly communicate a time limit to ensure equitable usage and 4) allow for computer stations to be sanitized between appointments to keep patrons safe.

## Interlibrary Loan

***What does interlibrary loan service look like? What sort of mitigation are we looking at for books travelling between libraries?***

Interlibrary loan (ILL) delivery will resume once all 12 delivery nodes have staff on site that are capable of facilitating ILL. Delivery nodes include all 7 regional library systems plus Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and Wood Buffalo. Once this is the case, ILL will recommence in phases.

Government courier will resume delivery and pickup to the delivery nodes when all 12 delivery nodes have reopened. The staff side of *Relais* will be immediately available for the month following, giving libraries the

opportunity to clear up ILL backlog. The patron side of *Relais* will relaunch subsequently.

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

This may impact interlibrary loan services

As with all other library materials, we recommend quarantining ILL materials in your space for 72 hours. This may require some negotiation with lending libraries to allow for the time required to quarantine, as well as potentially shortening loan periods to account for the quarantine period upon return.

Please also refer to the accompanying documents (*Public Library Pandemic Response: Alberta's Relaunch Strategy and Frequently Asked Questions* and *Checklist for Resuming Public Library Service*).

## Budgets and Grants

***We know libraries are public places. They serve much more than utilizing materials. Washrooms pose a challenge. How can we manage with our restricted budgets that we already have? Extra cleaning poses issues***

We know that public libraries have been providing service even while your physical spaces are closed and that re-opening will pose different costs than usual operations. This is why Minister approved providing 50% of the budgeted 2020-2021 public library operating grant to boards this spring while waiving the usual application (*the second installment will be available in the fall and the deadline has been extended from June 1 to October 1*).

As well, public libraries are part of the distribution of "Masks for Albertans" as of mid-July, and library staff will be able to use some of these masks.

Government is ensuring that millions of 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.

***Question surrounding grants: the library has received 50%. If we are not able to open to the 50% will there be any impact on the grant money coming into the library?***

The library does not need to be physically open to receive the remaining portion of the library operating grant. However, the funding is intended to support library operations and services, which should include things like offering virtual or curbside service, if the physical library is closed to the public coming inside. The deadline to apply for the remaining portion of the 2020-2021 public library service operating grant has been extended to October 1, 2020.

## Miscellaneous

***Do we get any sort of reply from the government after submitting a relaunch document?***

Library boards are not required to submit any documentation to the Province regarding relaunch. However, any plans that have been received to date were sent an acknowledgement via email by the Director of Public Library Services Branch.

***A lot of libraries have insurance through AUMA. AUMA released memo about updating insurance coverage. Not much will be covered. Do we have any legal protection if somebody thinks they caught COVID-19 at a library?***

Please consult your legal counsel for issues around the library board's legal liability.

## Post-secondary library related questions

***Dr. Hinshaw - Can we have slight differences in directives for public libraries vs academic libraries?***

***Should we be quarantine items that are being returned to us via Canada Post? We have distance learning and items that are being returned to us from harder hit areas such as Quebec and Ontario.***

***Concerning post-secondary libraries is there a specific strategy for reopening vs. public libraries. Also, would implementing curbside pick-up be alright for now?***

***We are exploring purchase of technology for sterilizing books and other materials. I want to ask about that as best practice. Will it be covered in the guidelines?***

***Is there any advice on whether a post-secondary library should operate with closed stacks? This would be having people request items and delivering them rather than having them go through the stacks?***

Academic/post-secondary libraries should consult with their home institutions and/or Advanced Education for guidance on re-opening strategies and best practices. Post-secondary institutions are responsible for academic library service and may have institution-specific directives and support.

That being said, if the documents prepared by Public Library Services Branch for public libraries are useful to post-secondary libraries, please feel free to use them as a starting point.

*\*Please note: Questions are reprinted exactly as submitted by participants in the June 1 Town Hall meeting. If you asked a question transcribed here and it was not answered to your satisfaction, please contact Public Library Services Branch directly*