

**VDH Interim Recommendations for the Safe Operation of Libraries
during the COVID-19 Pandemic
February 25, 2021**

At this time in the COVID-19 pandemic, public libraries in Virginia may be open with limited capacity for patrons, offering sidewalk service only, or closed, based on decisions of library directors and local governments. VDH offers this brief overview of recommendations for safe operations for libraries that are providing any services to the public at this time.

COVID-19 is spread primarily through the inhalation of droplets released when an infected person talks, coughs, sneezes, etc. The risk of spreading COVID-19 through library materials is very low, and restricting access to these materials is not a priority method of controlling the disease. Therefore, the recommendations in this document consist primarily of general COVID-19 prevention measures that apply to any public setting. As an extra level of precaution, the results of some research projects and recommendations of national library associations/organizations are reflected in these recommendations. VDH expects these interim recommendations to change over time.

Staff Safety Considerations – Library directors are encouraged to ensure the following:

- Staff are aware of and comply with VDH [COVID-19 prevention recommendations](#).
- Staff are encouraged to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them.
- Hand hygiene supplies are available to library staff, including soap, water, paper towels, and hand sanitizer. Glove use is optional and is not a substitute for frequent hand washing.
- Employees monitor themselves for fever and any other signs or symptoms of COVID-19 daily and stay home if they are sick. Supervisors screen arriving staff and confirm the absence of compatible illness.
- Employees wear cloth masks whenever they are in a library and maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others, including coworkers, to the extent possible.

Patron Safety Considerations – Library directors and staff are encouraged to ensure the following:

- Library capacity is limited to the number of people that can be accommodated in the building while maintaining 6-foot distancing.
- All patrons five years old or older who are capable of wearing a mask [wear a cloth face covering](#) at all times while in the library. Those who are aged five years or older and cannot wear a mask may be offered curb-side service.
- Hand hygiene is accessible, with soap, water, and paper towels in restrooms and hand sanitizer available at entrances to the buildings.
- Signs are posted to remind anyone with any symptoms of respiratory illness to refrain from entering the building and reinforce the importance of physical distancing and hand hygiene.
- Frequently touched surfaces are cleaned and disinfected regularly and shared equipment is wiped down with a disinfecting wipe between users.
- Procedures are in place in the library that minimize contact and maximize distance between individuals.

Handling Materials – Library directors and staff are encouraged to consider these procedures:

- Materials that have been touched by a patron on site or returned to the library after being checked out are returned to one or more specific receptacles. Materials that would not be damaged by cleaning (such as DVD cases and plastic-covered books) may be wiped with a disposable disinfecting cloth before placing them back into circulation. Alternatively, those materials, as well as any that cannot be exposed to moisture, could be kept in the receptacle for 24 hours before handling.
- Staff who handle these materials wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their eyes, noses, and mouths.

Building Considerations

- Meeting rooms can safely be used as long as the number of people present does not exceed the limit for group gatherings established by the Governor’s Executive Order (As of this writing, the limit is set at 10 according to [Executive Order 72](#)). Persons meeting together should remain at least 6 feet apart and wear masks while in the room, and meeting room surfaces should be wiped with a disposable disinfecting cloth between groups.
- Ventilation is maximized to the extent possible in the building. Heating and cooling systems are set to maximize air flow, filtration, and the percent of outside air in circulation. Circulation of outdoor air can be increased by opening windows and doors when possible and using fans. Windows and doors should not be opened if doing so poses a safety or health risk for occupants, including children.

References

AIHA Reopening Guidance for Libraries

https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Reopening-Guidance-for-Libraries_GuidanceDocument.pdf

Northeast Document Conservation Center, Disinfecting Books and Other Collections

<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/3.-emergency-management/3.5-disinfecting-books>

Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) Frequently Asked Questions

<https://www.oclc.org/realm/faq.html#disinfection>

CDC COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>