

**VDH Interim Recommendations for the Safe Operation of Libraries
during the COVID-19 Pandemic**
Updated May 21, 2021

Introduction

COVID-19 is spread primarily through the inhalation of particles released when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes or when these particles land on a person's eyes, nose or mouth through coughing or sneezing. The risk of spreading COVID-19 through touching contaminated surfaces, such as library materials, is very low, and restricting or delaying 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 many public settings, including libraries.

Staff Safety Considerations

Library directors are encouraged to ensure the following:

- Staff members are aware of and comply with VDH [COVID-19 prevention recommendations](#).
- Staff members are encouraged to get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Hand hygiene supplies are available to library staff, including soap, water, paper towels, and hand sanitizer, and they are encouraged to wash hands frequently. Glove use is optional; those who choose to wear gloves should continue to practice frequent hand washing.
- Staff members monitor themselves and their household members for fever and any other signs or symptoms of COVID-19 daily and stay home if they or anyone else in the household are sick.
- Library directors may establish masking policies for staff. At a minimum, policies should ensure that staff members who are not fully vaccinated wear cloth masks while in a library building and allow fully vaccinated staff members to elect to wear cloth masks. A universal masking requirement may be considered.
- Staff members are encouraged to continue to maintain physical distance from others.

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 according to the current Governor's Executive Order. As of this writing, the limit for indoor gatherings is 100 people; please monitor the [Governor's Executive Action webpage](#) to remain abreast of any changes.
- All patrons who are aged five years old or older, capable of wearing a mask, and not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 should [wear a cloth face covering](#) at all times while in the library according to the current Governor's Executive Order 72. Those who are fully vaccinated may choose to do so. Library directors may consider continuing a universal masking requirement.
- 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 masking, physical distancing, and practicing hand hygiene in reducing the risk of disease spread.
- Frequently touched surfaces and shared equipment are cleaned at least once per day. Consider using disinfectant (in addition to cleaning) if there is high transmission in the community, a low number of people wearing masks, infrequent hand hygiene, or the space is used by people at increased risk of severe COVID-19. In those situations, disinfecting wipes could be used at least once per day. Wipes may be made available to patrons to wipe down surfaces more often.
- Library staff continue operating in ways that minimize contact and maximize distance between individuals.

Handling Materials

Library directors and staff are encouraged to consider these procedures:

- Libraries should continue to utilize no-contact return procedures where possible.
- 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.
- Staff members should wash hands immediately after processing returned materials.

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 most recent Governor's Executive Order. People meeting together may be encouraged to maintain physical distance and wear masks while in the room. Masking and distancing in a meeting room are particularly important if some participants are unvaccinated or have underlying health conditions that affect their immune systems. Meeting room surfaces should be cleaned at least once daily.
- Ventilation should be maximized to the extent possible in the building, with heating and cooling systems 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

CDC Science Brief: SARS-CoV-2 and Surface (Fomite) Transmission for Indoor Community Environments (Updated April 5, 2021)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-and-research/surface-transmission.html>

CDC COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings

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

CDC Cleaning Your Facility

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Revision History (since original version on February 25, 2021)

- Under Staff Safety Considerations, updated the wording that staff who are not fully vaccinated should continue to wear a mask and maintain physical distancing and that staff who are fully vaccinated staff may choose to continue to wear a mask and maintain physical distancing.
- Under Patron Safety Considerations, updated the limit of in-person gathering to 100 people based on the current Executive Order 72 and added the recommendation to check with the [Governor's Executive Action webpage](#) to remain abreast of any future changes. Also updated the wording to say that patrons aged 5 years or older who are not fully vaccinated should wear a mask based on the current Executive Order 72.
- Under Handling Materials, removed previous consideration to place library materials touched by patrons into designated receptacles for at least 24 hours or more (i.e. quarantine materials). Also updated the wording about cleaning and disinfection to say that cleaning frequently touched surfaces at least once per day is recommended; routine disinfection (e.g., daily) could also be considered in certain situations.