

# RAILS Guidelines for Libraries Considering Curbside Service and/or Phased Reopening May 2020

## Introduction

At RAILS, our job is to support libraries as they consider how to provide service in this unprecedented time. For each library, service to the community they serve is paramount and individual library leadership is in the best position to determine what best works for their community.

Many libraries are starting to plan for the time when they can resume providing service from their library buildings. Most libraries are considering two options for resuming in-building service: providing phase one services, including curbside delivery service and/or reopening the library on a limited basis. This document provides questions libraries should consider before implementing either or both of these service options.

Determining a safe and effective way to handle library materials is of the highest priority for resuming library service to any degree. No one, including RAILS, is exactly sure how long the COVID-19 survives on different materials at this time, and we are definitely not medical experts. Thus far, there have been different lengths of time suggested for quarantining materials. For example, according to the most recent research by the [National Institute of Health](#), the virus that causes COVID-19 can last up to three days on plastic, and for a lesser amount of time on cardboard and other materials. There have also been other research studies noting that the virus may live as long as up to seven days on some materials, such as the [Lancet Study](#). These differing views are compounded by the fact that all of this information is subject to change at any moment given the fast-moving nature of the disease and the new things we are learning about it as each day goes by.

With our current knowledge of safe material handling, we can only suggest that quarantining library materials for at least three days and up to seven days might be the most effective method of disinfecting them. Library staff should have as little contact with materials as possible before this period and should wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling all materials when possible.

The Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) research partnership between OCLC, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and Battelle is currently working to create and distribute science-based information and recommended practices for libraries. This research will take some time. Libraries can keep informed about the latest developments at [oclc.org/realms](https://oclc.org/realms).

## General recommendations for all libraries

- With our current knowledge of safe material handling, quarantining library materials for at least three days and up to seven days appears to be the most effective method of disinfecting them. Library staff should have as little contact with materials as possible before this three to seven day period has passed, and should wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling all materials when possible.
- Libraries may want to consider a tiered approach to reopening the library.

- If your library is a member of an LLSAP/shared catalog consortia, check with your LLSAP regarding any special procedures you should follow.
- RAILS advises libraries to speak with their local public health officials, insurance provider, and their attorney about steps they should take to mitigate risk and liability to staff and the general public before reopening library buildings or offering curbside service.

## Questions to Consider Before Implementing Curbside Delivery Service

### Staffing Considerations

What hours will you offer the service?

- How many staff will you need to supply curbside service during those hours?
- Which staff members will you ask to provide these services?
- Are you considering staggered staffing models to allow for contact tracing?
- How will you publicize available hours to your patrons?

Do you have an ample supply of the proper protective equipment to keep your staff safe (gloves, masks, EPA-approved cleaning products, hand sanitizer, etc.)?

- Will you require all staff involved in providing curbside service to wear protective equipment?
- Can you order from online vendors ahead of time so you can ensure that all supplies will be delivered before you implement curbside service?
- If you do not currently have the necessary equipment, consider the difficulty in obtaining it.
- How will you train staff on the proper use of PPE?

### Patron Requests

How will you publicize your curbside delivery service to your patrons?

How will patrons request materials?

- Will patrons be able to request materials via your online catalog?
- Can patrons call/text to request materials?
- Can patrons email to request materials?

Will there be any limitations on materials patrons can check out via curbside delivery?

- Will you have enough materials on hand to meet potential curbside delivery demands?
- Will you need to limit the number of materials each patron can check out?
- Will you need to limit the types of materials that can be checked out?
- How will you communicate any limits to your patrons?

Who can use curbside pick-up?

- Will it be limited to your patrons?
- Will patrons in your LLSAP/consortium be allowed to pick-up items?
- Will reciprocal borrowers be allowed to check out?

### Picking Up/Checking Out Materials

Will you provide curbside service in all weather conditions?

- What will you do to protect library materials if it is raining?
- What gear will you provide staff to protect them against inclement weather?

How will you maintain social distancing during the checkout/pick up process?

How will patrons notify you when they arrive to pick up materials?

- Is there a dedicated phone number they should call when they arrive at your library?
- Will patrons need to let you know the make, model, and color of their vehicle?
- Will patrons be able to choose a pick-up time?

How will patrons know where to go to pick up curbside delivery items?

- Will you have signs or special pavement markings to indicate pick up areas?

Can patrons apply for a library card curbside if they do not already have one?

- Can you take photos/confirm IDs through a closed car window?

How will you check items out curbside?

- Will patrons need their library cards to check out materials?
- What will you do about library fines? Can you waive library fines during the curbside delivery period to eliminate the handling of cash?
- Will you put all checked out items in plastic bags?

How will you handle patrons who want to extend the due dates of their items?

- Can patrons extend due dates online?
- Will you increase the number of automatic renewals during this time?

### Handling/Quarantining Materials

What will you use to transport materials to the curbside area for pick up?

- Can those receptacles be cleaned?
- How often will you clean them?

Can you separate pick up of materials from drop off of returned items to minimize staff exposure to contaminated materials?

- Can you require patrons to return materials via your book drop?
- Who will empty the book drop and what will they do with those materials?
- What will you use to transport items from the book drop to the quarantine area?
- Can those receptacles be cleaned?
- How often will you clean them?

Do you have a designated spot where you can quarantine returned materials for the recommended 72 hours?

- Who will bring materials into the quarantine space and how will they be transported?
- How will you track the amount of time each item has been in the quarantine area?
- Will you wait to check items in until after they are out of the quarantine area?
- How will you indicate which items are in quarantine and not available for checkout? (Check with your shared catalog consortium as appropriate.)

## Ordering/Processing New Materials

Do you have a process in place for ordering and processing new materials?

- Do you have the staff capacity to handle these functions?
- How will you maintain social distancing between staff involved in processing new materials?

## Questions to Consider Before Reopening the Library on a Limited Basis

### Staffing Considerations

What hours will you be open?

- How will you publicize these hours to library patrons?
- Will you have staff to cover all of those hours?
- How many staff do you need in the building at specific times? Do you need to limit this number for social distancing purposes?

What areas/desks will you need to staff?

- Will you staff all public service desks?
- Will you staff all areas of the library?

Will some staff be able to work at home even if your building is open?

- How will you determine who is eligible to work from home and who isn't?

How will you ensure that staff stay at least six feet away from each other in staff areas and out on the floor?

[See curbside delivery section for additional questions about staff safety, protective equipment, etc.]

### Social Distancing Considerations

How many patrons will you allow in the library at one time?

- Who will monitor this number and how will they do it?
- Where will patrons wait to enter the library if you have already reached your maximum number? Can they be appropriately socially distanced in this space?
- How will you monitor the total number of patrons in your building?
- Will you have special hours for patrons in vulnerable categories (elderly, those with weakened immune systems, etc.)?

How will you monitor patron behavior while in the library to comply with social distancing rules?

- Will you require patrons to wear masks and/or gloves while in the library?
- What will you do if patrons do not comply with wearing masks and/or gloves?
- Will you install plexiglass shields or other protective barriers around your circulation desk and other public desks?
- Will you have signage, markings on the floor, or some other way of helping patrons maintain a distance of six feet from each other?

- Will you close your stacks? Make stacks one way or otherwise limit access to your collections?
- Will you move or remove furniture to prevent people from socializing or getting too close to each other, e.g. removing chairs and tables so people cannot sit near each other?
- Will you cordon off areas where furniture cannot be easily moved, e.g. in your children's area?
- If you have multiple-stall bathrooms, are you going to put into place any social distancing guidelines for bathroom use, such as only one patron or parent/child group in the bathroom at a time, and how will you monitor/guide that process?

### Cleaning/Sanitizing Issues

Will you have hand sanitizer, wipes, etc. available for patrons to use?

- How will you ensure that you have an ample supply of these materials when you are ready to open your building?

How often will you clean/sanitize different areas and heavily used items? Consider bathrooms, railing, doorknobs, keyboards, counters, workstations, public service desks, self-checkout stations, emptying wastebaskets, etc.

### Handling/Quarantining Materials

How will you maintain social distancing during the checkout/pick up process?

- Will you have markings on the floor or signage to help patrons maintain six feet of distance in checkout/self-checkout lines?

Do you have a procedure in place to minimize staff/patron contact for in-building holds pick up?

How will you handle the use of games and toys in the library? Consider the risk of children putting these items in their mouths, which would vastly increase the possibility of disease transmission.

[See curbside delivery section for additional questions about handling materials.]

### In-House Computer Services

Will you allow patrons to use in-house computers?

- How will you maintain social distancing, between workstations, when helping patrons with computer equipment, etc.?
- Will you decrease usual time limits on computer use?
- Will you offer computer use by appointment only?

Will computers be cleaned after each use?

- Who will clean them?

### Library Delivery/Resource Sharing

- If delivery is available through RAILS, do you want to begin receiving materials immediately?
- Have you alerted RAILS about your delivery preferences when you're ready to come back online?
- What processes will you have in place to minimize contact and handle incoming materials?

### Library Programming/Use of Meeting Rooms

What if any in-person library programming will you offer?

- Will you cancel children's programs (storytimes, etc.) because of the difficulty of enforcing social distancing rules?
- Will you accept reservations for meeting rooms?
- Will you allow patrons to use individual study rooms?

### Home Delivery

Will you offer home delivery services?

- Will staff delivering these items wear masks and gloves?
- Will you drop these materials on the doorstep rather than making contact with patrons? How will you check the items out?