



From the State Library - April 27, 2020

COVID-19 and Iowa Libraries: Considerations on Re-opening to the Public



Today, Governor Reynolds [issued a new proclamation](#) allowing establishments (including libraries) in 77 Iowa counties to reopen on a limited basis with public health measures in place. A library in these counties may reopen provided it limits the number of patrons present in the building to 50% of its maximum legal occupancy and must implement reasonable measures to ensure social distancing of employees and patrons and increase hygiene practices.

The proclamation also extends the closure order for establishments through May 15 in the following counties: Allamakee, Benton, Black Hawk, Bremer, Dallas, Des Moines, Dubuque, Fayette, Henry, Iowa, Jasper, Johnson, Linn, Louisa, Marshall, Muscatine, Polk, Poweshiek, Scott, Tama, Washington, and Woodbury. Libraries in those counties must remain closed but may continue to allow staff to report to the closed building and offer curbside service for patrons.

The State Library has developed the following list of questions for library boards and directors to consider while developing plans for re-opening their libraries. This is not an exhaustive list and should not be considered official recommendations from the State Library. Each library will have different needs, and decisions should be made on a local level in consultation with city officials, keeping state and federal guidelines in mind. The primary goal should be to re-open cautiously in order to protect the health and safety of library staff and patrons.

Contact [State Library staff](#) with any questions or feedback on the following considerations.

Re-opening Logistics

- Can you allow staff time in the building prior to opening to deal with returns and make needed changes?
- Will you plan for a gradual offering of services rolled out over time- a “phased plan” determined by your situation?

- Honor social distancing guidelines; the number of patrons in the building at one time must not exceed 50% of the building's maximum legal occupancy.

Social Distancing and Disinfection

- Do you have a supply chain for protective equipment for staff and patrons? (masks, gloves, sanitizers, etc.)
- Can you provide masks and gloves for staff to wear? Will use be required or voluntary?
- Do you have the ability to provide hand sanitizer or disinfectant wipes available at service points, entrances, exits and at all restrooms?
- How frequently will you disinfect counters, public computers, self-check machines and touchpoints during the day?
- Can you install plexiglass shields at service locations?
- Is it possible to put holds out for patrons to retrieve and check out themselves (if you have self-checkout capability) to limit physical interactions with staff? (Do your best to protect the confidentiality of patrons' reading choices.)
- Will you limit the number of people in the library at one time?
- Is it possible to have a separate entrance and exit from the building? Or to use different stairways for up and down traffic?
- How will you handle returned items? Can you instruct patrons to use book drops or automated returns only?
- How will you handle money safely, if at all?
- Is it possible to be open at special hours for at-risk populations such as the elderly or immunocompromised?
- Can you limit hours open to the public to allow for extra cleaning of the building?
- Can you limit use of bathrooms?
- Will you provide direct access to the copier/printer? Is wireless printing an option? Is there another way to provide copies and printing to patrons?
- Can you arrange for directional signs/one-way signs on floors, down the aisles, around service points? Can you create one-way traffic patterns?
- Will you post signs about washing hands frequently?
- Is it possible to rearrange, remove, or cover furniture to limit seating or allow for socially distanced use?
- How can you separate computer stations or allow access on every other station? Do you have the capacity to move computers to other areas of the library and use Wi-Fi access?
- How will you clean and disinfect computers after each use?
- Will you limit time patrons can use computers or require appointments to use computers to control crowding and allow for disinfection between uses?
- Can you provide laptops or devices that can be used in other areas of the library and disinfect between uses?
- Do you have a process to disinfect returned materials? Is it possible to consider keeping areas of library closed, or use meeting rooms to quarantine returned materials before re-shelving?
- Will you remove toys, puzzles, puppets, Legos, etc. that are difficult to clean to discourage close play or interaction?

- Will you continue to encourage staff and patrons who feel sick to remain at home?

Online Tools and Resources

- Will you encourage online or phone renewals or holds of items? How will you get the message out?
- Can you provide tutorials or links to tutorials on how to use your online resources (such as how to renew items, place holds, access Bridges ebooks and audiobooks, and how to use the online resources in the State Library package including Gale, Brainfuse, Opposing Viewpoints, Transparent Language, etc.)?
- What is your plan to use your library's social media accounts and website to inform, promote, and provide access to tools and programming?

Programming and Meeting Rooms

- Will you limit the use of meetings rooms? Under what conditions will meeting room re-open?
- What number will you allow for library gatherings, programs, meeting rooms, etc.?
- Can you provide passive programming?
- Can you provide make and take crafts or grab-it bags of supplies?
- Will you remove access to VR headsets or gaming consoles, if you have them?
- How will you reinstitute in-person programming while keeping in mind limits of gatherings?

Interlibrary Loan and IA Shares Delivery

- Will you update your library's status in SILO when ready?
- Will you mail items as needed or wait for IA Shares delivery to start again?
- Can you slowly increase the volume of materials for delivery once IA Shares is reinstated?

Community Needs and Outreach

- Can you provide Wi-Fi access outside your building?
- Is it possible to designate specific computers or laptops only for patrons with needs related to unemployment, such as filing, reports, resumes, applying for business loans, applying for jobs, etc.?
- Can you partner with a local organization to provide additional access to computers?
- Can you provide additional hotspots or Wi-Fi access within the building?
- If your library has a bookmobile, could you use it to provide internet access in areas of your community that lack access?

Continuation of Services Offered While Closed

- Will you continue curbside services, or consider starting them in a limited capacity?
- Can you develop or continue to allow online registration and renewal of library cards?
- Will you continue to deliver items to at-risk patrons?
- Will you continue to provide online programming?

Long-Term Plans

- Have you considered revising or developing a policy for emergency management?
- Have you thought about revising or developing a personnel plan to adapt to remote work or leave during a pandemic or other disaster?
- Will you review and/or revise your Meeting Room Policy?

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