

COVID-19 UPDATE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES – AS OF NOVEMBER 27, 2020

The Government of Alberta is implementing additional public health measures to respond to rising COVID-19 spread and to protect the health of Albertans and the capacity of the health care system.

The measures are in effect as of Friday, November 27, including restrictions on entertainment and event services that will affect all public libraries in Alberta.

Public libraries may remain open to the public with restricted capacity of 25 per cent of the occupancy set under the Alberta Fire Code, or a minimum of five customers, whichever is more, if they follow all public health guidance in place and maintain physical distancing.

The full list of orders and relevant legislation can be found at <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-orders-and-legislation.aspx>. We encourage you watch for updates as they are made available and use the online information to guide your decision making. This info sheet is meant to assist public libraries in conforming with recent health restrictions. It is strongly advised that members look [online](#) for the most up-to-date information on these restrictions.

Libraries are encouraged to offer curbside pick-up and delivery and promote digital resources and online services where possible.

Authority for decision-making

Alberta's public library decision-makers have a role to play in realizing a shared goal of curbing the spread of COVID-19.

According to the *Libraries Act*, public library boards maintain responsibility for public library service delivery in their community. It is critical that boards continue to exercise their decision-making authority during the pandemic.

Library boards are able to make choices for delivery of library service within the context of the *Libraries Act* and the Libraries Regulation, and while following public health orders and other provincial directives related to the current pandemic.

Library boards may decide that they want to pass further measures than the mandatory ones to stop the spread of COVID-19 at this time depending on the specific situation in their community. Again, public libraries are encouraged to offer curbside pick-up and delivery and promote digital resources and online services where possible.

Other existing mandatory measures

- Masks are mandatory for anyone attending an indoor public place (i.e., any indoor location where an entity is operating) in the Calgary and Edmonton Metropolitan Regions (see Appendix for the list of affected municipalities)

- Other municipalities have passed mask wearing by-laws that will impact people in the library. Please make sure you are up to date on your municipalities' direction on this issue.
 - A “face mask” means a medical or non-medical mask or other face covering that covers a person’s nose, mouth and chin.

Other orders include the following:

- Every person attending an indoor or outdoor location must maintain a minimum of two metres distance from every other person
- An operator of an entity must:
 - Implement practices to minimize the risk of transmission of infection among persons working at or attending the entity
 - Provide procedures for rapid response if a person develops symptoms of illness while working at or attending the entity
 - Ensure that persons working at or attending the entity maintain high levels of sanitation and personal hygiene
 - Comply, to the extent possible, with applicable Alberta Health guidance found at <https://www.alberta.ca/biz-connect>
- Mandatory 10-day isolation for people who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19

There may still be questions about how specific restrictions should be interpreted by library boards. Public Library Services Branch is seeking clarification and will update you when possible.

In the meantime, we encourage you to visit <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-orders-and-legislation.aspx> and to use the available information to guide your decision-making.

Questions and answers – (please refer to Alberta.ca for the most up-to-date information)

Can library space remain open to the public? Can people visit the library in-person?

- Yes. Libraries may remain open to the public at this time with restricted capacity of 25 per cent of the occupancy set under the Alberta Fire Code, or a minimum of five patrons, whichever is more, if they follow all public health guidance in place and maintain physical distancing.
 - Fire code information can be found at: <https://nrc.canada.ca/en/certifications-evaluations-standards/codes-canada/codes-canada-publications/national-fire-code-2019-alberta-edition-nfcae>
- Where possible, library boards are encouraged to use curbside pick-up, delivery and online services to limit in-person visits at this time.
- Public libraries housed in schools will need to work with their partner school boards to determine the best way to deliver service at this time especially if the school will be closed to students.

Are people in the library considered a social gathering?

- No. Indoor social gathering restrictions are in place for visits of a social nature. This does not apply to services offered by or being accessed at the public library.
- However, public libraries should follow other public health orders around social distancing and follow public health orders and municipal bylaws around masking.
- Programs should be offered online where possible and boards should consider postponing in-person programs where possible.

Are meetings allowed at work for library staff?

- Meetings are allowed provided measures are in place to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- We strongly encourage meetings to move to an online format where possible.

Can we have an in-person Library Board or Committee meeting?

- Meetings are allowed but in-person attendance should be limited to the extent possible and physical distancing, guidance and public health measures followed.
- In light of the new measures, it is recommended that boards meet virtually for now to reduce risk of person-to-person virus transmission.

What are the rules around masking?

- Effective immediately, there is a mandatory mask requirement for all indoor workplaces in Calgary and Edmonton and surrounding areas (see Appendix for affected municipalities).
- Other municipalities have passed mask bylaws and are in the process of implementing mask bylaws.
- Exemptions to this include:
 - Persons who are unable to place, use or remove a non-medical face mask without assistance;
 - Persons unable to wear a non-medical face mask due to a mental or physical concern or limitation;
 - Persons providing or receiving immediate care or assistance where a non-medical face mask would hinder that caregiving or assistance.
- There are no changes to mandatory student mask requirements in schools (for the information of public libraries located in schools that remain open).

Can outside community groups use the library space for meetings?

- Mutual support meetings are permitted to continue (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous), with physical distancing and adherence to strict measures to control COVID-19. This includes masking and physical distancing and compliance with public health guidance. Virtual formats should be encouraged wherever possible.
- People are not permitted to use public space for private social gatherings at this time – i.e. a group of people booking a library program room to have a social gathering limited to that group is not permitted.

Can tutoring services continue at the library?

- One-on-one lessons can continue by appointment only as long as all public health guidance is followed.
- Group lessons should move to virtual at this time.

Contact

Public Library Services Branch produced information earlier in the pandemic on how to promote virtual services, how to ensure strong board governance, and how to safely have people in the library during the relaunch phase this summer.

If you are interested in receiving any of this information again or have any other questions, please feel free to reach out and ask for assistance. You can email our director at diana.davidson@gov.ab.ca, any of our other staff, and/or use the email address libraries@gov.ab.ca.

Appendix – Municipalities subject to mandatory mask order

- City of Airdrie
- Town of Beaumont
- City of Calgary
- City of Chestermere
- Town of Cochrane
- Town of Devon
- City of Edmonton
- Municipal District of Foothills
- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- Town of Gibbons
- Town of High River
- City of Leduc
- Leduc County
- Town of Morinville
- Town of Okotoks
- Parkland County
- Rocky View County
- City of St. Albert
- City of Spruce Grove
- Town of Stony Plain
- Strathcona County
- Sturgeon County
- Town of Thorsby