

# Public Library Pandemic Response

## Frequently Asked Questions: Closures by December 13, 2020

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On December 8, 2020, the Province of Alberta announced new mandatory measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. **These new restrictions apply province wide and will be in place for at least four weeks.** For the full set of the most up-to-date restrictions, please visit

<https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx>.

These measures directly affect public libraries and it is crucial that library boards take immediate action. Public Library Services Branch has compiled answers to some frequently asked questions to assist libraries in navigating this situation:

### Do public libraries have to close?

**Yes**—as announced on December 8, many businesses and service providers will be required to close to the public. **Libraries are included in this measure and must close as of 12:01 am on Sunday, December 13.**

In light of this directive, library boards need to make arrangements to close their doors to the public effective December 13. It is recommended that notifications of the closure be posted on the library's various social media and websites. Boards should also connect with any partners (e.g. municipality, school, library system) to collaborate and advise on further steps. Libraries may continue to support their communities with virtual and curbside services.

### What if my library is located in a school or joint use facility?

The new measures announced on December 8 also include closures of most public recreation or entertainment facilities. If your library is located in a joint-use facility, it may be that your partner organization is also closing its space to the public. While the board has authority over library service and the library space, it is important to maintain communication with partner organizations to inform

them of the board's decisions and plans. Consult your joint-use agreement to see what responsibilities you may have. If you have staff continuing to work on site, you may also need to discuss protocol for access to the facility during the closure.

If your library is located in a school, the board should engage in discussion with the school authority as soon as possible. K-6 schools are continuing with in-person delivery and the school authority may decide to continue with use of the library space and/or materials *for school purposes only*. If that is the case, the library board must ensure the library is closed to the public as per the new measures.

### Can library staff continue to work on site?

The measures announced on December 8 include a mandatory work-from-home order for employees unless the employer determines the work requires a physical presence for operational effectiveness. The library board, as the employer, has the authority and the responsibility to make decisions about on-site work in light of this directive.

If staff are required to work on site, for example to facilitate curbside pickup services, all public health measures (e.g. mask wearing, physical distancing, sanitization) must be followed. Masks are mandatory in all indoor workspaces province wide except when an employee is working alone in an office, at a safely distanced cubicle, or when a barrier is in place.

### Can the public enter a library for limited in-person service, such as service by appointment?

No. As per the most recent public health restrictions announced on December 8 2020, libraries must be closed to the public as of 12:01 AM on December 13, 2020. This means that members of the public are not permitted in the library after that time—not

even for limited time periods or previously booked appointments (like exam invigilation).

### Can my library provide curbside pickup and homebound services? If so, what do we need to consider?

Yes, libraries may continue to offer curbside pickup and homebound services (i.e. delivery of materials) after closure. Libraries that offer curbside pickup or homebound services are responsible for keeping both library users and workers safe.

Curbside pickup should be delivered using minimal staff on site (i.e., 1- 2 employees, more in large libraries and systems if necessary). Curbside pickup must also be structured so that staff have no physical contact with library users. Library users should not take materials directly from staff or vice versa. Library users cannot come into the library building. Physical distancing, mask wearing, and sanitization practices must all be implemented when delivering curbside pickup service. Vehicle and road safety should also be considered when providing curbside pick-up.

Homebound services can continue if no-contact rules are in place. The library should communicate clearly with any homebound service partners – especially long-term care facilities – about whether or not they want the service to continue at this time.

The library should consider if it will quarantine items after they are returned to the library. Refer to the question-and-answer later in this document for more information on item quarantine.

### Will interlibrary loan (ILL) lending and borrowing be impacted?

We will be suspending the patron/discovery side of Relais as of Friday, December 11 so that limited on-site staff are not overwhelmed with material during the closure.

The staff portal of Relais will remain active. Government courier (Loomis) will continue as usual, making daily drop offs and pickups at the 12 delivery nodes (i.e., the seven library systems, Wood Buffalo, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Calgary and Edmonton).

### How can my library continue to support the community at this time?

Promote your library's available digital resources, and those offered by your regional library system, including those available to all Albertans through the provincial e-content suite:

- Pronunciator (language learning),
- PressReader (world newspapers),
- RBdigital Audiobooks,
- RBdigital Magazines,
- the *Read Alberta Ebooks Collection* (a partnership with the Book Publishers Association of Alberta) which includes the *Prairie Indigenous Ebook Collection* and
- Electronic resources for the print-disabled through NNELS and CELA.

Maintain a virtual presence in your community by continuing to communicate through your library's website and social media sites. The library may also resume online programming, such as story times or book clubs.

The board should also be mindful of those who may need additional supports to access virtual service, such as those with print and other disabilities and patrons with limited or no access to the internet (which may include remote Indigenous communities that boards are providing service with/for).

Patrons with print disabilities continue to have access to thousands of digital accessible-format items through both [NNELS](#) and [CELA](#). If you are having trouble registering a patron for NNELS because you do not have access to your ILS, please contact NNELS directly at [support@nnels.ca](mailto:support@nnels.ca) or 1-888-848-9250 (option 5) to have them registered manually.

If possible, you may want to maintain reference or information services via telephone—either by forwarding the library's number to another number or giving patrons an alternate phone number to call. Not everyone has a computer or internet access, so having alternative means of access to service is important. If you do this, it is best to have the phone answered by a staff member, not a machine. In these times of physical distancing, personal contact via telephone or virtually is important.

## Should libraries quarantine returned items?

There is no provincial order mandating the quarantine of library materials. Libraries that continue to circulate physical items (i.e. via curbside pickup) may wish to quarantine and/or sanitize physical materials to reduce the risk of transmission.

Research on the topic is continually evolving and current best practices vary by jurisdiction across Canada and globally. Alberta library boards have the authority to determine whether or not quarantine is worthwhile in their local context. Even if quarantine procedures are implemented, libraries should still put in place practices that encourage safe handling of materials by staff and patrons.

## Should library boards continue to meet?

Yes. The library board should meet remotely at this time, as most boards are already doing. Library boards in Alberta are governing bodies that make decisions in the public interest and spend public tax dollars, and it is important for boards to continue to fill this role. Just because the physical location is closed does not mean the board's work ceases. In fact, this is a critical time for boards to be discussing options and future plans.

Boards should also remember that all library board meetings, online or in person, should be made open to the public as per section 5(1) of the Libraries Regulation to ensure transparency in board decision making.

Library boards should share the method of joining the meeting with the general public. This could be done by posting the meeting link on the library website or posting the contact information of a staff person who could share a meeting invitation.

## How can I ask further questions or find additional support?

We encourage library boards to lean on the provincial Public Library Network for knowledge and support. There are over 220 municipal and intermunicipal boards in Alberta, each facing the same challenging situation.

Reach out to your fellow board members and library staff across the Province—there is a wealth of

knowledge out there. Your regional library systems also are there for support, advice, and help in service delivery.

Please continue to forward your questions to PLSB staff. PLSB staff are working remotely.

### PLSB Contact Information

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