



**Reopening Massachusetts Libraries:**

**Guidelines and Recommendations for Resuming Full Services - Version 2 updated for Phase 3**

**Introduction and Purpose:**

On May 11, Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, and the Reopening Advisory Board released the [Four-Phase Approach to Reopening Massachusetts](#) and [Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplaces](#). On May 18, the [phased reopening plan was released](#), and this timeline included libraries. We have developed the following phasing for Massachusetts Libraries to follow as they resume their services, and aligned them with the Reopening Massachusetts Phases. On June 8, the Reopening Advisory Board released Mandatory [reopening safety standards, recommended best practices and a checklist for libraries](#). On July 6, Phase III went into effect which included in library browsing, and [updated](#) sector specific guidelines were released.

Reopening Massachusetts Libraries	Reopening Massachusetts
<b>Library Phase 1, Part 1:</b> <i>Planning to resume in person service</i>	<b>MA Govt. Phase 1: Start:</b> <i>Limited industries resume operations with severe restrictions.</i>
<b>Library Phase 1, Part 2:</b> <i>Initiate services that emphasize limited in-person contact</i>	<b>MA Govt. Phase 1: Start:</b> <i>Limited industries resume operations with severe restrictions.</i> <i>Phase 1 – May 25 for curbside pickup and delivery only</i>
<b>Library Phase 2:</b> <i>Soft openings and limited services</i>	<b>MA Govt. Phase 2 Cautious:</b> <i>Additional industries resume operations with restrictions and capacity limits</i> <i>Phase 2 Step 1: June 8 for in library pick up, like curbside</i>
<b>Library Phase 3 Step 1 :</b> <i>Expanded service and adaptation to the current health climate</i>	<b>MA Govt. Phase 3 Vigilant: Open with Browsing</b> <i>Additional industries resume operations with guidance.</i> <i>Phase 3: July 6 for in library browsing.</i>
<b>Library Phase 4:</b> <i>Near full resuming of services</i>	<b>MA Govt. Phase 4</b> <b>New Normal:</b> <i>Development of vaccine and/or therapy enables resumption of “new normal.”</i>

The recommendations should not be interpreted as legal advice, nor should they supersede any orders or directives by local, state or federal agencies. Please consult an attorney or municipal counsel for guidance on protecting library patron confidentiality when asked for contract tracing information. Library workers and staff are required to protect patron confidentiality in accordance with the law ([MGL Ch.78 Sec.7](#)).



*Libraries are not required to provide services that are now permissible in a new phase.* When planning for the next phase, libraries should consider if they are able to follow [Mandatory Workplace Safety Standards](#) and [Sector specific safety protocols and best practices](#). Not all libraries will be ready to open due to limited staffing and budgets. Each library, in consultation with their municipality, will decide when they are ready to open and at what level of service. Libraries must be able to self-certify compliance of mandatory standards before they open.

### **Reopening Massachusetts Libraries Phases**

Aligning with Governor Baker's Four Phases for Reopening Massachusetts, we initially conceived of four phases for the resumption of in-person library services. Libraries were allowed to begin curbside pickup or delivery services on May 25. Libraries were allowed to offer in library browsing on July 6. Subsequent phases will be released in more detail in future iterations. We have developed a Plan and Policy Template that libraries may use and adapt to create their own plans, which is a separate document.

#### **Library Phase 1, Part 1: *Planning to resume in person service***

**MA Govt. Phase 1: *Start: Limited industries resume operations with severe restrictions.***

This phase is the first many libraries will undertake, and many are currently in this phase. It is mandatory to follow the work place safety standards to keep staff and patrons safe when you open your building. During this time, the library will be open only to staff. Staff may return to the building to work on tasks like rearranging meeting rooms and spaces for quarantining items, rearranging furniture and computers in staff and public areas, processing inventory and deliveries. This may include installing acrylic/plexiglass barriers, and additional signage around the library.

One of the most important things to consider when getting ready to resume in person services is the disinfecting of your physical space.

- Who will provide a deep clean prior to opening? How will cleaning be done throughout the day, as staff come in contact with equipment, furniture, doors, bathrooms?
- Can you purchase cleaning and safety supplies, including disinfectant sprays and wipes, paper towels, disposable gloves, and masks?

Materials handling will also be an important consideration. Quarantining materials is the safest way to ensure materials are not infected, and this requires finding space and developing a protocol and process to ensure that materials entering the building go untouched for the set amount of time.

Additional tasks to consider:

- Create a pandemic policy and process. These guidelines contain a sample umbrella policy that touches on various other policies. Samples can be found on the [MLS' website](#).
- In conjunction with your local board of health, plan appropriate staff and patron safety measures (wearing masks and gloves), limited access to the building (one door in and one door



out), acrylic/plexiglass barriers for service desks, and ways to manage the number of people in the building at one time. Creating more space around service desks (extending the footprint to six feet away from staff), creating one way pathways, taping six foot intervals on the floor leading to service points. Are you able to designate entry and exit only doors, and remain ADA complainant?

- Consider opening hours for available services, as well as limiting shifts, number of staff in the building at once, and specific hours for vulnerable patrons. This may be a time to develop teams of staff to work on specific days. Staff members who are able to continue teleworking to ensure enhanced virtual services are continued.
- Consider weighing local guidance with what area communities are doing. Coordinating service roll-outs with neighboring towns will minimize the possibility of a single town being overwhelmed with resident and nonresident patrons. Be aware of State Aid requirements that public libraries must “be open to all residents of the commonwealth” ([MGL Ch. 78, Sec. 19B](#)).
- Use this time to work through curbside pickup or delivery services workflows to ensure staff and patron safety are maintained. Create a detailed work plan and consult with your network for assistance in changing any parameters.
- Consider waiving library fines for the foreseeable future or establish more relaxed policies about fine limits to ensure access to materials.
- Considering extending borrowing limits (number of items checked out at one time) and/or due dates.
- Test equipment to ensure everything is in working order.

### **Library Phase 1, Part 2: Initiate services that emphasize limited in-person contact**

**MA Govt. Phase 1:** *Start: Limited industries resume operations with severe restrictions.*

*Phase 1 – May 25 for curbside pickup and delivery only*

**MA Govt. Phase 2:** *Additional industries resume operations with restrictions and capacity limits*

*Phase 2 Step 1: June 8 for curbside pickup and circulation desk pick up only*

During this phase, libraries may start to offer curbside pickup and delivery services, beginning on May 25. This is not required, but a date when libraries are allowed to offer these services. When thinking about how to provide these services, we recommend that libraries take the following considerations into account. The update on June 8 did not increase the level of service provided and allowed libraries to offer pick up at the circulation desk in addition to curbside.

**Staffing:** In order to provide curbside services, libraries will need to ensure that they have sufficient staff to provide these services, that their staff is well-informed about the services, and that they can keep staff safe before, during and after the services. Things to consider include:

- What days and times will you offer curbside pickup and delivery services?
- How many staff, of which classifications, will you need to provide these services? Staff may be needed for:



- Pulling requested materials
- Preparing and staging requested materials
- Checking out requested materials
- Have you created your process for curbside pickup and delivery?
- Has your staff been trained on your process for curbside pickup and delivery?
- Do you have adequate PPE for staff to provide the services?
- Do you have adequate equipment (e.g., book carts, tables, bins) and supplies (e.g., bags to pack materials) to provide the services?
- Do you have adequate space for staff to stage materials requested by patrons?

**Requests:** To take advantage of curbside pickup and delivery services, patrons will need to know that these services exist and how to successfully use them. Things to consider include:

- How will you let patrons know that these services are available?
- How will patrons request materials? Possibilities include:
  - Calling the library
  - Texting the library
  - Emailing the library
  - Using an online form
  - Using the library catalog
- Are there dedicated times during which patrons can request materials?
- Are there any limitations on the type of materials that patrons may request?
- Are there any limitations on the number of materials that patrons may request?
- How will patrons know how to place a hold on materials and any limits on availability?

**Arrival:** After patrons have requested library materials, they will need to be notified how, when, and where the materials will be made available to them. Libraries should let patrons know in advance, if possible, what to expect when they arrive at the library. Things to consider include:

- How will patrons know their materials are ready?
- Will you require an appointment for patrons to pickup materials?
  - Will the library call/text/email patrons with a date/time for pickup?
  - Will patrons be able to select their desired date/time for pickup?
  - What happens if patrons do not show up for their appointment?
- Will patrons be able to pickup materials without an appointment?
  - If appointments are not required, what will you do if many patrons arrive at the same time or just before closing?
- Will you have a designated space for patrons to park when they arrive at the library?
- Will you have a designated phone number patrons should call when they arrive?
- Will you have signs in the parking lot telling patrons what number to call?
- What information should patrons provide when they arrive? Possibilities include:
  - Make, model, color of their vehicle



- Library card number
- Name on the library account
- Parking lot space number
- Will curbside pickup and delivery services be available under all weather conditions?
  - What protection will materials need during inclement weather?
  - What protection will staff need during inclement weather?
- How will you let patrons know if their pickup or delivery needs to be rescheduled?

**Check-Out:** Once patrons arrive to pickup materials, libraries will need a process to ensure that the right materials get to the right patrons at the right time. In addition, libraries will need to ensure that the check-out transaction is completed in a manner that is safe for both staff and patrons, and that complies with social distancing guidelines and upholds patron confidentiality. Libraries should let patrons know, in advance, if possible, what to expect during check-out. Things to consider include:

- Where will materials be stored while they are waiting to be checked-out?
- How will you distinguish one patron's materials from another patron's materials?
- What equipment will you use to move materials to the curbside location?
- How will you maintain social distancing during check-out?
  - Will you post signs to explain how the check-out process will work?
  - Will you post signs and/or put down tape to show patrons where to stand or wait?
  - What will you do if patrons refuse to comply with social distancing guidelines?
- What will patrons need to check out the materials?
  - Will materials be checked out before the patron arrives?
  - Will you need to scan their library cards?
  - If so, can you do it without having to hand the cards back-and-forth?
  - How will you let patrons know what they need to check out materials?
- How will materials be given to patrons?
  - Can you minimize or avoid the physical handing off items to patrons?
  - Will materials be left on a table, book cart, or bin for patrons to pick up?
  - Will materials be placed in a plastic/paper bag prior to patrons' arrival?
  - Can patrons check out materials themselves?
- What if patrons are unable to check-out due to fines?
  - Will you waive fines?
  - Will you take money to clear the fines during check-out?

**Returns:** Patrons may want to return items while they are checking out new materials. Libraries will need to decide how, when, and/or whether they will accept returns during the check-out transaction. Libraries should let patrons know in advance, if possible, whether they will be allowed to return materials during the check-out process. Things to consider include:

- Will patrons be allowed to return materials when they are checking out materials?
- How will you let patrons know when and where to return materials?



- Can patrons be asked to return materials to a book drop or other place that does not require the physical handing off of materials?
- Will you be able to keep returns separate from materials ready for pickup?
- Do you have adequate space to receive and quarantine returned materials?
- Will you discourage or disallow donations at this time?

These considerations for curbside pickup and delivery services have been adapted from the [RAILS Guidelines for Libraries Considering Curbside Service](#) and the [Vermont Department of Libraries' Curbside and Book Delivery Service Guidelines](#). Samples of libraries providing curbside services are available on the [MLS website](#).

(updated on 7/9/2020)

**Library Phase 3, Step 1:** *Expanded service and adaptation to the current health climate*

**MA Govt. Phase 3:** *Vigilant: Open with Browsing*

*Phase 3: July 6 for in library browsing*

On July 6, libraries are permitted resume in-library browsing as established by the Reopening Advisory Board. Libraries must adhere to the [Mandatory Workplace Safety Standards](#) and [Sector specific safety protocols and best practices](#) before in-library services resume. When planning to resume services, we recommend libraries take the following considerations into account.

At this time, the guidance from the Governor includes keeping a log for contact tracing, if needed. ([Source](#)) However, MBLC and MLS have expressed concerns to the Reopening Advisory Board that contact tracing is a violation of MGL.

As many libraries have faced staff layoffs and furloughs, it needs to be considered how many hours of public library service can be reasonably delivered while meeting the [Mandatory Workplace Safety Standards](#) and [Sector specific safety protocols and best practices](#). Library directors and trustees should be aware of the laws around furloughs and use of volunteers to perform library tasks.

MBLC and MLS recommend a considered and cautious approach to resuming in-person library services. What is paramount is the safety of library staff and the public in any service delivery model. These guidelines, considerations and best practices are meant to complement the mandatory safety standards issued by the Reopening Advisory Board. However, service should be resumed in some capacity for the public through curbside or pick up services, virtual programs and remote services.

As many libraries have faced staff layoffs and furloughs, it needs to be considered how many hours of public library service can be reasonably delivered while meeting the [Mandatory Workplace Safety Standards](#) and [Sector specific safety protocols and best practices](#). Library directors and trustees should be aware of the laws around furloughs and use of volunteers to perform library tasks.



***In-library browsing:***

- Determine the number of hours the library can reasonably be open to the public. At this time, there has been no change to State Aid Requirements for FY21 however this may change in the future.
  - Do you have staff to cover all of the hours? How many staff do you need to deliver services? Will staff be able to appropriately stay distanced? How will hours and/or services be modified if staff are unable to work due to illness or do not meet the mandatory criteria for health?
  - Libraries should reduce operating hours to allow for on-going off-hour sanitation and cleaning. For example, some libraries plan to close for an hour in the middle of the day to allow for cleaning.
  - How will the library screen staff and do so in a confidential way? Ask staff to self-certify?
  - What staff will be able to work from home when the building is open? How will that be determined?
  - Will the library continue to provide curbside or pick up service options? How will that service be supported along with in library browsing?
  - The library may offer special hours to at risk populations; however these hours will not be counted toward the State Aid requirement for hours open, as they are not open to the whole public.
  - The library should make hand-sanitizer available at the entrances and throughout the building.
- ***Stacks***
  - Open or closed stacks will be made at the local level depending on the libraries ability to support open stacks based on staffing, accessibility, and cleaning capacity. Open or closed stacks will have no bearing on State Aid requirements.
  - If stacks are closed, consider how will requests be made? At a service desk, virtually or a combination of? Will materials be checked out in advance to cut down on service interactions? If children's or teen stacks are closed, how will those services be delivered?
  - If stacks are opened, are you able to support a layout or flow that will be one way or minimize bottlenecks?
- ***Service Areas***
  - What services desks will be staffed? Will areas be staffed instead of desks? Circulation desks, reference desks, children's or teen spaces?
  - How will staff areas and service desks be modified to meet social distancing concerns?
  - Service desks should be stocked with adequate cleaning products.
- ***Occupancy Calculations***
  - The library will need to determine which calculation they'll use for occupancy, up to 40% of the building's maximum permitted occupancy or 8 persons per 1000 square feet.



- How will the library manage the number of people allowed in the building? Will they post staff at the door to count people entering and exiting, or utilize two doors to manage the flow through the library.
- Consider how best to manage occupancy? First come, first served or appointment based, or a combo of the two? How will the library take appointments while protecting library patron's confidentiality, and if so how will you anonymize the information? For example, 50 people are allowed into the library at any time first come, first served or 25 appointment slots per half hour.
- Consider additional restrictions on the number in the children's room or other enclosed rooms at 8 persons per 1000 square feet capacity limit.
- **Signage**
  - Update signage in the library to reflect current library services- mask coverings required by law, hand washing, signage for social distancing.
  - Establish directional pathways to manage foot traffic and minimize contact.
- **Public Computers and Shared Equipment**
  - Consider cashless systems where possible.
  - Public computers should be spaced at least 6 feet apart, or if not possible equipment should be blocked off and chairs removed to maintain 6 feet distancing.
  - Public computers, shared technology and equipment accessible to multiple users must be wiped down and disinfected between uses. Provide wipes to patrons to wipe down equipment after use.
    - Who will be responsible for cleaning the computers?
    - Are there covers or sleeves for shared equipment that patrons will use?
  - How will staff assist patrons with computer equipment and still meet social distancing requirements?
  - Consider curbside pickup for printing needs, allowing patrons to email or upload a document for printing.
- **Meeting Rooms and Study Rooms**
  - These spaces can be made available for use, as long as they meet the standards for occupancy that a maximum of no enclosed space within the building may exceed occupancy of 8 persons per 1,000 square feet. Allowing the use of meeting rooms by outside groups will be at the discretion of the library as meeting rooms will require additional cleaning or being used for the quarantining of materials.
  - If a library allows the use of study rooms or meeting rooms, those spaces should factored in for additional cleaning.
  - Masks will be required in the study rooms.
- **Materials and Collections**
  - The [Mandatory Workplace Safety Standards](#) state that "Books and other materials should be placed in marked containers after patron handling or return and subject to 24-hour quarantine before being returned to shelves by library workers".
  - We interpret this as materials that have been checked out and returned to the library, placed on a reshelving cart, or are found out of place in the library (e.g., on tables).



- We do not interpret this as materials patrons may touch on the shelves while browsing, much like items are not restocked in a grocery store or pharmacy simply because it is touched by a customer. If patrons return items to re-shelving carts, or if you find items out of place in the library (e.g., on tables), those items should be quarantined for 24 hours.
- **Programming**

Guidance from the Governor on in-person programming was not included in the Phase 3 sector specific protocols and best practices for libraries. We are seeking clarification on this, as indoor Theater and Performance Venues must remain closed until authorized to open under a subsequent executive order. Given that in-person programming wasn't included, we will not be issuing guidance on that at this time.

We encourage libraries to continue offering their virtual events and programming by library staff, and uploading videos to the Massachusetts video library.  
(<https://www.mavideolibrary.org/upload/>)

However, outdoor programming may be permissible if the library is able to meet the safety standards for [Theaters and Performance venues](#).



### Global Recommendations and Best Practices

While services and offerings will vary from library to library, it is recommended that libraries approach reopening in a phased process, being aware of community transmission rates following state directives and, working closely with the municipality leadership and the local board of health. Advancement to additional phases will be triggered with guidance from Governor Baker. Until there is an effective treatment, vaccine, or herd immunity level is met, transmission is possible. The following recommendations and best practices are protocols to implement to minimize the transmission as much as possible. All libraries are required to adhere to the Mandatory Safety Protocols.

Minimizing transmission is a critical goal, and the primary methods in order of importance:

1. Human interactions are minimized and at safe distances among public, staff, and vendors including wearing personal protective equipment (PPE);
2. Common areas for public, staff, and vendors are cleaned and disinfected with enhanced environmental cleaning; and
3. Materials handling is performed safely.

### Social Distancing

All persons, including employees, patrons, and vendors should remain at least six feet apart to the greatest extent possible, both inside and outside libraries. Face masks are required for all employees and patrons, except for those exempt per [COVID-19 Order No. 31](#) on May 6, 2020. Work stations may need to be reconfigured or moved in order to accommodate staff working at the same time.

### Supplies

On May 11, [Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplaces](#) was released, which details what supplies are needed for hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting. These were released by the Department of Public Health (DPH) and the COVID-19 Command Center in consultation with the Reopening Advisory Board. In addition to the requirements, [suppliers are listed to help in the procurement of supplies](#).

Questions to consider:

- Is the library or municipality able to ensure proper PPE for library staff, such as face masks, gloves, disinfecting materials for surfaces, hand sanitizer, hand soap, towels and water and that access to these materials will be available for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and mandatory orders for wearing them in public?
- Is there training for staff on the proper implementation of PPE, including the wearing and removal of masks and gloves and proper disposal.

### Collections and Circulation (updated on 7/9/2020)

Planning the lending workflow with policies and protocols for safety is more important than whether the quarantine is one day or one week. One of the largest areas of concern is about the transmission of COVID-19 on the surface of books and other library materials, including DVDs, magazines, computer surfaces, touch screens, and other high touch surfaces.



MBLC and MLS recommend quarantining books and materials for a period of three days based on the results of the IMLS, OCLC, Battelle study which found that the COVID-19 virus was undetectable on five highly circulated library materials after three days ([Source](#)). This recommendation may be updated in the future.

Previously we supported a recommendation by Northeast Document Conservation Center ([Source](#)). Staff should have as little contact as possible with the materials before the quarantine period has passed.

We do not recommend sanitizing UV lights. Be aware that the terms “sanitize” and “disinfect” have specific meanings. Products that “sanitize” kill bacteria but not viruses. Only “disinfecting” products kill viruses. A forthcoming Collections FAQ will contain detailed information.

Questions to consider:

- Are you able to use meeting rooms or other enclosed spaces to quarantine materials?
- In smaller libraries with no meeting rooms, you may consider using blocked off tables or shelving to store quarantined materials.
- Before you start accepting returns, are you able to develop procedures for how staff will empty book drops, how frequently they will empty book drops, where materials will go, how they will be processed, who will be responsible for cleaning the book carts or book drops, and how often? Some communities are working with their schools or Public Works Department to quarantine materials off site if space is limited in the library.

### **Communications**

Internal communication plans are critical. Resuming in-person library services will require meetings with staff, conversations about protocols, training, and more. Staff buy-in and participation in decision-making is paramount to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of the expectations and how to execute their work tasks. Communication with neighboring communities is recommended to attempt to coordinate similar services levels as well as stagger hours.

Service changes require a well thought out communication strategy to ensure the public is aware of the changes and why. Clear communication will go a long way to manage public expectations. Consider the use of various media sources to announce any phased services. This includes updating the library website with an FAQ or other clear guidelines.

### **Staffing**

Efforts should be made to allow staffs, who are able to, to continue teleworking, and to continue to deliver virtual programs and services during periods of limited in-person services. Policies should be developed in accordance with union contracts and municipal requirements that allow for flexibility, while still meeting the needs of the library.