

## How Public Libraries Are Adapting for COVID-19

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Increasing cleaning schedules, supplying personal protective equipment, and limiting services are just some of the ways library leaders are adapting for COVID-19. To find out how public libraries are modifying their protocols and spaces, we surveyed almost 3,000 library workers.

Seventy-four percent of survey respondents said their libraries were open in some way, with 15–20% saying they are allowing patrons in the building. Another 50% plan to open their physical doors in the coming weeks. Many more are in the planning phases for reopening.

Below you'll learn the actions survey respondents have taken to modify their libraries to continue to provide vital services safely.

### Increased Cleaning Measures

The most common response that library staff had to reopening their doors during the COVID-19 pandemic was to **step up cleaning efforts**, in terms of both frequency and intensity. Some library systems worked with janitorial staff to implement additional cleaning measures, while smaller libraries scheduled extra cleaning times. All increased the number of items they are disinfecting throughout the library.

Respondents advised others to **stock up on cleaning and disinfecting supplies**, as they found they used more than expected once they opened their doors.

### Protecting Staff and Patrons

There are several safety measures that almost all libraries said they implemented, including **wearing masks**, **installing acrylic barriers (see our Covid-19 Library Supplies section)** at service points, and requiring **temperature checks** for staff before they start each shift.

Staff members are expected to follow strict **handwashing** guidelines and are using a lot of **hand sanitizer**. Some libraries are keeping their public restrooms closed for the time being but are making handwashing stations and sanitizer available to patrons throughout each area of the library. This includes the entrance, where patrons are being asked to disinfect their hands before they enter.

Many libraries that are requiring their patrons to use masks have stocked up on disposable masks and are offering them to patrons for a nominal fee, along with other individual-use items such as earbuds. They are also prohibiting food or beverages in their spaces.

Visit Promatech Web Site for Covid-19 related supplies at below section:

< Covid-19 Library Supplies >

< Library Signage >

< Book Trolley & Book Drop >

## **New Operating Hours and Procedures**

Curbside pickup is by far the most popular accommodation that libraries are making to get materials in the hands of patrons. Others are also using curbside pickup for printing services.

Libraries that have fully opened their doors started by **limiting the number of people** allowed to enter. They are monitoring this with **patron counters, browsing baskets or bags (see our Book bags collection)**, or keeping the door locked and have a greeter manually admit people. Most also established **designated hours** for seniors and patrons who are high-risk and are stating that children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

## **Creating New Protocol for Computer Use**

Many libraries that have reinstituted computer use are doing so by appointment only and have stepped up **cleaning protocols**, wiping down equipment after each use. They are also **spacing computers out** so that they are at least 6 feet from each other, per CDC guidelines, and **limiting the time** patrons are allowed on them.

To help patrons at computers while maintaining social distance, some are **marking the floor (see our Covid-19 Library Supplies page)** with how close a staff member can be, and others are using software such as TeamViewer or other VNC software that allows a staff member to control the user's computer remotely.

Many libraries have also found ways to increase their Wi-Fi signal to cover their parking lots and are loaning out additional tablets to supplement computer use in the library.

To help keep staff safe, some libraries are **labeling designated computer** mice and keyboards for each staff member to use when they work at shared workstations, as well as increasing disinfecting measures for the rest of the shared equipment.

## **Rearranging Furnishings**

Many respondents have **removed extra seating** or marked it with "do not use" signs. They have also **marked floors** with social distancing indicators to show patrons how far apart they need to stay and implemented stanchions at their circulation desks to control traffic.

Inevitably, said one respondent, the first few people in your library are going to re-arrange all of the tables you have carefully measured and moved apart, so make sure you have clear signage instructing them not to move anything.

Library staff have also tried to arrange their individual tables and chairs near outlets, or they've incorporated mobile power near the individual workspaces they have created.

Others noted that they are realizing now more than ever the need for flexible, movable, durable furniture that can be easily cleaned.

## **Modifying the Children's Area**

Many respondents are keeping their children's areas closed for the time being, and others are setting strict limitations, such as limiting the number of patrons in the area at one time. They have also removed seating to accommodate social distancing and have placed toys and manipulatives in storage.

Those that are keeping their children's areas closed have set up services to pull books for their youngest patrons to check out and are offering read-alike lists for kids to choose books from.

With in-person programming on pause, grab-and-go kits are a popular way to serve youngsters, and many librarians are pairing these with virtual programming.

## **Providing Virtual Programming**

None of the survey respondents are offering in-person programming at the time of this writing; however, many are starting or continuing to **provide virtual programming** for all age groups. Librarians have been endlessly innovative in delivering high-quality programming to their communities, from book clubs to story times to craft instructions.

Some libraries have set up green screen areas to help staff who are now working in the physical library continue to provide their virtual programming.

## **Increasing Signage Throughout the Library**

With all the new policies and procedures, library workers have had to **increase their signage (see our Library Signage )** throughout their library exponentially.

Signs include but are not limited to the following:

Curbside pickup procedures

Patron limits in the physical library

How many computers can be in use and how long patrons can use them

Handwashing procedures

What to do if you pick up a book or movie and decide not to take it

Procedures or limitations for the children's area

Social distancing reminders

E-resource promotion

Promotion of phone consultation services

Respondents also recommended that libraries be transparent about their sanitizing efforts by posting cleaning schedules on all public-access surfaces. This helps maintain a regular cleaning schedule and helps patrons feel safer and more comfortable in the library.

Need help creating multiple signs for your library? **Check our Library Signage section.**

## **Quarantining Materials**

Some libraries that are allowing browsing are cutting down on how often materials are handled by asking patrons to leave any items they touch **on book trucks (see our Book Truck & Book Cart)** at the end of aisles and are then quarantining them or wiping them down with disinfectant between contacts.

For items that are checked out, many libraries have a 72-hour quarantine process in place. Movie cases and other plastic cases are disinfected with cleaning solutions when returned.

Several respondents are overriding normal checkout limits, but one respondent whose library had increased checkout periods warned that they were preparing for a high loss of inventory, as they expected that some materials might not get returned.

## **Continuing to Learn from Others**

Across the country, libraries are in different situations and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to force us all to adapt and pivot. Fortunately, the library community is made up of learners, researchers, and knowledge-lenders, and we will continue to learn from each other as we move forward.



### **About The Author**

#### **Liz Bowie**

Liz is the Marketing Content Manager. Her background includes editorial management and product development of innovative and time-saving tools for schools and libraries, with an emphasis on Common Core, literacy and math. The products she and her team have developed, including classroom games, learning centers and professional development resources, have garnered 46 industry awards for excellence in education. Liz is passionate about promoting literacy through her work and the work of others.

If you are interested in sharing your ideas and programming tips. Please contact [info@Promatech.com.sg](mailto:info@Promatech.com.sg)