

Infectious Disease Outbreak/Pandemic Response Plan

Procedures for the



DRAFT – Plans subject to change

March 4, 2020

I. **Situation,**

From the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

CDC is responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel (new) coronavirus that was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China and which has now been detected in 37 locations internationally, including cases in the United States. The virus has been named “SARS-CoV-2” and the disease it causes has been named “coronavirus disease 2019” (abbreviated “COVID-19”).

On January 30, 2020, the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a “[public health emergency of international concern](#)” (PHEIC). On January 31, 2020, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II declared a public health emergency (PHE) for the United States to aid the nation’s healthcare community in responding to COVID-19. (Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>, accessed February 26, 2020.)

II. **Purpose and Rationale**

The Poudre River Public Library District is establishing this plan in response to threats posed by the COVID-19 as well as other highly infectious diseases with potential for pandemic. The District seeks a measured and responsible response to potential pandemic. These procedures represent the District’s commitment to provide library services to the public in the safest and most effective way possible during a period of pandemic illness, with public health and safety the primary concern and a goal of continuity of business operations insofar as is possible.

The local, national and international conditions of pandemic illness may change on a daily basis. The current situation regarding COVID-19 is dynamic and developing rapidly. The District’s response is subject to modification based on the best and most current information and shifting conditions. These procedures are therefore subject to change as the District identifies the most effective responses to a pandemic.

The District maintains a long-term, vital partnership with Front Range Community College-Larimer Campus in the operations of the joint use Harmony Library, located on the campus and owned by the college. Harmony Library serves as both a public library for the surrounding community and as the campus library serving the entire college community. In matters of mutual interest related to Harmony Library’s operations and services, the District will consult and confer with the College to reach decisions that the two parties agree are in the best interests of both service communities.

Commitment to Free and Equal Access for All

The District is committed to providing a welcoming space for all community members that is inclusive and equitable. To that end, the District seeks to prevent misinformation and stop fear and discrimination around COVID-19. Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race, ethnicity, or nationality. The Library District will work to provide accurate information regarding COVID-19 and will confront misinformation that stigmatizes or characterizes any person or group in a discriminatory manner.

III. Coordination with Public Health Authorities and Local Government

An effective response to pandemic requires ongoing coordination with public health authorities and local governmental and educational entities. The Library District is formulating its response to the threat posed by COVID-19 in cooperation with local, state and national health authorities and in consultation with local city and county governments and educational entities such as the City of Fort Collins, Larimer County, Poudre School District, Front Range Community College-Larimer Campus and Colorado State University. The procedures here are based on recommendations from the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment (LCDHE) (<https://www.larimer.org/health>), the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (<https://www.colorado.gov/cdphe>), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<https://www.cdc.gov/>).

Communications, both internal and external, are a critical component of the District's response. The District is committed to communicating in a timely and accurate manner with the public, staff, public health entities, the media and community partners. The District will continually monitor external factors, update procedures based on the latest and best information available, and communicate changes effectively.

The District will work to ensure that all staff members understand District plans and procedures. Pandemic illness is frequently a source of considerable anxiety. Educating staff by sharing the most current and accurate information available is the most effective way to reduce anxiety.

- a. Inform staff of the District's planning efforts and ongoing response to the pandemic.

In an effort to inform staff, the District will:

- i. Develop a informational documents for staff, to help staff understand District operating procedures and help them communicate plans and procedures to the public.

- ii. Invite questions from staff regarding plans and afford staff the opportunity throughout the pandemic response period to express concerns and suggestions.
 - iii. Respond to staff questions and comments as soon as possible.
- b. Inform the public of the District’s planning efforts and ongoing response to the pandemic.

In an effort to inform the public, the District will:

 - i. Post current information about the Library District’s pandemic response on the District’s website (www.PoudreLibraries.org).
 - ii. Develop and maintain an information page on the District’s website for the public regarding COVID-19.
 - iii. Respond to questions from members of the public as soon as possible.
 - iv. Inform local media and public of relevant changes to library operations and procedures.
- c. Networking. The District will network cooperatively with public health authorities, local governmental and educational entities, and other organizations and groups in the community.
- d. Communications with other libraries and professional organizations. The District will work cooperatively with regional, state, and national library organizations and public libraries.

IV. Library Operations

a. Continuity of Services

The District seeks a balanced, responsible approach to operations informed by the best and latest science and public health guidance available. There are obvious risks in failing to prepare and respond adequately to the threat presented by pandemic disease agents. At the same time, significant changes to library operations and services have the potential to disrupt normal community use of their libraries more than the effects of pandemic illness alone. The District will consider costs and benefits to residents and staff regarding proposed changes to operations. Please see Section V., “Minimizing Negative Impacts on Operations and Services,” for further details.

The District will maintain continuity of library services to the greatest extent possible while working to provide safe facilities and cooperating with public health authorities.

b. Public Health Measures

The District is committed to providing safe and sanitary facilities for the public and for library staff. Based on recommendations from the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment, the CDC, or other public health

authorities, the District may decide to temporarily increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing in its facilities, especially areas and surfaces that experience the highest use.

However, no amount of reasonable effort can ever guarantee that public places are free of infectious agents, including, potentially, COVID-19. Even a recently cleaned and disinfected surface can potentially transmit disease once touched by a sick person. With approximately 3,000 visitors a day to our three public facilities, the District encourages individuals to take preventative measures as a necessary component in minimizing public health risks in the library.

The District emphasizes prevention and individual responsibility for taking steps that contribute to keeping well and helping prevent the spread of infectious illness. To that end, the District provides public and staff with convenient access to hand sanitizer, hand washing facilities, disinfecting wipes, and facial tissues in all of our facilities. The District will post signs in restrooms encouraging hand washing and routine practices that help minimize the spread of infectious illness from person to person.

c. Temporary Reduction or Suspension of Services

During the course of a pandemic, public health authorities may advise or mandate that libraries and other public gathering places minimize or avoid conditions where numerous individuals congregate in relatively confined spaces. In such cases, the Executive Director may decide to temporarily discontinue library programs, such as storytimes, as well as use of library meeting rooms by the public. Some services, such as access to public use computers and open study spaces, may be curtailed or limited but not completely suspended in order to reduce risk, for example through social distancing such that open library seats are two or more meters apart.

Programs, including regularly scheduled programs such as storytimes, may be cancelled under the following conditions:

- The Library District cannot provide them safely or effectively
- Appropriate staff is not available to support or provide programs
- Non-staff programmers are not available
- Attendance at programs is too low
- When requested or required to curtail public gatherings by local, state, or Federal public health authorities.

d. Temporary Closure of District Facilities

Closure of one or more of the District's libraries will be at the discretion of the Executive Director. In the case of Harmony Library, closure will be considered jointly with senior administrators of the Front Range Community College.

District libraries may be closed temporarily under one or more of the following conditions:

- i. Public health authorities, such as the Director of the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment, advise, request, or order such closure.
- ii. The Poudre School District closes public schools in the District.
- iii. Public visitation is too low to warrant keeping libraries open.
- iv. Too few staff members are available to operate libraries.
- v. Front Range Community College-Larimer Campus closes due to the pandemic.
- vi. Any other conditions which prevent the District from operating public facilities safely and effectively.

V. Minimizing Negative Impacts on Operations and Services

The District provides crucial resources and services to residents. The District will strive to minimize negative impacts on access to resources and services resulting from procedures adopted in response to pandemic illness.

The District will work to preserve access to its online resources both in its libraries and remotely. Residents with Internet access can use the District's online resources remotely and when libraries are closed. The District will strive to maintain access to its digital resources such as its Internet site, subscription databases, online catalog and collections of digital books and other media even in the event that the District's physical facilities are closed temporarily.

The District recognizes that some residents lack home computers or Internet connectivity and rely on the public library to provide free Internet access. While District libraries remain open, the District will strive to maintain public Internet access insofar as it is possible to do so safely.

In coordination with health authorities, the District will consider alternatives to complete suspension of public computing, depending on emerging conditions. Measures might include provision of disinfectant wipes, social distancing measures to increase space between simultaneous computer users, and, potentially, latex gloves and health care facemasks.

In the event of a temporary closure of the library, the District may suspend all due dates, suspend all late fees, or both. The District will use its website, social media, library email distribution lists, and work with local media to publicize any such suspension. The District would encourage the public to keep checked out items in their homes until further notice. A suspension would be advantageous for a number of reasons. It would help prevent libraries from being inundated with returned materials while no items were getting checked out. It would prevent customers from feeling a need to venture to the library to return materials, as a suspension would provide assurance that no fines would accrue on items

currently checked out. Remote return drops would be closed during a period of closure.

Potential Procedures with Significant Negative Impacts on Library Operations

Quarantine on recently returned items

While perhaps unlikely, it is possible that a quarantine period on recently-returned materials is recommended by public health authorities. The District will consider how such a process might be implemented as well as how operational problems might be addressed.

At the time of this report no specific data is available on the viability of COVID-19 on objects, or its transmissibility via objects such as books. Regarding other coronaviruses, there seems to be variation from hours to many days or more in the reported durations of viability of COVID-19 on various objects. (See for example CDC FAQs at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>, in particular the answer to the question “Q: Am I at risk for COVID-19 from a package or products shipping from China?”).

A quarantine period on returned materials of several hours or longer would disrupt normal operations significantly. Checking in and shelving of returned materials would be delayed. Secure temporary storage areas and additional, movable bins would likely be needed. Required space for such procedures is not readily available in all of our libraries. A materials quarantine might necessitate closure of one or more of our meeting rooms for the duration of the procedure. In contemplating such a significant departure from normal operations, the District will consider both the practicality of proposed measures, and the actual, rather than presumed, public health benefits in consultation with authorities.

Disinfecting and cleaning of all returned library items

The suggestion might arise that a procedure be implemented that staff clean each returned item at the time of check in. Due to the inordinate amount of time required, such a procedure would prove impractical to the point of slowing library operations to a near standstill. In addition, while surface covers of library items might potentially be cleaned it is not possible to disinfect each page of returned books. Finally, effective disinfecting methods such as heat, liquids, and gels would likely damage or destroy library items, especially with repeated application.

Even if one or both of the processes above were implemented---quarantining and individual disinfecting---the items would be subject to being touched again by members of the public as soon as they were re-shelved.

Closed stacks

All libraries in the District currently have open stacks, which means that library users have direct and free access to shelves where books, CDs, DVDs and other items are stored, and are able to retrieve items themselves. Health officials or others might suggest that the District implement a system of “closed” stacks for a

period of time. In a closed stack arrangement, only staff can access shelved materials, and staff must retrieve requested materials for the public.

Such a system is highly impractical for any of our libraries given the physical arrangement of District facilities and current work flow processes. Both have been designed to facilitate self-directed service. A closed stack system would be highly difficult, time consuming, and inefficient to implement in District libraries.

VI. Library Staff

a. General

The District is committed to communicating with staff regarding its pandemic illness plans to ensure that all staff members understand the procedures and their role in the District's response. The District will make every effort to respond to staff concerns and questions and will consider revising procedures based on continuing dialog with staff members throughout the Library.

b. Personnel Policies and Procedures

During a pandemic many human resources questions regarding staffing and personnel matters will arise.

The Library District's Personnel Policies and Human Resources department staff will inform the District's response to relevant issues such as paid time off, sick leave and return from sick leave, Family Medical Leave, emergency leave for hourly employees, extended benefits, working from home, and related matters. Existing policies will govern all such decisions unless and until the District's Board of Trustees modifies the policies.

c. Prevention and Personal Responsibility

The emphasis of the District's response is on good hygiene habits and personal responsibility in preventing the spread of infectious illness. The District encourages staff to follow the CDC/LCDHE guidelines which aim to slow the spread of infectious diseases in these ways:

[From Larimer County Department of Health and Environment]

As with other respiratory viruses, we recommend people protect themselves and others by practicing everyday actions:

- Clean hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing.
- Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.
- Stay home if you are sick.

- Get an annual flu vaccine if you have not had one. (Although COVID-19 is not an influenza virus, and the flu vaccine is not a vaccine for COVID-19, an annual flu shot is recommended as a general method to reduce occurrence of infectious disease.)
- For further guidelines regarding individuals infected with COVID-19 specifically, see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>.

d. Continuity of Services with Reduced Staffing

Library managers and administration will develop continuity of service plans with reduced, less-than-optimal staffing levels. Plans will prioritize safety and remotely accessible services, in anticipation of potential closures of physical facilities, as well as limited staffing plans for service desks and service areas in District facilities to provide a basic level of service should illness temporarily reduce the Library's available workforce during pandemic.

e. Library Closures

In the event that one or two District libraries are closed, library managers will first work to identify any necessary tasks for employees to perform at the facility or facilities remaining open. Employees from closed facilities may be reassigned to open facilities if productive work is available. Depending on the nature of the closure, selected staff may continue to work in District facilities to perform tasks related to continuity of services.

Potential on-site work tasks during a public closure might include:

- Collections inventory
- Processing and cataloging
- Retrospective spine labeling for materials on shelves
- Insure collections are in correct order by shelf reading the spine labels on materials
- Collection management
- Computer and network maintenance and support (internal and external)
- Shifting collections
- Self guided computer training opportunities for staff on software and online resources
- Materials repair
- Building projects and repairs
- Mailing out materials from the library
- Providing telephone reference from various locations, possibly reassigning staff to expand this service
- Providing online reference
- Administrative activities

In the event of either a partial or complete closure of District facilities, the type and amount of paid and unpaid leave available to employees will be determined by the District's personnel policies.

f. Working from Home

In the event of a partial or complete closure of the Library, or if an emerging situation related to a pandemic warrants it, the District will consider work-at-home possibilities for appropriate staff in an effort to maintain the continuity of limited library services.