

# Derry Public Library Pandemic Policy

12/13/2021

## I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the Covid-19 global pandemic caused libraries across the State of New Hampshire, including the Derry Public Library (“DPL”), to cease normal operations for an extended period of time. This document – the Derry Public Library Pandemic Policy (“Pandemic Policy”) – establishes policies which aim to enable DPL to operate effectively during the Covid-19 global pandemic, as well as any future pandemics which may impact DPL’s operations.

The purpose of this Pandemic Policy is to establish protocols which DPL can utilize during a pandemic that impacts the State of New Hampshire, and the citizens of the Town of Derry, specifically.

This Pandemic Policy differs from a more general emergency preparedness policy. Emergency preparedness policies presume that staff will return to the building or begin rebuilding quickly after an emergency event. Based on our experience with the Covid-19 global pandemic, DPL must be prepared for prolonged service disruption during this and possibly future pandemics.

During a pandemic, DPL may be required to operate with limited staffing or take measures to help slow the spread of the illness, including but not limited to service restrictions, limited hours of operation, or closure by order of local public health officials. Due to the often prolonged nature of a pandemic compared to other natural disasters or man-made crises, it is important to ensure that DPL’s core functions and activities can be maintained for an extended period of time with limited staff, reduced hours or extended building closure.

This Pandemic Policy is intended to “overlay” DPL’s other policies, and only be in effect during a pandemic that impacts the citizens of Derry, such as the Covid-19 global pandemic. All other DPL policies in effect at the onset of a pandemic shall remain in effect except as modified by this Pandemic Policy. In the event of any conflict, the provisions of this Pandemic Policy shall supersede and take precedence over any provisions contained in other DPL policies.

## II. DEFINITIONS

**Appropriate Staffing Level:** The number of qualified staff necessary to provide service safely, effectively and efficiently, as determined by the Library Director or his/her designee.

**Disinfectant:** An agent that frees from infection; especially: a chemical that destroys vegetative forms of harmful microorganisms (such as bacteria and fungi) especially on inanimate objects (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disinfectant>)

**Furlough:** A temporary lay off from work, during which employees are not paid, but in which they keep their employment benefits, including but not limited to health insurance, dental insurance, and vacation accruals. Contrasted to a traditional lay off or dismissal, with a furlough, an employer intends to return employees to work when it is financially prudent to do so.

**Pandemic:** An outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population: a pandemic outbreak of a disease. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic>)

**Personal Protective Equipment (“PPE”):** Equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious workplace injuries and illnesses. These injuries and illnesses may result from contact with chemical, radiological, physical, electrical, mechanical, or other workplace hazards. Personal protective equipment may include items such as gloves, masks, safety glasses and shoes, earplugs or muffs, hard hats, respirators, or coveralls, vests and full body suits. (<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/personalprotectiveequipment/>)

**Public Health Emergency:** A state of emergency following a declaration of an organization such as the World Health Organization (“WHO”), or government such as that of the United States of America, or State of New Hampshire. For the Covid-19 pandemic, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II declared a public health emergency for the entire United States, retroactive to January 27, 2020. (<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/01/31/secretary-azar-declares-public-health-emergency-us-2019-novel-coronavirus.html>)

**Quarantine Period:** A period of time that must elapse before those exposed to or attacked by a contagious disease can be considered as incapable respectively of developing or transmitting the disease. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quarantine%20period>)

**Social Distancing (aka Physical Distancing):** The practice of maintaining a greater than usual physical distance (such as six feet or more) from other people or of avoiding direct contact with people or objects in public places during the outbreak of a contagious disease in order to minimize exposure and reduce the transmission of infection. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20distancing>)

**Sneeze Guard:** A plastic or glass screen originally designed to protect food from contamination. Sneeze guards are common in restaurants and buffets, and prevent pathogens from entering food through sneezing. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneeze\\_guard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneeze_guard)) Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, sneeze guards have been used in many settings to protect people from viral exposure.

### **III. EFFECTIVE DATE**

While this Pandemic Policy is available for implementation at DPL immediately upon ratification by the DPL Board of Trustees (“Trustees”), it will only impact existing DPL policies during the time in which a Public Health Emergency has been declared relative to a pandemic, and the Public Health Emergency remains active.

### **IV. DPL’S MISSION STATEMENT**

When this Pandemic Policy is not in effect, DPL’s mission statement is: *“The Derry Public Library is a welcoming space for the community to connect, explore and grow.”*

When this Pandemic Policy is in effect, DPL’s revised mission statement is: *“The Derry Public Library serves the community’s evolving informational and cultural needs, and supports residents’ efforts to connect, explore and grow.”*

### **V. SERVICE LEVELS**

During a pandemic, the services that DPL are able to provide its patrons will depend on the severity of the pandemic locally, state-wide, and regionally.

### **MANDATORY CLOSURE**

DPL will close to the public in the event of a public health mandate, order, or a recommendation for closure issued by public health or government officials at the local, county, or state level.

### **MANDATORY ABSENCE FROM DPL DURING QUARANTINE PERIOD**

DPL will follow the current CDC and DHHS guidance, as it is revised periodically, relating to exposures to the pandemic illness, testing protocols, and the question of whether it is necessary to quarantine/isolate.

Whether a DPL staff member or patron needs to quarantine and/or isolate after an exposure to the pandemic illness and remain absent from DPL may depend on several factors, including but not limited to the individual’s level of exposure to the illness, whether PPE was worn in proximity to an infected person, the individual’s vaccination status, and whether they are symptomatic. As noted above, DPL will follow current CDC and DHHS guidance to the greatest extent possible when addressing mandatory absences from DPL.

### **DISCRETIONARY CLOSURE**

At the discretion of the Library Director (“Director”), DPL may close to the public, reduce its operating hours, or limit services temporarily in the event that:

- there is insufficient staff to maintain an appropriate staffing level;
- DPL staff and patrons are unable to maintain adequate social distancing in the building;
- DPL patrons are not complying with safety requirements aimed at preventing the transmission of the pandemic illness;
- DPL is unable to obtain necessary PPE or disinfectants to provide for the health and safety of its staff and patrons.

In the event of closure or reduction in operating hours, the Director or designee will maintain communication with Trustees, staff, the public, and the Town Manager.

## **NORMAL OPERATION**

Upon the termination of a declaration of the Public Health Emergency which led to reduced services, DPL should strive to return to normal hours of operation as soon as practicable, and provide library services approximating those that were being provided prior to the pandemic. A “new” normal may exist at the conclusion of a Public Health Emergency, and library services may out of necessity be somewhat different than prior to the pandemic. It is expected that services/activities that have been deprioritized during the pandemic, which are listed later in this Pandemic Policy under Section VIII, will take longer to re-introduce than those services/activities which continue to be prioritized during the pandemic.

## **VI. STAFFING**

To provide services safely and efficiently during a pandemic, the following actions may be taken at the discretion of the Director or designee, or at the direction of the Trustees:

- Implementing increased health/safety measures for staff, including but not limited to mandatory use of PPE and sneeze guards, and increased use of disinfectants to clean work areas and materials;
- Restricting access to certain areas in the library, including but not limited to closing off floors, silent study rooms, and meeting rooms;
- Requiring social distancing practices throughout the library building;
- Reducing hours that DPL is open to the public;
- Cancelling all programs, special events, and meeting room reservations;
- Reallocating employee responsibilities to meet new needs as a result of the pandemic;
- Changing employee schedules to provide necessary coverage during open hours; and
- Closing the library.

If the Library is open to the public, employees are expected to report to work on time as scheduled, excluding any excused absences, following DPL’s established Personnel policy. In the event that DPL is closed to the public or operates under service restrictions for thirty (30) days or less, all full and part-time employees shall be compensated for their regularly scheduled hours, while continuing to work from home to the greatest extent possible.

If DPL is closed or its hours of operation reduced, healthy employees may be assigned work-at-home tasks to be completed in their compensated hours. When appropriate, work tools (e.g., laptops, supplies, etc.) will be checked out to employees by the Director or designee for work-at-home assignments.

In the event that DPL is closed to the public or operates under service restrictions in excess of thirty (30) days, the Director may furlough or decrease scheduled hours of some or all DPL staff in consultation with the Trustees, pursuant to DPL's service needs. During this time the Director also may exercise discretion in allowing staff who are unable or unwilling to work to use their earned time, or take leave without pay, outside the normal parameters of the Personnel policy.

The Trustees reaffirm the statement made in the introduction to DPL's Personnel Policy here in this Pandemic Policy: Notwithstanding personal compassion for an employee's situation, the Trustees and Director must always be guided by the service needs of the library. This foundational principle of library staffing is true before, during, and after a pandemic.

## **VII. COMMUNICATION**

During a pandemic, the Director will communicate with DPL Trustees, staff, the public, and the Town Manager clearly and quickly about any change in services or operating hours. In communicating pandemic related changes at DPL to the public, DPL staff should follow the normal procedures used for communications with the public, including but not limited to use of the library website, Facebook, social media, and other news outlets.

## **VIII. LIBRARY OPERATION PRIORITIES**

DPL will prioritize the following essential services/activities during a pandemic:

- Maintaining public access to information, both virtually and in-person;
- Facilitating the lending of library materials to patrons in a safe and efficient manner;
- Creating virtual programming and resources to meet the needs of all age groups within the community;
- When deemed safe, providing in-person outdoor library programs;
- Payroll;
- Accounts Payable; and
- Facility Maintenance.

DPL will deprioritize all services/activities not noted above during a pandemic, including but not limited to the following:

- Hosting in-person library programs indoors;

- In-person instruction by DPL librarians for patrons;
- Requesting interlibrary loans (“ILL”) for patrons, and filling ILL requests from other libraries;
- In-person staff meetings; and
- Participation in organizations by DPL staff that require travel and in-person attendance.

In the case of reduced staffing or reduced hours of operation, the Director or designee, in consultation with department heads, will prioritize service-related tasks, and assign work plans to staff.

## **IX. PANDEMIC SERVICE PLAN**

The Trustees, in consultation with the Director and Assistant Director, will enact a Pandemic Service Plan to provide more detailed guidance to DPL relating to library services that may be implemented in stages both during and after a pandemic. The Pandemic Service Plan will take into account recommendations from a variety of local, state, regional, and national authorities, as relevant.

DPL’s Pandemic Service Plan will work in tandem with this Pandemic Policy, and strive to provide the guidance necessary for DPL to operate as safely, effectively, and efficiently as possible throughout the life-cycle of a pandemic.