

COVID-19 Transitioning – Obligatory Conditions and Guidelines for Libraries

The following obligatory conditions are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and require strict adherence. Failure to adhere to these conditions will result in enforcement procedures as provided by the Act.

As COVID-19 restrictions are gradually relaxed, employers and workers must work together to adapt and promote safe work practices consistent with advice from public health authorities and to ensure that premises are ready for the social distancing and correct hygiene measures that are critical to the success of the transition. Employers, workers and customers must prevent the transmission of COVID-19 while at work, consistent with updated advice from the public health authorities. Employers and workers must prepare for the possibility that there will be cases of COVID-19 in the workplace and be ready to respond immediately, appropriately, effectively and efficiently, and consistent with specific recommendations from public health authorities.

These guidelines shall apply to all forms of libraries including National and regional libraries, school, University, research and academic libraries and private collections.

Mandatory conditions to be observed by Libraries

The libraries shall implement the following measures:

- a) exercise the right of refusal of entry into the library of visitors if they are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms;
- b) users will be checked with non-contact infra-red thermometers at the door. Users with a temperature above 37.2 C will not be allowed in;
- c) ensure that inside the library every person keeps a minimum distance of 2 metres from others;
- d) ensure that maximum capacity of visitors that the library can hold at any one time inside the building is one person per 4 square metres, including staff;
- e) affix visible signage at the entrance of the library indicating the maximum capacity that the premises can hold at any one time;
- f) acrylic or tempered glass barriers must be fitted in reception areas (2metres from the floor). If this is not manned, then this is not required); and;

- g) indicate with visible markings outside and inside the library two (2) metre distances that visitors shall respect whilst queuing.
- h) Encourage the use of e-books
- i) hand sanitizers must be made available at the entrance / exit of the library and in other strategic places (sanitizers with sensors are recommended);
- j) users will be asked to sanitize their hands on entering and upon leaving premises;
- k) users who refuse this procedure will not be allowed in;
- l) ensure that visitors and staff always wear a face mask (covering mouth, nose and chin) or face visor whilst inside the library;
- m) Families should be allowed to go together or – minors are to be accompanied by only one adult;
- n) No one permitted to stay within the library reading. Study spaces where people may spend a longer time in the company of others shall remain closed;
- o) Returned books are to be quarantined for 72 hours before being placed again into circulation;
- p) Close the cloakrooms requiring the presence of staff to avoid unnecessary handling and contact. Lockers can remain available if they are disinfected regularly between uses;
- q) Ensure that devices that require handling are systematically disinfected before and after each use;
- r) Inform the general public about all restrictions on the library’s website and at the entrance.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 presents with coughing or sneezing which release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets can fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as counters, display items, desks, tables, machinery or telephones. Other frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, intercoms, lift buttons are other surfaces which are frequently touched by visitors and employees and can become contaminated. People can catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Standing within two metres of a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period, one can catch the disease by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age. People with weakened

immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

Viability of COVID-19 on Cardboard, Paper and other Materials

A study published in March in The New England Journal of Medicine showed that the virus remained active on plastic and stainless steel surfaces for two to three days under the conditions of the experiment. It remained active for up to 24 hours on cardboard". A study published on the Lancet on 2nd April 2020 showed that "no active virus could be recovered from paper and tissues after a 3-hour incubation". This data can inform appropriate action including, wiping down cardboard and plastic-covered books with alcohol wipes and leaving returned books to quarantine until the danger of transmission has passed.

A bigger concern is however more about the hard non-porous surfaces that are high touch, because the virus survives longer on them, but also because it's much easier for hands becoming contaminated after touching one of those surfaces.

Library management should:

- Exercise the right of refusal of entry into the library of visitors if they are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms including coughing, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat.
- Ensure that maximum capacity of visitors inside the library at any one time is one person per 4 square metres, including staff. To achieve this 4 square metre 'rule';
 - calculate the area of the site (e.g. length of site in metres x width of library in metres = area of site in square metres),
 - divide the area of the site by 4, and
 - the answer of that division (ignoring any remainder) is the maximum capacity that the site can hold at any one time.
 - by way of example, if a site is 25 square metres in size, $25 \div 4 = 6.25$, ignoring 0.25, the site should allow only six persons at any time inside the site, including staff.
- As far as possible, set up a system whereby renewal of borrowing of books can be made online, by phone and/or by email.

- The number of visitors to the library should be limited according to the maximum capacity of the library.
- Place floor stickers and signage that provide guidance for social distancing.
- Keep a record of the names, contact details and date and time of visit for all visitors in order to facilitate contact tracing should this be required.
- Remove non-essential high touch items such as information leaflets.
- Encourage contactless renewal of books as much as possible e.g. through the scanning of bar codes
- Ensure that employees who are sick MUST stay home.
- Provide training and educational materials for staff on sanitation, handwashing, cough and sneeze etiquette, use of face masks, visors, gloves and aprons, and other protective behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID19.
- Ensure staff rooms are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized and do not allow staff to congregate.
- Ensure that all wash hand basins in the workplace have soap and paper towels available. No air flow driers or revolving cloth towels are allowed.
- Place handwashing signs in the restrooms.
- Provide alcohol wipes near the phone
- Consider flexible work schedules/ hours to reduce the number of people (employees and visitors) in libraries at all times in order to maintain social distancing.
- Employee workstations shall be as far apart as possible. The use of acrylic or tempered glass barriers between employee workstations and between library staff and visitors shall be encouraged. Ideally such acrylic or tempered glass barriers shall be at least 2metres high from the floor.
- Ensure that separate flows of entrances and exits are maintained, where possible.
- Provide staff with the required adequate personal protective equipment all the times.
- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of premises and frequently touched surfaces as per updated national guidelines.
- Cleaning all accessible areas in the facility at least daily.
- Interior doors should be left open whenever possible. Otherwise, they must be disinfected each time they are used.
- Restrict access to rooms and facilities that cannot be fully cleaned or disinfected.

- Elevators must be reserved to individuals with mobility problems and ensuring a distance of 2 metres is respected between every person. Controls should be disinfected after each use.

Handling of Physical Library Material

- The recommended quarantine period for physical lending material (books, DVDs etc.) at risk of contamination from the COVID-19 virus is **72 hours**. For this period, the materials should be placed in boxes, sealed and date marked and where possible, stored in a separate location.
- When handling returned library materials, staff should wear gloves and avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Materials that have been quarantined for a minimum of 72 hours may be handled without gloves.
- Avoid cross-contamination of returned materials and quarantined materials.
- Quarantine of library materials is the most effective known method of disinfection.
- Various disinfectants have been shown to be effective on the novel coronavirus, however, these chemicals are not safe to use on library and historic materials. While expensive "book sterilization" or "book disinfection" equipment is now being marketed to libraries, archives, and museums, there is no evidence or studies to suggest that these technologies are effective or won't cause unnecessary damage to collections. Even methods for UV sterilization have not been standardized.
- The risks to books subjected to aqueous cleaning or disinfecting include water damage and weakened hinges and joints. Books wrapped in polyester or polyethylene can be more reasonably cleaned and disinfected, and strong library-binding buckram cloth coverings can probably withstand the enhanced cleaning too but the risk of damage to the books still exist.
- It is a misperception that spraying or wiping the outside of a volume with alcohol, or bleach is sufficient to de-nature the virus across the entire volume of the book.
- After handling materials, hands should be washed with soap and water for 20 seconds as per guidelines further down in this document.

Other materials and Devices

- Computer use by customers will be restricted in order to facilitate proper sanitation of computer devices.
- Braille materials are usually covered by a thin layer of plastic. These can be disinfected by cleaning with alcohol wipes or by using disposable single-use covers.
- For materials with plastic covers, such as DVDs, cleaning with alcohol wipes is suggested, allowing these to go back into circulation immediately.
- Disposable headphones are recommended.

Communication with visitors:

- Ensure that visitors are aware of what is expected of them as part of the hygiene and infection control measures being practiced at the library BEFORE entering the site. These can be communicated to visitors over the phone, via email or other appropriate virtual channels.
- Notify the public of context-related restrictions on the library's website (if applicable) and before entering the library
- Proactively communicate the precautions in place in term of social distancing, visitor registration and temperature screening.
- Place posters in prominent places.
- Appeal to visitors to cooperate and practice good hand hygiene

Other methods of service delivery

- This includes finding means for continuing to provide information services for the public, such as digital reference, online materials access and expansion of other online resources such as increasing access to e books

Maintaining good hygiene practices

Staff should:

- Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.
- Washing hands with soap should be given priority over using alcohol hand rub. The application of alcohol hand rub should not be done in place of hand washing but rather as a complementary step AFTER handwashing or if hand washing is not convenient. Alcohol hand rub should contain a minimum of 70% alcohol.
- Wash hands frequently especially:

- Before and after contact with a visitor
 - Before and after eating
 - Before and after cigarette breaks
 - Before putting on and after removing face masks, visors, gloves and aprons
 - Before and after cleaning equipment and the environment in the library
 - After using the rest room
 - Upon arriving at work and at home
- Use disposable hand towels to dry hands and to open and turn off taps.
 - Not use handshakes/hugs when greeting visitors and colleagues.
 - Postpone or cancel non-essential meetings or training. If meetings or training are essential, use non face-to-face options such as tele and video conferencing.
 - Monitor their personal health and condition for any symptoms, however mild.
 - Implement temperature checks on entry.
 - All staff to wear face masks or visors
 - If uniforms are used at work, they should be changed daily and washed after use. Uniforms/clothing worn at the library should not be worn at home.

10 STEPS TO CLEAN YOUR HANDS

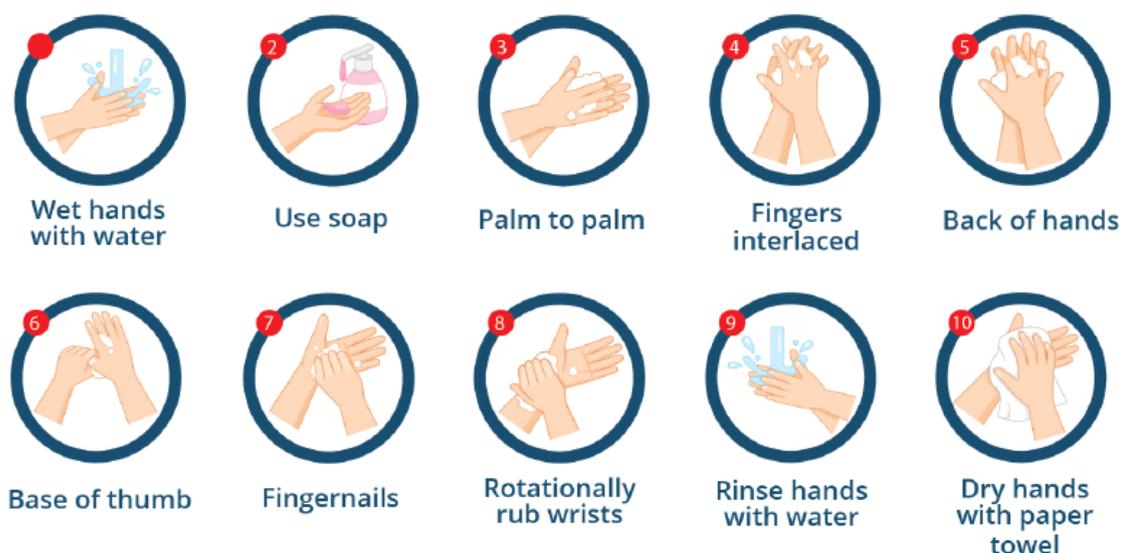


Fig. 1: 10 steps to wash your hands properly

- Common equipment used by several staff members will need to be disinfected regularly. In the absence of disinfection standards, this equipment shall not be used.
- Staff will clean their workplace daily with alcohol-based wipes or paper towels, regardless of the cleaning service in place
- Practice good respiratory etiquette requiring everyone at the library to, at all times:
 - cover their coughs and sneezes with a clean tissue or use their elbow (and no spitting)
 - avoid touching their face, eyes, nose and mouth
 - dispose of used tissues and cigarette butts hygienically, e.g. in closed bins
 - clean and disinfect shared equipment and machinery after use
 - wash body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day
 - have no intentional physical contact such as shaking hands and patting backs
- Staff who develop a mild cough, fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.2°C or higher), shortness of breath, headaches, tiredness, loss of taste, loss of smell or diarrhoea, should call the public health helpline on 111 giving details of their symptoms.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by staff



Wash your hands with soap and water or sanitizer before touching the mask



Inspect the mask for tears or holes



Find the top side where the metal piece or stiff edge is



Hold the mask from the elastic loops and place it on your face. Ensure the coloured-side faces outwards



Avoid touching the front side of the mask while putting it on your face



Place the metal piece or stiff edge over your nose



Cover your mouth, nose and chin. Do not leave gaps on the side



Remove the mask from behind the ears or from the elastic loops



Keep the used mask away from you and surfaces once it is removed



Dispose of the mask immediately after use in a safe way



Wash your hands either with soap and water or sanitizer after discarding the mask

- Staff should wear a surgical or cotton mask or face visor when providing a service to a visitor.
- The face mask should completely cover the face from the bridge of the nose down to the chin.
- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser before putting on and taking off the face mask.
- When taking off the face mask, remove it from behind, avoiding to touching the front side.

- Dispose of the face mask safely by placing it in a plastic bag and put it in the trash if it is disposable.
- Wash your hands or apply 70% alcohol hand-rub immediately after removing the face mask.
- Washable, reusable face masks should be washed as soon as possible after each use, using common laundry detergent at 60 °C.
- Surgical masks are not intended to be used more than once. If your mask is damaged or soiled, or if breathing through the mask becomes difficult, you should remove the face mask, discard it safely, and replace it with a new one.
- Visors should ideally be the reusable type, should reach below one's chin and should be disinfected appropriately.

Used PPE should be disposed of safely in the mixed waste stream (black bag), in double bags.

Visitor safety

Visitors:

- Should have their temperature checked used a contactless forehead thermometer before entering the library.
- Should apply alcohol hand rub upon entering the library. An appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub should be provided at the entrance of the site.
- Must always wear a mask (covering mouth and nose and chin) or a visor.
- Should limit the personal belongings they bring with them ideally to just a mobile phone and mode of payment.
- Should limit the time spent at the library
- Should have access to toilets; with soap and water being available at the restrooms to be able to wash their hands.
- Markings on the floor should be made to guide visitors about the required distance they should keep from each other.

The Library Environment

- Doors and windows must be kept open, air-conditioning adjusted for more ventilation and recirculated air-conditioning avoided.
- Airconditioning flaps should be directed towards the ceiling. Filters should be cleaned well and maintained properly
- Extractors are recommended in every library. These must be thoroughly cleaned every week

- All precautions must be taken to ensure water systems are safe to prevent the risk of infections derived from water such as Legionnaire's disease. If the water supply is direct from mains, flushing of the water system by opening all taps for a few minutes should suffice. However, if the supply of water is through a roof tank, this should be cleaned, and the water system is flushed through for a few minutes. It is important that the water heater temperature is raised to 60°C and thus there is no need to take samples and get approval from the Environmental Health Directorate. If the library forms part of a complex and the water supply is through the complex main water system, please follow the procedure indicated in Annex 1.

Cleaning library surfaces is crucial to prevent and reduce the spread of viruses and other germs.

- Wear disposable gloves while cleaning and disinfecting the environment.
- Where feasible use disposable cloths or when using non-disposable cloths, they must be changed after every use and washed at a temperature of at least 60 degrees Celsius.
- Wipe down all surfaces (floors, worktops, trolleys, chairs, sinks/basins etc) with medical grade disinfectant & cleaner following guidelines and let them air dry. Contact time on label must be observed for disinfectant to work. Contact time refers to how long the disinfectant is visibly wet on the surface allowing it to thoroughly destroy all of the pathogens. Typical contact time for immersion /sprays is 10 minutes, for disinfectant wipes is 2-4 minutes
- Remember to clean all touch points with medical grade disinfectant & cleaner frequently during the day. These include door push plates/handles, light switches, fridge handles, touch points on any shelving, soap dispenser, toilet flush and taps, card machine.
- Acrylic or tempered glass barriers should must also be wiped clean
- Items on hard surfaces should be kept to a minimum.
- Where possible avoid using any materials or furniture in the library that are difficult to clean such as carpets, material couches, etc
- Ensure that devices such as audio guides, headphones and other similar equipment that require handling are systematically disinfected after each use
- Disability-assisted facilities and exposed devices with control buttons for educational purposes should be cleaned frequently with disinfectants

Annex 1

The following are the legal requirements to be carried out on the water systems prior re-opening of the premises:

1. Carry out a full system disinfection of the cold-water system, flushing through to all outlets to achieve 50 mg/l free chlorine for at least an hour checking that this level is achieved at the furthest outlets. This may be also achieved by making uses e.g. 5 mg/l for 10 hours (this all depends on the water piping system condition). It is important to top up when required throughout this process;
2. Flush out and refill the system to achieve maximum normal operating target levels of disinfection (equivalent to at least 0.2 mg/l free chlorine);
3. Refill and carry out a thermal shock by raising the temperature of the whole of the contents of the hot water storage heater from 70°C to 80°C then circulating this water throughout the system for up to three days. To be effective, the capacity and temperature of the hot water storage heater should be sufficient to ensure that the temperatures at the taps and appliances do not fall below 65°C. Each tap and appliance should be run sequentially for at least five minutes at the full temperature, taking appropriate precautions to minimise the risk of scalding;
4. Monitor temperatures and biocide levels where applicable, adjust where necessary, for at least 48-72 hours and then take Legionella samples from sentinel outlets (microbiological samples taken before 48 hours following disinfection may give false negative results);
5. Ensure you keep all documentation for inspection by the Competent Authority, including the review and update of the risk assessment manual including monitoring data, etc., with evidence of who carried out the monitoring, add time, date and signature;
6. Laboratory results for Legionella analysis which have to be carried out at an accredited laboratory, together with all the necessary documentation referred to in point 5 above and a declaration from the private water consultant under whom this water system treatment has been carried out are to be sent to the Water Regulatory and Auditing Unit within the Environmental Health Directorate prior reopening of the establishment;
7. Once it is found that your systems of the hot and cold water are under control then the establishment can reopen.