

# **Recommendations for Good Practices in the Re-Opening of Libraries in the National Network of Public Libraries During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

(Portuguese recommendations, version of 5 May, translated by IFLA)

The information in this document may be amended in the future, as more information on the Covid-19 pandemic is known, when there are new recommendations from the Directorate-General for Health or as a consequence of the emergency situation.

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

Council of Ministers Resolution No. 33-A/2020 of 30 April declared a state of emergency linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by Council of Ministers Resolution no. 33-C/2020 of 30 April 2020 which established a strategy for lifting containment measures in the context of combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among other measures, Council of Ministers Resolution No. 33-C/2020 states: "Keeping the fight against the pandemic as a priority, it is essential to gradually initiate the lifting of containment measures in order to begin the recovery and revitalization phase of our society and our economy. It is essential that the roll-out of measures is progressive and gradual, and that the effects of measures on the evolution of the pandemic are systematically evaluated, so that we can resume economic activity and our life in society with the guarantee that the pandemic remains controlled."

"All measures must be accompanied by specific operating conditions, including rules for stocking and using personal protective equipment, scheduling and physical distancing on top of the general conditions for lifting containment measures, namely the availability in the market of masks and disinfectant gel, the regular hygiene of spaces, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and the practice of the civic duty to support the recovery and respect physical distancing".

According to the Plan for the Lifting of Restrictions, libraries can reopen to the public from 4 May, so the Directorate General for Books, Archives and Libraries (DGLAB) considers it useful to establish recommendations for libraries of the National Network of Public Libraries (RNBP), in compliance with the approved legislation, and in conjunction with the policies of the municipalities responsible for the

protection of these facilities, to support librarians and other library managers in the phased planning of the reopening of their libraries.

The highest priority should be to seek the broadest possible balance between ensuring the lowest risk of contagion and spread of COVID-19, both for workers and users, and the provision of as many services as possible. It is considered a priority to create an environment of good communication, transparency and trust, internally and externally, to ensure that all services are provided with the greatest possible security.

## **2. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RNBP LIBRARIES**

Since public libraries are run by local authorities, all decisions about how they operate are the responsibility of their municipal councils, within the framework of their Contingency Plans, prepared in accordance with the guidelines of the Directorate-General for Health.

In all public spaces and indoor spaces, the recommendations of the Directorate-General of Health should be displayed, as well as other internal procedures, in order to alert to the need for compliance with the rules in force. It is recommended that all workers and users be guaranteed access to information on procedures defined by the Health Authority, as well as other complementary rules defined by the Municipality under their Contingency Plan.

The information present in this document therefore aims to provide recommendations for the libraries of the National Network of Public Libraries that ensure the application, in practice, of the most generic guidelines, and should be adapted according to the spaces of each library, the available teams and the different modalities of services to be provided.

It is to be noted that they may be amended or updated as more information on the COVID-19 pandemic is known, or that there are new recommendations from the Directorate-General for Health or legislative changes.

As regards public libraries, the general recommendations in force should be observed, namely:

- Limit the number of people in the library spaces (maximum capacity of 0.05 people per square meter of area open to the public);
- Physical distance (minimum 2 m) between people who are not already in close contact outside and in all library spaces;
- Compliance with respiratory hygiene rules (use of mask indoors);
- Regular disinfection of all contact surfaces (glass, counters, tables and chairs, computers, office supplies, handles, doors, etc.);
- Use of personal protective equipment defined by the Directorate-General for Health;
- Regular hand washing with soap or alcohol-gel solutions (for around 20 seconds), after handling potentially contaminated surfaces and always before starting a new task;
- Avoid touching the face, nose, eyes and mouth;
- Cancel whenever possible, any procedures involving physical interaction, such as filling out forms, collecting signatures, and, where this is not possible, ensuring disinfection of all objects and contact surfaces;
- Limit the number of workers present by rotating teams that ensure functions not compatible with remote working;
- Do not share work or personal objects without ensuring that all contact surfaces can be disinfected.

### **2.1. PREPARING THE FACILITIES**

It is recommended that library facilities be prepared in such a way as to:

- Ensure that the entire building is disinfected (if the library has been closed during the lockdown period and according to the information available, it will be safe to resume use immediately);
- Ensure that all documents and equipment are in hygienic condition so that they can be used (if documents and equipment have not been handled during the lockdown period, and according to the information available, it is safe to resume use);
- Minimize contact between library team members and users. Where possible, changes in the layout of furniture and work stations should be made, and routes for moving around the library should be organised in a way to ensure respect for physical distancing rules (minimum 2 m);
- Reorganise the layout of the furniture in order to comply with the general rules of physical distancing and the maximum capacity provided (e.g. chairs, sofas, or computers in order to comply with the rules of physical distancing);
- Define regular procedures for disinfection of door handles, handles, handrails, tables and chairs, counters, keyboards and PC mice, as well as service locations;
- Prevent access to or remove all equipment which cannot be used by users at the moment, or whose disinfection cannot be performed, for example: photocopiers, scanners, sofas, beanbags and carpets, computers, game consoles, vending machines, self-service equipment, etc.;
- Prevent access, as far as possible, to bookshelves and documents, which must be handled and dispensed by library staff;
- Define differentiated routes for users and the team, in order to minimize their crossing (if possible);
- Define routes of movement for users, preferably one way, through barriers or markings on the pavement, in order to, if possible, create different inlet and exit circuits;
- Consider, whenever necessary, the installation of protective barriers in service locations that allow physical separation between users and library staff;
- Make personal protective equipment available to members of the library team according to the indications of the Directorate-General for Health;
- Make available at the entrance of the library and in other places alcohol-based disinfectant / alcohol-gel, hand washing soap and wipes in sanitary facilities and other appropriate places;
- Affix in places visible to the public all the basic rules that must be respected, in particular those relating to respiratory etiquette and physical distancing;
- Provide cleaning personnel with clear indications on how to clean spaces and contact surfaces;
- Ensure that all doors are open in order to avoid contact with door handles and handles;
- Ensure regular (natural) ventilation of library spaces throughout the day by opening doors and windows, if possible, without using air conditioning.

## **2.2 USE AND OCCUPATION OF SPACES**

For library spaces and their use, the following recommendations should be taken into account:

- Define the opening of the different spaces of the library in a phased way, taking into account the target audiences, the need for disinfection and the available team;
- Control the access and occupation of the library spaces in order to comply with the general rules defined of 0.05 people per square meter of open area to the public and the rules of physical distancing (minimum 2m);
- For each use of the space, the maximum duration of occupancy must be provided for, which should be limited to the time taken to perform of the intended task;
- In addition to the legally defined priority care rules (Decree-Law No. 58/2016 of August 29) and the provisions in force, priority care should be privileged for the following categories of people:

- Immuno-depressed people and with those with chronic disease that, according to the guidelines of health authorities, should be considered at risk;
- People aged 70 or older;
- People with chronic diseases – heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, neoplasms or hypertension, among others;
- People undergoing treatments that affect the immune system (chemotherapy treatments, treatments for autoimmune diseases (rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis or some inflammatory bowel diseases), HIV/AIDS infection or transplant patients;
- health professionals, elements of the security, protection and relief forces and services, armed forces personnel and social support services;
- Although any type of gathering should be avoided, in case of extreme need, actions with a maximum of 10 people are allowed, provided that the rules of respiratory etiquette and physical distancing are respected;
- Toilets should be properly disinfected at each cleaning and the frequency of cleaning should be increased. Depending on usage, more periodicity may be required.

## **2.3 DEFINITION OF SERVICES**

In defining the services to be made available, attention should be paid to:

- Devising a plan for the phased opening of the library, in order to resume the usual offer of activities but adapted to the current circumstances;
- Defining which services can be provided without risks to the health of workers and users;
- Defining which services can be provided face-to-face or at distance, focusing, whenever possible, on the latter;
- Ensuring the provision of a home delivery service for borrowing documents and also consider the loan of computer equipment;
- Assessing the need to define new opening hours according to the services to be provided and the library staff available;
- Considering the services to be provided according to the available library staff;
- Designing or adapting new services to be made available to users;
- Creating regular contact channels with users, encouraging continuity of connection with the community through the available channels;
- Maintaining a diversified range of activities over the internet;
- Maintaining an offer of activities aimed at different segments of the public (children, young people, adults, seniors), through the Internet;
- Providing for the provision of some type of services to populations who do not have access to the Internet or who are in a situation of exclusion;
- Re-organising face-to-face services in order to reduce contact between library staff and users;
- Making acquisitions of documents to bookstores or local publishers, as a way to support local commerce and contribute to the reactivation of the local economy.

## **2.4 STAFF**

For library staff, the following recommendations should be taken into account:

- Provide for the minimum number of people needed for the phased reopening of the library, taking care of the absence of people caring for family members, risk groups or sick people;
- Organise stable, rotating work teams, with the number strictly necessary for the services to be available;
- Reorganize internal work areas in order to ensure compliance with the rules of physical distancing;

- Use personal protective equipment whenever you manipulate documents or are in contact with potentially contaminated contact surfaces.
- Until June 1, to privilege remote working, whenever the functions allow it;
- After June 1, define a partial remote working regime, with staggered schedules or with mirror teams;
- Ensure, whenever possible, that each worker performs tasks end-to-end in order to avoid the sharing of tasks and equipment;
- Ensure, whenever possible, that each worker is posted to a particular place in order to avoid coming into contact with others, as well as the sharing of jobs and equipment;
- All library staff should verify compliance with the rules for users and know how to act in case of non-compliance;
- Strictly apply hygiene and physical distancing rules, also in internal services.

## 2.5 QUARANTINE OF DOCUMENTS

In view of the circulation of documents, strict compliance with the rules of disinfection and quarantine must be provided for. Considering the little information available about the new Coronavirus, the periods for which the virus remains active on different surfaces, and the difficulty of fully disinfecting all documents in circulation and ensuring that they are not damaged, several experts consider that the quarantine of potentially contaminated documents will be the safest method.

However, according to a study published in The New England Journal of Medicine, the periods in which the new Coronavirus remains active on different surfaces, although variable according to temperature and humidity, are as follows: Plastic (up to 72 hours), Stainless Steel (up to 72 hours), Copper (up to 8 hours), Cardboard (up to 24 hours) and Aerosol/Dust (up to 2h30).

Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Regularly disinfect all contact surfaces (counters, desks, computers, office supplies, etc.);
- Quarantine documents returned or handled in the library by users in an isolated space with good ventilation. Procedures should be established to control access to the space so as not to contribute to possible contagion;
- Arrange quarantined documents by return/handling date (indicating the date of last use), for a maximum period, according to the currently available information, of 72 hours;
- Record the deposit and retrieval of documents in order to control compliance with the quarantine times of the documents.

In order to ensure the reduction of the risk of contamination, library teams should consider:

- The date of return of the document;
- The last time the document was used;
- Compliance with document quarantine procedures;
- Compliance with the individual protection procedures defined by the Directorate-General for Health.

If it is confirmed that the document has not been manipulated for the defined period (due to having completed its quarantine, or simply not having been used), it may be used in the services to be provided by the library. If the Integrated Library Management System allows this, it is suggested that a "Quarantined" status be created in order to be able to identify in catalogue searches which documents are available and which ones are unavailable during the quarantine period. This avoids wasting time searching for documents that, while being available in the catalogue, are not on the shelves.

## 2.6 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Effective information and communication policy should be taken into account and it is therefore recommended that:

- Post in visible places (entrance, places of service) and communicate through all available means and channels, all rules of respiratory etiquette and physical distancing, as well as others defined internally, in order to inform all users of the need for their compliance;
- Inform the population about the reopening of the library and the new conditions of use;
- Ensure the dissemination of information that reassures the public about the safety of the use of the available services including the rules for the quarantine of documents;
- Ensure access to information to segments of the population that do not have access to the Internet or who are in a situation of exclusion;
- Ensure the information and training of the library team through regular communication and confirmation of compliance with the established rules;
- Hold regular meetings to exchange information and experiences, change or improve procedures and clarify doubts;
- Ensure that rules and procedures are updated in accordance with the guidelines of the Directorate-General for Health in conjunction with the contingency plan of the municipality.

## 3. GOOD PRACTICES FOR THE PHASED OPENING OF SPACES AND SERVICES

This proposal provides for the phased reopening of the libraries of the National Network of Public Libraries and is organized in 4 phases without indication of fixed implementation dates.

Thus, it is intended to be adapted according to the available means, local circumstances, and the evolution and impact of the pandemic. A progressive implementation of spaces and services will be essential to test and verify the security conditions and measures to be taken at all times. In view of the different scenarios in the country with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, we stress that all decisions on how municipal services operate should be taken by the respective local authorities responsible for the public libraries, within the framework of the Contingency Plan after consulting the local Health Authority. Throughout this, the guidelines of the Directorate-General for Health should always be guaranteed.

The transition between each phase will depend on the context of each library, and must respect the specifications of each establishment in terms of space, staff and local context. In each phase, the rules in force of hygiene and physical distancing defined by the Directorate-General for Health must be complied with.

### **PHASE 1**

#### **Services**

- Provision of remote services by internet, email and telephone;
- Maintain the dissemination of diversified online content adapted to different audience segments, preferably on platforms without registration (institutional websites, Youtube, etc.);
- Provision of a loan service (documents and equipment) with prior reservation made through the catalogue, telephone or email, with marking of the day and time of withdrawal; This service may be provided in the modalities of "take-away", "drive-thru" or home delivery;
- Provide a document return box (24/7);
- Support service to search for information through email, chat or telephone;
- Document printing or scanning services;

- Phased opening of some of the library spaces and especially the places for loan and return of documents.

**Internal Tasks:**

- Organization of workspaces in order to comply with the rules of physical distancing (minimum 2 m) and to prepare the next phases of reopening;
- Implementation of services to the public, by phone or email, information, contact and response to questions about reopening and services provided;
- Organization of work for staff members who are not working remotely;
- Control of compliance with the rules and hygiene and physical distancing;
- Organization of the loan service: reservations of documents, response to emails and requests;
- Organization of quarantined documents, preparation of spaces and services, storage of documents (after quarantine).
- Holding regular working meetings with all team members via videoconference.

**PHASE 2**

**Services:**

- Continuation of the services provided in phase 1;
- Possibility to request documents over the counter for loan, and the rules of respiratory etiquette, physical distancing and the maximum capacity of spaces (0.05 people per square meter of area) must be respected;
- Access to the reading rooms and local consultation (without direct access to the shelves, the documents will be provided by a member of the library team) for pre-defined periods of time. The rules of respiratory etiquette, physical distance and maximum capacity (0.05 people per square meter of area) must be complied with;
- Partial opening of some spaces (except common areas: cafeterias, informal reading area, etc.);
- Possibility for small organized groups (maximum 10 people) to remain in spaces open to the public. The rules of respiratory etiquette and physical distancing (minimum 2 m) must be complied with;
- Access to equipment, including tablets, computers and consoles, and screens and keyboards should be cleaned after each use, with cleaning wipes and quick disinfection based on alcohol or other disinfectant with action against the virus (anti-viral action);
- Library Extension Services: availability of services and collections in open spaces;
- Long-term loan or creation of service points in conjunction with other services and associations (educational establishment, day care centers, after-school care, etc.).

**Internal Tasks:**

- The same as in phase 1.

**PHASE 3**

**Services:**

- Continuation of the services provided in phases 1 and 2;
- Opening and access to common areas, and the rules of respiratory etiquette, physical distancing, must be respected;

- Performance of activities with a maximum of 10 people and must be respected the rules of respiratory etiquette, physical distancing (minimum 2 m);
- Allow groups to enter and stay for predefined periods of time.

**Internal Tasks:**

- The same as in phase 1;
- Continued return of library staff to facilities for local tasks, still with remote working rules, staggered schedules or mirror teams.

***PHASE 4***

Return to the usual functioning of the RBNP libraries in accordance with the rules in force defined by the Directorate-General for Health; Evaluation of the strategies applied during the pandemic.

## REFERENCES

In the absence of specific indications for public libraries, these recommendations were based on the general recommendations of the Directorate-General for Health and on scientific bibliography of reference on the theme cited throughout the document. Recommendations produced by professional associations or public bodies with responsibilities in the area of libraries in several European countries were also consulted.

### PRESIDÊNCIA DO CONSELHO DE MINISTROS

Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 33-A/2020 - Declara a situação de calamidade, no âmbito da pandemia da doença COVID-19

<https://dre.pt/web/guest/home/-/dre/132883344/details/maximized>

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### DIREÇÃO-GERAL DA SAÚDE

*Apresentação dirigida aos Municípios*

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### DIREÇÃO-GERAL DA SAÚDE

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DIREÇÃO-GERAL DA SAÚDE

*Perguntas frequentes*

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*Protocolo para la reapertura de los servicios de biblioteca móvil, tras la pandemia Covid-19*

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