

### **1. Purpose:**

To establish the protocol that will be used in the event of a pandemic, epidemic or other public health emergency. If there is a serious infectious disease outbreak, the library must plan for the safety of staff and visitors, and for staff being unable to report to work. In addition, during a public health emergency, businesses, social organizations or schools may be required to take unique measures to help slow the spread of the illness including:

Closing down by order of local public health officials

Limiting or canceling social and public gatherings

Requiring quarantines and/or other social distancing measures

Recovery from a disease outbreak may be slow, as compared to a natural disaster or some other physical crises. It is important to ensure that core business activities of the library can be maintained for several weeks or more with limited staff and reduced hours due to a public health emergency.

## **II. Definitions**

“Public Health Emergency Response Plan” A public health emergency plan differs from a general emergency preparedness policy or procedure. With an emergency preparedness policy, there is an assumption that staff will return to the building, or begin rebuilding, almost immediately after the event or crisis (such as after a fire or storm, or if there is a utility shortage). If there is a serious infectious disease outbreak, recovery may be slow and limited staff, services, and hours may be necessary for several weeks or more.

“Pandemic” A disease epidemic occurs when there are more cases of that disease than normal. A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic of a disease and may occur when a new virus appears against which the human population has no immunity. If a pandemic were to occur today, we could expect the virus to spread rapidly due to the interconnected nature of the world and the high level of global travel. During a pandemic, up to one or both employees here at the Fort Edward Free Library may be absent at one time due to their own illness. (Sources: World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int> and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov>)

## **III. Library Operations**

Continuity of Services: The Library 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 for and respond adequately to the threat presented by a community health emergency. However, significant changes to library operations and services have the potential to disrupt normal operations more than the effects of a pandemic, epidemic or other health emergency alone. The Library will consider costs and benefits to residents and staff of all proposed changes to procedure. The Library

will maintain services to the greatest extent possible while simultaneously working to provide safe facilities and cooperating with public health authorities.

**Public Health Measures:** The Library is committed to providing safe and sanitary facilities for the public and for library staff. Based on recommendations from the Washington County Public Health, the CDC, or other public health authorities, the Library may decide to:

Temporarily increase the frequency of cleaning and sanitizing in its facilities, especially areas and surfaces that experience the highest use, with the understanding that no amount of reasonable effort can ever guarantee that public places are free of infectious agents

Post signs in restrooms and throughout the building encouraging hand washing and routine practices that help minimize the spread of germs from person to person

Provide public and staff with convenient access to hand sanitizer, hand washing facilities, disinfecting wipes, and facial tissues

Institute social distancing measures, such as arranging furniture so that there is at least three-feet of distance between people

Provide staff with vinyl gloves if requested and training in their use when handling materials

Require staff who are sick to leave the library

Emphasize good hygiene habits and personal responsibility in preventing the spread of disease. We encourage staff and visitors to follow the CDC guidelines which aim to slow the spread of germs in these ways:

Stay home if you are sick

Keep your children home from school or daycare, and away from the library, if they are sick

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cough into your shoulder or the bend of your arm

If you use a tissue, throw it away in the trash right away and then wash your hands

Wash your hands frequently throughout the day for 30 seconds with soap and water

Use an alcohol hand sanitizer if you can't find soap and water

Be prepared for taking care of yourself or your family members at home if you or they get sick

Get a flu shot for the seasonal flu as well as the vaccine for the pandemic, epidemic or other health emergency when it becomes available

**Temporary Reduction or Suspension of Services:** During the course of a pandemic, epidemic, or other public health emergency, public health authorities may advise that libraries and other gathering places minimize or entirely suspend situations where numerous individuals congregate in relatively confined spaces.

In such cases the Director may decide to temporarily discontinue library programs and use of library meeting rooms by the public

In the event that the Fort Edward Union Free School District is closed due to pandemic or epidemic, Fort Edward Free Library will remain open unless one of the requirements for closing listed below is also met. However, all library programs, outreach, and special events will be canceled on any day in which any or all of Fort Edward School is closed due to pandemic or epidemic

Should school be canceled due to a pandemic or epidemic, non-circulating children's materials and toys will be removed from public areas, and play and program areas, during the duration of the school closure to minimize spread through surfaces frequently touched by children. Disinfecting and/or cleaning procedures issued by public health officials will be followed as possible

Temporary Library Closure: Fort Edward Free Library will close due to pandemic, epidemic, public health concern, and/or public infection concern in the event that a mandate, order, or recommendation for closure is issued by public health or government officials on the local, county, or state level.

At the discretion of the Library Director or the Library Board President, the Fort Edward Free Library may close, reduce its operating hours, or limit services temporarily in the event that:

There is not sufficient staff to maintain basic library service levels

Public visitation is too low to warrant keeping the library open

Any other condition exists which prevents the Library from operating safely and effectively

#### **IV. Minimizing Negative Impacts on Operations and Services**

The Library provides crucial resources and services to residents. The Library will strive to minimize negative impacts on access to resources and services resulting from procedures adopted in response to public health emergency.

Online Access to Information: The Library will work to preserve access to its online resources both in the library and remotely. Residents with home Internet access can use the Library's online resources remotely and when libraries are closed. The Library will strive to maintain access to its Internet site, subscription databases, digital content, and online catalog even in the event that the Library is closed temporarily.

Access to Computers in the Library: The Library recognizes that many residents lack home computers or online access and rely on the public library to provide free Internet access. While the Library remains open, we will strive to maintain public Internet access insofar as it is possible to do so safely. In coordination with health authorities the Library 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, vinyl gloves and facemasks.

Suspension of Due Dates and Fines: In the event of a temporary closure, the Library will extend or suspend all due dates, and suspend all late fees. The Library will use its Internet site, social media, library e-mail distribution lists, and work with local media to publicize any such suspension. In such an event, the Library 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, including to prevent the library from being inundated with returned materials while no items were getting checked out; and it would prevent customers from feeling the need to venture to the library to return materials when they are sick, since a suspension would provide assurance that no fines would accrue on items currently checked out.

If the Library cannot be staffed at its minimum level because of a pandemic or epidemic, all programs and public meetings will be cancelled or postponed, and certain areas of the library, including all meeting and program rooms, will be closed.

An inability to maintain this temporary minimal level, or a necessity to maintain this temporary minimal level for more than five consecutive days, will result in reduced hours or closing the library.

The level of absence of library staff will determine the ability to carry out services and maintain open hours. Phases may include:

Cancellation of all programs, outreach, events, and meeting room reservations

Reduce open hours if number of employees falls below temporary minimum level

Close the library for one or more days if number of employee's further declines or only minimum level can be met for an unspecified time.

Prioritization of Services: If a reduction in staffing, open hours, or services is required, employees shall perform priority responsibilities that most directly impact patrons prior to any other work tasks

Priority responsibilities shall follow this order:

Direct patron assistance: check out; issuing library cards; computer and reference assistance; facility and collection supervision/safety

Patron related-tasks: check in; incoming delivery; shelving, holds list

Essential services: payroll; processing bills for payment; Library Board meetings

Individual tasks beyond those listed above may be completed, if time permits, with projects with significant deadlines or greatest impact given first priority. Employees should consult with the Director or designated administrative authority to determine staffing area assignment and which individual tasks should take priority, or in the event that they feel a responsibility not listed here requires urgent attention.

## **VI. Communication**

In the event of closure necessitated by a public health emergency, effective communication about any reduction in services or open hours is of the utmost importance. Library staff should immediately follow the Fort Edward Free Library Emergency Closing Procedures.

## **VII. Employee Attendance and Non-Essential Activities**

If the Library is open, healthy employees are expected to report to work on time as scheduled, according to the Fort Edward Free Library general policies for staff absences, with the understanding that they may be temporarily reassigned during the emergency period.

Some employees may have duties which can be completed through teleworking (i.e., payroll, banking, website maintenance). During the emergency period, this option may be exercised, with administrative approval

Employees who come to work sick, or who become sick while at work will be sent home immediately

In the event of a closure occurring after healthy library employees have reported to work as scheduled, they may complete tasks that are not direct public-service tasks, as appropriate, during their scheduled hours

Large work events, such as staff development days, will be cancelled or postponed during the emergency period

Non-essential work-related travel will be cancelled or postponed during the emergency period

## **VIII. Responsibility for Library Operations**

If, for any reason, the Library Director is unable or unavailable to perform the responsibilities and decisions outlined in this policy, administrative authority for this policy and all library operations shall follow the Person in Charge protocol.

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