

**Westhampton Public Library Pandemic Policy**  
**Amended 11/19/21**

**Purpose:**

To establish the protocol to be used in the event of a pandemic. If there is a pandemic, the library may be required to take unique measures to help slow the spread of the illness, including service restrictions, limited hours of operation, or possible closure by order of state or local public health officials. Recovery from a pandemic may be slow, as compared to a natural disaster or 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 pandemic. In the event of a pandemic, the Library Director and Board of Trustees reserve the option to make critical, time-sensitive changes to services in order to ensure the safety of library staff, volunteers, and patrons.

**Pandemic:**

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease. (World Health Organization <https://www.who.int>)

**I: Criteria for Closing the Library**

The Westhampton Public Library may temporarily close because of a pandemic or public health emergency in the event that either of the following occur:

- A. The Town of Westhampton offices close because of a health emergency.
- B. A mandate, order, or recommendation for closure is issued by the local Board of Health or other elected officials.
- C. At the discretion of the Library Director, the Westhampton Public Library may temporarily close, reduce its operating hours, or limit services in the event that there is insufficient staff to maintain basic service levels.

In the event of closure, all book returns will be checked in in amnesty mode when the library reopens. This will ensure that no late fines are accrued by patrons. The exterior book drop will be closed until it is determined to be safe to reopen the book drop for returns by the Library Director, Library Trustees and local Board of Health. All patron holds, physically in place within the library upon its closing, will be issued to patrons when lending services are resumed.

**II: School Closure due to Pandemic**

In the event that Hampshire Regional High School or Westhampton Elementary School is closed because of a pandemic, the Westhampton Public Library will remain open unless one of the above requirements for closing are also met. However, library programs and special events may

be canceled at the discretion of the Library Director. Should school be canceled due to a pandemic, non-circulating children's materials will be removed from public 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. *If a Westhampton School closes, all children must be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult in the Library at all times.*

*\*In unforeseen circumstances related to the health and safety of volunteers, employees, or patrons the library will follow the guidance of the local Board of Health and Health Agent.*

### III: Minimum Staffing Level, Volunteers, and Staff Compensation

Minimum staffing level for a temporary period of time is defined as two healthy desk staff available to be present at the library during all open hours. Westhampton Public Library relies heavily on volunteers to maintain day to day public services at the library. In the instance of a pandemic, volunteers will be asked to stay at home if they fall under the high-risk or immunocompromised category for infection. All volunteers, regardless of age or health status, will be encouraged to stay home if they feel unsafe working at the library during a pandemic. Any staff members and volunteers who feel ill will be required to stay home. An inability to maintain this temporary minimal level will result in reduced hours or closing the library. The absence of healthy library staff will determine the ability to carry out services and maintain open hours. At the Library Director's discretion, this may include:

1. Cancelling programs, special events, and meeting room reservations.
2. Reassigning employee duties and shifts.
3. Reducing open hours if the number of employees falls below minimum levels.
4. Closing the library for one or more days.

*In the event of closure and healthy library employees are sent home, those employees shall be compensated for their regularly scheduled hours.*

### IV. Critical Operational Needs and Facilities

If reduced staffing, open hours, or services are required, library staff shall perform priority responsibilities that most directly impact patrons in the following order:

1. Direct patron assistance: may include virtual reference services and programs, technology help, circulating materials, and processing patron holds.
2. Essential services: including payroll, processing bills for payment, Library Board meetings, regular facilities check-ins and maintenance.

### 3. Workflow tasks: including material orders, processing and cataloging.

Employees should consult with the Library Director to determine staffing area assignment and which individual work tasks should take priority, or in the event that they feel a responsibility not listed here requires urgent attention.

## V. Communication

In the event of closure necessitated by a pandemic, effective communication about any reduction in services or open hours is of the utmost importance. Library staff should immediately update information about closures on the library website, social media, library email list, library phone voicemail, and notify the Town Administrator's office.

## VI. Health and Safety Protocol for Staff and Public

Library staff will be provided with disposable gloves, face masks, hand sanitizer, and surface disinfectants. Library staff will sanitize high-touch areas regularly and will reserve the option to close off areas of the library to the public if it becomes difficult or unrealistic to sanitize those areas regularly.

If the State Department of Public Health or the local Board of Health mandate the wearing of masks (or any other safety gear) by the public, use will be mandatory in the library. Patrons in violation of this policy, as with any other policy approved by the Board of Trustees, will be asked to leave the library. Non-compliance, will be reported to the local police and trespass orders issued.

Library staff will reserve the option to quarantine all incoming library materials for a 1-week period. The practice of quarantining and its duration will be determined based on industry-specific guidance and best practices.

## VII. Criteria for Reopening the Library

The library will follow a phased reopening strategy in compliance with state and local guidelines for safe reopening. The Library Director will complete the MA self-certification process and post documentation and state-issued health and safety guidelines, such as social distancing markers and reminders, in all public service areas.

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 be determined by the Library Board of Trustees.

## VIII. Criteria for Use of Community Room upon Reopening

Groups of up to 15 people spaced 3' apart will be allowed to reserve the community room for recurring and special programs. All visitors to library meeting rooms will be required to wear masks for as long as mask mandates are in place locally.