

**Date:** April 21, 2021  
**From:** Paul Takala, CEO/Chief Librarian  
**To:** Library Board  
**Subject:** **HPL COVID-19 Response Update Report – REVISED**

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## UPDATED SPECIAL MESSAGE

On April 21 we will discuss with the Library Board our plans for the coming weeks as we respond to the recent announcements for the Province and Hamilton Public Health around the risk the variants pose to our community. Getting all our staff and our members safely through the pandemic has been our highest priority. Throughout the pandemic we have been focused on providing as much service as we safely can.

In the last couple of days, we have listened to thoughtful and passionate input from the CUPE 932 Executive and members of the Management Team urging us to recommend to the Library Board that we move to take-out service only and stop computer access. Most public libraries in Southern Ontario have temporarily moved to take-out only and stopped public computer access.

In follow-up to the Stay-at-Home order we asked the City Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and the Public Health to provide advice on whether we should continue to provide computer access. They are not concerned about us continuing to allow public computer service as long as we continue to follow all the protocols we have in place. We understand and acknowledge that anxiety is high right now, but we have all the precautions in place to keep Staff and Members safe.

An updated letter to Members has been prepared to reinforce the need for everyone to follow all the pandemic rules and to encourage Members to only visit when they need to. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely and be prepared to proactively act if we need to. We will continue to work closely with Public Health to ensure we keep everyone safe. Throughout the pandemic we have been committed to full transparency around the pandemic. In cases of COVID exposure in our spaces we have promptly reported to Public Health and informed the Staff and public. While protecting the privacy of individuals, we have opted to exceed the disclosure of cases beyond what we have been advised to do. This transparency has been critical to maintaining trust and we will continue to follow that practise as we see if additional precautions are needed.

While we have every indication that we can continue to operate safely, we need to recognize the anxiety people are feeling. The question is balancing the impacts on Staff anxiety of continuing to operate verses the negative consequences to vulnerable members in our community who have no other options to access computers. With the income tax deadline approaching we are seeing Members use library computers to file, as well as access to other government services.

Our goal is to continue to provide needed access, provided we can do so safely, and if we need to temporarily pause the service, we will minimize negative impacts and keep the pause as short as possible.

## INTRODUCTION AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

With the provincial stay-at-home order in effect and major restrictions likely to continue for the next several months, we are looking for Board input on several key issues and decisions that we will need to make in the near term. For each issue, staff have identified a recommended course of action.

- 1. Public Computer Access** – Current regulations allow us to continue to provide public computer access. For individuals who lack adequate technology or bandwidth at home, the Library computers and Wifi provide a critical lifeline to navigate services and government. Some Ontario public libraries have opted not to provide computer access due to concerns about COVID-19 and the new virus strains. So far, we have every indication that the precautions we have are working and HPL is safe for Staff and Members.  
**Proposed Action** – *For now, continue to provide computer access but monitor the situation carefully and be prepared to suspend public computer access should the situation warrant.*
- 2. Building Out Library Services** – HPL should prepare for a gradual expansion of Library service and service hours as the risk of the virus and restrictions are reduced. With the relatively slow pace of the vaccination rollout, concerns about variants and an increase in cases and hospitalizations the near-term outlook has deteriorated in recent weeks. At this time, it looks like a best-case scenario is during the summer months we will be able to operate with somewhat less stringent restrictions and the situation will gradually improve in the months that follow.  
**Proposed Action** – *In May and June, work with the Library Board on a plan for the restoration of service hours as soon as Hamilton returns to Red-Control or better. Should circumstance warrant, host a special summer meeting to further develop plans.*
- 3. Recalling Staff from Public Health Secondments** – The timing of Staff returning is largely dependent on the plan for expanding Library services. The City has both committed and demonstrated their willingness to work with us on ensuring the secondments do not negatively impact Library operations. We recently recalled two full-time Staff to address operational challenges created by staff taking leaves. The City recently asked that most of the 65 seconded Staff be extended until Sunday July 4.  
**Proposed Action** – *Continue to support Staff secondments until July 4 and recall only Staff needed to maintain current operations during that period. Plan for most HPL Staff to return to HPL in early July. Staff seconded beyond that date would be approved at the June Board meeting and be based on the status of pandemic and our ability to provide service.*
- 4. Alternative Ways to Support Public Health** – Some public libraries are helping seniors, newcomers and people that lack adequate technology to navigate the vaccine booking systems. At this time Public Health has asked HPL to continue to forward calls to the City's Vaccine Booking Line. With current seconded Staff to the City, the capacity to take on additional work is limited, however as Staff return to HPL there may be additional ways to align our work to support the emergency response.  
**Proposed Action** – *Explore with the City Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and Public Health ways HPL can support the pandemic response that integrates this work within Library operations and staffing. Report back to the Library Board potential opportunities worth pursuing.*

## PROVINCIAL STAY-AT-HOME ORDER

The Provincial Government announced that Ontario would be under a Stay-at-Home Order effective April 8, 2021 and then on April 16 announced an extension of that order to May 20 with stricter rules. The regulations governing public libraries are the same as they were for the most recent Shutdown and Grey-Lockdown Phase, however, **HPL is updating some services (see chart below)**. Under the

new Stay-at-Home Order, all HPL staff who do not need to be on site for operational needs should continue to work from home.

HPL's plan during the Stay-at-Home order is consistent with the regulations and was shared with the City Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). EOC did not have concerns with our plan.

## BREAKDOWN OF SHUTDOWN MEASURES UNDER THE STAY-AT-HOME ORDER

SERVICE	STAY-AT-HOME MEASURES
BROWSING OF SHELVES	<b>Not permitted.</b> Staff may retrieve requested items for Members. Signage indicates stacks are not to be used.
HOLDS SHELVES PICK-UP	<b>Not permitted.</b> Staff retrieve Members' holds. Members' self-check holds as branch capacity allows.
IN-BRANCH SEATING	<b>Not permitted.</b> Members must log into and be using a HPL computer.
LIBRARY WI-FI SERVICE	Outdoor Wi-fi use available 24X7. No restrictions provided physical distancing is maintained.
PUBLIC WASHROOMS	Open with contact tracing.
CONTACT TRACING & SCREENING	All Members required to check-in using library card or provide name and phone number, screening procedures followed.
IN-PERSON VISITS DURATION FOR PER DAY	<b>30-minute max. daily visits, while using a computer.</b> Tax Clinics are still available. Other social services are not available.
LIBRARY PROVIDED COMPUTER ACCESS	<b>30-minute computer session.</b> Computers will be set to 30 minutes, starting April 17 and will not extend even if capacity is not met.
STANDARD MEMBER SERVICES	Refer members wanting library cards to hpl.ca or to call our main line 905-546-3200 for assistance. Staff will not provide scanning, printing, or computer support beyond providing login information verification.
PRINT SERVICES	Self-service standard printers and Print on the Go available, with no staff support. Advanced printing including 3D print jobs where available (pick up only).
IN-DEPTH ASSISTANCE APPOINTMENTS	<b>Not Permitted.</b>
PROGRAMS	Limited online and partner led. No in-person events.
MAIL HOLDS TO VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS	Continue for VLS and reconsider for other Members. Library has access to the Library Book Discount Mail program.
WARMING/ COOLING CENTRES	HPL provides "Warm/Cool Centre" services while under official weather alerts. (Occurs during service hours offered at the time.)

## OTHER SERVICES

The Bookmobile will serve one route; no impacts to the Newcomer Learning Centre (NLC), Visiting Library Service (VLS). Local History and Archives (LHA) and Collections/Technical Services will continue to operate but at reduced capacity. Internal operations like courier, processing and sorting of materials, Digital Technology, Human Resources and Finance & Facilities will continue to provide service to ensure we can operate effectively.

## REVIEW OF SAFETY PROTOCOLS IN PLACE

We continue to follow City and Public Health guidance, adjust library operations and plan based on authoritative guidance and the best information and evidence available. Our goal remains to provide as much critical service as we can, provided we can do it safely. Here are key steps we are taking:

### Enforcement of PPE and Accommodations

- **Masks and Face Coverings** – Staff are required to double mask. If unable to double mask, Staff must wear a medical mask. Library Members are required to wear a face covering. A face covering means a medical or non-medical mask or other face covering such as a balaclava, bandana, scarf, cloth, or other similar item that covers the nose, mouth, and chin without gapping. Library Members are provided disposable medical masks upon entry (if not wearing a face covering). Face shields or eye protection are also required when staff cannot maintain physical distancing with exempt Members not wearing a face covering.
- **Alternate for Exempt Individuals** – Face coverings are required. Exempt individuals are required to wear a face shield as an alternative. All locations have face shields to loan or give to individuals who require them. Regular customers are provided a face shield to keep and reuse when the situation warrants. If a vision issue is disclosed, staff help the person navigate the branch verbally and guide the Member, while maintaining physical distancing.
- **Additional Accommodations** – HPL works with partners serving vulnerable individuals and Library Members in need of supports. In 2021, HPL launched a pilot project to offer a limited number of individuals alternative accommodation by providing a mobile-connected device for a one-month extended loan period. Accommodated Members will be required to agree to only visit the Library to pick-up holds.
- **Maintaining Physical Distancing and Wearing PPE** while working on-site is critical. We are seeing very good compliance from staff; however, this needs to be maintained at all times. Please ensure you are in compliance at all times.

### Increased Emphasis on Remote Work

The regulation mandates us to ensure people who can work from home, do so. We know that supporting operations requires staff to be present in our spaces, so working from home is not an option for many. Key points:

- Our focus during this heightened period of pandemic risk is to ensure we only have the staff onsite to support onsite-specific work. All other staff, including staff working FreshDesk, will work from home.
- Staff working from home should only come into the Library when it is necessary to do so for business reasons.

### HVAC Enhancements

- City of Hamilton Facilities Division installed new high-grade filters and increased flow in all HPL HVAC systems. During the pandemic, locations are temporarily closed if a HVAC system is not functional.

## Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Significant efforts are made to ensure high touch surfaces throughout the Library are cleaned and disinfected several times each day. Public computers are disinfected between each use. Hand sanitizer is available throughout the system for Members and staff.

## Library Materials Quarantine

- HPL is currently following the provincial regulation from The Government of Ontario that requires a period of quarantine. Libraries across Ontario are moving to a 24-hour period of isolation for returned library materials.
- Members can decide to isolate items at home before using them. They may also decide to use the library's vast digital resources.
- We will monitor this issue in partnership with other library systems and applicable legislation. We will continue to look for Public Health guidance as the science evolves on surface testing and transmission. Currently, we do not allow in-branch use or sharing of newspapers and children's toys and equipment.

## LOCAL HOT SPOTS

We are working closely with Public Health to monitor identified hot spot areas in Hamilton. We will continue discussions regarding further safety measures to be considered for those local library locations.

## STAY-AT-HOME ORDER RESTRICTIONS

On April 3 2021 O.Reg 82/20: Grey-Lockdown and Shutdown was updated. On April 8 2021 a Stay-at Home Order went into effect for Ontario. There is no legislative change for Public Libraries.

(1) Public libraries may only open if they comply with the following conditions:

1. Circulating materials must be reserved over the telephone or online.
2. Circulating materials may only be exchanged with members of the public through contactless drop-off, pick-up or delivery.
3. Patrons must only be permitted to enter the premises to facilitate contactless drop-off and pick-up or to access computers, photocopiers or similar services.
4. Patrons must not be permitted to be in the book stacks, or to handle circulating materials that are shelved, or in other areas of library storage.
5. Circulating materials returned to the library must be disinfected or quarantined for an appropriate period of time before they are recirculated.
6. The person responsible for the public library must comply with subsection (3), if applicable.

(2) The conditions set out in paragraphs 3 and 4 of subsection (1) do not apply with respect to any space the library provides for,

(a) Revoked: O. Reg. 239/21, s. 3 (1).

(b) a provider of child care within the meaning of the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014;

(c) mental health support services or addictions support services, so long as no more than 10 people are permitted to occupy the space; or

(d) the provision of social services.

(3) The person responsible for a public library shall,

(a) record the name and contact information of every member of the public who attends the space described in subsection (2);

(b) maintain the records for a period of at least one month; and

(c) only disclose the records to a medical officer of health or an inspector under the Health Protection and Promotion Act on request for a purpose specified in section 2 of that Act or as otherwise required by law