

The Westport Library's Path to Reopening

While COVID19 forced our building to close this spring, it did not close our Library. Digital resources and engaging and creative virtual programs were offered that demonstrated our ongoing value to the community.

We have also been carefully preparing for what a return to our physical space must consider and include. First and foremost, the health, safety, and well-being of our staff and patrons must be our guide.

We developed a detailed plan, which pulls from Governor Lamont's Sector Rules for Reopen Connecticut, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidance, support of the Westport Town Safety and Infection Control Office (SICO), Town government, and best practices from networking sessions with Connecticut Libraries.

The plan we developed includes phases to reopen our building and to reintroduce people to our physical spaces, our materials, and building-bound services with new health and safety protocols in place. Moving from one phase to the next is determined by the larger, external environment. We recognize the possibility of reverting to earlier phases if new infections occur and government mandates to shelter are reinstated.

Prior to implementing Phase One, the Library conducted a thorough cleaning of the facility. Regular cleaning is one of the most effective strategies for preventing the spread of COVID-19. A pandemic response team was assembled, and staff were trained and certified around good hygiene practices.

Phase One was introduced on June 15th since physical distancing could be complied with by strictly limiting the number of staff in the building at a time. The Library had enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and supplies to ensure all safety recommendations for public and staff were adhered to. In Phase One, the Library instituted Curbside Pickup, Homebound Delivery, and Book Return/Quarantine procedures.

The Westport Library will be moving to **Phase Two** of the reopening plan on July 13th. During this Phase, physical distancing is recommended but best practices are in place for public buildings to reopen. There will be a separate entrance and exit, social distancing markers and signage to manage traffic patterns.

Although the Governor's sector rules allow for 50% occupancy, we will limit the number of patrons and staff in the building to 100 people at any given time during this stage. This will be done to reinforce social distancing and to discourage extended stays or gatherings.

The Library will advance to **Phase Three** when physical distancing is still recommended by health and government officials, but infection risks are declining. Patrons will be allowed to remain in the building for extended periods of time and some seating will be re-introduced but configured to allow for physical distancing.

In **Phase Four**, physical distancing guidelines will be relaxed to allow for small group gatherings. Most of the Library's services will be reintroduced. And in **Phase Five**, the infection threat is considered low or non-existent or there is a vaccine that is widely available. The Library will return to its "new normal" with large group gatherings and all services and programs restored.