

# COVID-19 AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES FOR LIBRARIES IN PAKISTAN: A COMMENTARY

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The prime aim of this study is to review the preventive measures for libraries in current pandemic of COVID-19 in the world and suggest special safety procedures for libraries in Pakistan.

**Material and Methods:** Content analysis approach was used to review the available web literature about the current position of libraries during and after COVID-19. Efforts were made to comment the preventive measures adopted by various library associations and leading libraries of the world.

**Results:** Being a social entity, libraries in Pakistan need to adopt the COVID-19 precautionary measures as in practice in the world libraries. The library practitioners in our country have to follow the same Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in libraries for safety of their users as operated by the international library communities. Library staff and patrons should be trained to safeguard the lives of the society. The various library associations of the country should have to come forward and work for the survival of our libraries in this difficult time through awareness campaign on social media and WhatsApp groups. Online training sessions can also be arranged for the COVID-19 literacy of the library staff and library clientele.

**Conclusion:** The adoption of COVID-19 precautionary measures in libraries will result into a better library culture. These practices will control the spread of this contagious virus to ensure a safe and healthy Pakistan.

**Keyword:** Corona Virus-Libraries, COVID-19-Pakistan, COVID-19 -Libraries, Libraries-Pakistan, Corona-Preventive Measures..

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## INTRODUCTION

The city of Wuhan, Hubei province of central Asia was reported as the origin of this contagious Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) in December 2019. COVID-19 belongs to a newly discovered family of virus that causes infectious diseases. It has medical, psychological, financial, social and religious effects on millions of people around 213 countries and territories of the world. As per worldometer updates about COVID-19 published on May 23, 2020, United States of America is on the top of the list of the most affected zones of the globe followed by Russia and Brazil. Pakistan is at serial No.19 of this international report with 52437 confirmed Corona cases with 1102 deaths<sup>1</sup>. Pakistan tested its first Coronavirus-positive case on February 26th—a young man who returned from Iran after pilgrimage<sup>2</sup>. Most of the countries have decided to

relax the lockdown or planning to do so, that will result into a continuous rise in number of infected cases. The highest per day increase was observed on May 19, 2020—over 105,000 new registered cases as reported by World Health Organization (WHO) on 20th May 2020<sup>3</sup>. The total number of infected people has crossed the figure of five million. Although COVID-19 is a deadly virus but recovery response rate is also very estimable.

Libraries, being a part of global world—were also badly affected by this emerging virus. Various library associations and organizations of the world have been trying their best to combat the effects of COVID-19. International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) are regularly updating the Librarians community and information providers about the current pandemic. IFLA has given the key resources for libraries in responding to the Coronavirus pandemic. As per IFLA update May 22-2020, the librarians around the world should follow the following instructions<sup>4</sup>.

Understanding COVID-19, its spread and libraries. It is the prime responsibility of the information providers to understand the basics of this epidemic disease including common symptoms of Corona virus and preventive measures. The people of older age with chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases

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are more likely exposed to this contagious disease. Fever, shortness of breath, dry cough, tiredness, aches and pains, running nose, nausea and diarrhea are the common symptoms of patients of COVID-19. To be well informed about the spread of corona is the best preventive measure against this widely dispersing disease. This virus is primarily spreading through droplets of saliva or liquid from the nose when an infected coughs and sneezes. WHO search pages, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on corona, WHO's WhatsApp alerts and other sources can be consulted to acquire trustworthy information. Librarians in Pakistan can update his/her level of awareness from the web site of Government of Pakistan designed for COVID-19<sup>5</sup>.

Libraries around the world are being closed by their respective Governments across 213 countries on the world map just after corona pandemic. All facets of libraries including schools, colleges and universities, special, medical, public, juvenile and even national libraries were badly affected by this worldwide pandemic. These libraries have closed the doors for all sorts of services for their clientele. As per education survey report of finance Department, Government of Pakistan (2018-19), there is a total 262 thousand educational institutions working under the umbrella of Government of Pakistan, with a library and information center<sup>6</sup>. These libraries have also stopped their services for the safety and health care of their patrons.

Adoption of different approaches. Pakistani libraries are also facing very hard situation due to the present-day international epidemic. Drawing on the experience around the world, libraries and librarians in Pakistan are finding themselves in the situations: Starting to re-think about the gradual reopening of the libraries under the Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) framed by the Ministry of Health, Government of Pakistan with modifications in library policies as per current corona circumstances.

Limits on number of people using the libraries at any one time, enforcing preventing measures like one-way sanitizer installed walk through gate, furniture with venerable space with reading room and toilets closed approach should be adopted. This system will help in ensuring social distancing. The public library of Macao-China has introduced ticketing system to restrict number of users in the library<sup>7</sup>. The national library of Serbia has permitted only five users to enter the reading room of the library at a time<sup>8</sup>. Some school libraries in Geneva have also allowed one pupil to enter the library<sup>9</sup>. Here in Pakistan, libraries and librarians can adopt a measurable strategy for ensuring safety of the library users. A regular and orderly availability of hydroalcoholic gel bottles will have to be placed both at the entrance of the information Centre/ library, at the reception counter and circulation desk, on the reading table, in the washrooms and with the computer gadgets.

It should be ensured that each user has disinfected their hands before coming inside the library

Spraying periodically on the furniture, shelves, and gates of the library to ensure safety of their users. The importance of high standards of hygiene should be inculcated among the library staff and users. It should be ensured that all people have washed their hands frequently. Provision of gloves and face masks and hand sanitizers (potentially next to the equipment such as laptop, printer, computer etc.), bins for tissues or other contaminated material (pedal bins) should be made possible.

Initiating click-and-collect or drive-through services to safeguard access to learning material without human interactions. The click-and-collect as well as reproduction of valuable materials is offered by National Library of the Netherlands<sup>10</sup>. Vancouver Public Library has applied mobile libraries or busier central library systems in France<sup>11</sup>. In order to allow access to library resources without human contact, remote lockers concept has been introduced by Librarians in Korea<sup>12</sup>.

Provision of training and safety kits should be given to library personnel for safety measures of staff and library users. Unlimited renewal, waiving off of the fines, provision of digital services to library users can also be used as safety measure for the library users as in Macao, Hong Kong (China) and Geneva, Switzerland<sup>13</sup>. Try to implement e-lending, e-learning or support to remote teaching.

Try to promote online services and resources to minimize number of visits to library. Appointment-only policy should be adopted for library services such as reprographic, scanning and printing as proposed by library policy makers in West Virginia. Limitation of time in the library can also provide more opportunities to library visit as suggested by Czech Library Council. Hong Kong and Shanghai –China also plan to re-open the libraries for no more than one hour followed by short break<sup>14</sup>.

People with mild symptoms should be instructed to self-isolate and contact a COVID-19 information Centre for advice on testing and referral. People with sore throat, cough or difficulty in breathing should be referred to doctor for attention.

Staff and library patrons should be encouraged to take time at home rather coming to the library, if he/she is feeling ill. The regular employees and library users should be ensured to respect rules and SOPs around social distancing.

Ensuring that staff and users are encouraged to take time to recover if they are feeling ill, rather than coming to the library. Providing pages with useful links to reliable information for users on their websites and promoting media literacy faced with potential misinformation online.

Corona virus survives for longer time on steel, iron,

plastics and for less long on paper, cardboard or copper. It is estimated to date that SARS-CoV-2 remains viable: 3 hours in the air in the form of aerosols (particles at 5 m), 7/24 hours for cardboard, 48 hours for textiles, 3-5 days for metals, paper and glass, 4-5 days for wood, 3-9 days for plastics<sup>15</sup>. The returned books should be quarantine for a specific period to reduce the risk of virus infection with regular hygienic measures of the library equipment and material. The quarantine period should be ensured as per following details (French Library Association)<sup>16</sup>.

Minimum of 3-day quarantine for paper documents without plastic material. Minimum of 10-day quarantine for paper documents with laminated blankets

10-day quarantine with impregnated with ethanol at 70%, followed by a quarantine of 3-day for plastic documents (CDs, DVDs, Cases, etc.) before re-entering into circulation.

A dedicated quarantine space/room/store should be reserved for the incoming documents with a surety that the room should be declared as no go area for general public. The furniture and other material placed inside the reserved room will be sprayed with ethanol or isopropanol preferably alcoholic products meeting the virus-killing standard NF EN 14476 at morning and evening at least once in a day. Individual protective measures at libraries are also very important for combating corona virus contagious disease. Wear overalls (made of cotton, washable at 60 degree centigrade) and wash it on daily basis or use disposable one designed for medical practitioners. Use cotton non-medical grade masks (washable at 60 degree centigrade)

Try to follow the SOPs of public health such as washing hand for at least 20 seconds, usage of cotton towels. Use these towels to close the tap and open the door. These practices will avoid risk of contact contamination. Disinfect floors/surfaces, keep doors open; Restrict and define the number of people that have meal together with social distancing;

Provide regular updates about COVID-19 to the general public through library website, social media and WhatsApp groups. Promote media and digital literacy to get reliable information about various online resources and latest updates on corona. Ensure that all human ware of the library should be made capable to work remotely and services can be provided virtually.

## CONCLUSION

As libraries are social entities dealing people of different ages, it should be re-opened after proper preparation. It is the legal responsibility of the library executives to ensure all possible measures as per framed rules of Government of Pakistan. The human resources working in the library should be trained enough to follow SOPs. In

first phase, libraries should gradually resume its services. Pakistan Library Association (PLA) and other sub associations should have to play their timely role to protect their professional colleagues through online trainings and social media platforms.

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