



## Guidance for Reach Out and Read Programs Regarding Books and Infection Control

Some Reach Out and Read sites are asking about children's books and infection control practices, particularly as COVID-19 has created extra focus on this area.

First and foremost, Reach Out and Read cannot and should not override a clinic, hospital, or health system's policies regarding how books are placed, cleaned, or handled with respect to infection control, or with respect to playroom or waiting room activities. All Reach Out and Read sites and affiliate staff are encouraged to work collaboratively with health care organizations to achieve our goal of children and their families being supported in nurturing, literacy-rich interactions.

Given that this current situation is uncertain but expected to be temporary, removal of communally-used books on a temporary basis from clinical locations — with the expectation that they will return after the intercurrent crisis is over — is a reasonable approach and is consistent with what has happened in the past with the prior national H1N1 influenza epidemic, or with other smaller, more local outbreaks of other diseases. Similarly, the exigencies of social distancing and infection control and the attempt to reduce time spent in waiting rooms means that volunteer reader and other waiting room programs that bring children into close proximity should be suspended, again with the expectation that they will be possible once more when the crisis is over.

Having said that, there are instances where Reach Out and Read sites or affiliate staff are being asked for guidance, or where potentially vague guidelines are being aggressively interpreted. To that end, we offer the following points:

### **WITH RESPECT TO GENTLY USED BOOKS** (*where permitted in waiting rooms and common areas*):

- There is no evidence that books are any more risky as a fomite (inanimate object capable of transmitting disease) than other commonly found objects in a health care environment such as door handles, elevator buttons, etc.
- The limited data available on the survivability of COVID-19 on surfaces seem to indicate that cardboard (and presumably other paper surfaces) is less hospitable to the virus than plastic or most metals. Of note, this data is based on *no* sanitizing process being used at all.
- To that point, some health systems have had processes where books that were *not* visibly soiled or used in isolation rooms could be wiped down with a "quat cloth" (disinfectant wipe such as CaviWipes). Books that were soiled or in use with patients on isolation would definitely need to be discarded.

- Given the limited survivability of bacteria and viruses away from living hosts, one possible conservative-yet-effective technique would be to store all “handled” books in a storage bin away from being handled for at least 3 days, and then wiping them down as above.

**STORE GENTLY USED BOOKS UNTIL THE CURRENT CRISIS IS PAST:**

- At this time, there is no data to suggest that gently used books need to be destroyed or removed permanently from clinical settings.

**CONTINUE TO GIVE NEW BOOKS AT WELL VISITS:**

- Remember that brand-new books shipped from publishers reflect extraordinarily low risk of transmitting disease, so the books used in the central Reach Out and Read intervention in the exam room during the course of a well-child visit should be considered differently from communal books in a waiting room.

We hope this guidance is helpful.