

April 21, 2020

**Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security**

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Re: Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors

Dear Dr. Rivers and other named authors,

On behalf of the Public Library Association board, staff and membership, we are writing to seek a correction in how libraries were characterized in your recent report referenced above, solicit additional information about the report, and invite future collaboration.

With a vast range of public library buildings and configurations around the country, as well as diverse public programming, I am deeply concerned about the characterization of libraries as “low contact intensity” and having a low number of contacts. Each year public libraries host 1.3 billion visits or more, or roughly averaging 3.5 million visits each day.

Not only is “the risk in these spaces highly dependent on the size of the population served and the size of the space,” as you say, but also the type and nature of programs offered each of our roughly 17,000 public library locations. While a new footnote touches on these activities, the table on page 16 should be corrected entirely to match that of community centers. With summer reading and learning programs traditionally a centerpiece of our work between May and August, issues you raise related to school-age children also apply if our locations are re-opened in this period. In many of our public internet spaces, computer users often sit less than a foot away from each other. This is critical to note as public libraries were essential connection points for filing online for unemployment, online job seeking and upskilling in the wake of the Great Recession. The scale of economic displacement we see today is far greater than it was then, and libraries will be essential in getting America back to work.

We appreciate that libraries were specifically included among the critical civic assets and social infrastructure needed to recover and rebuild in the wake of this global health crisis. But we can only do our vital work with our staff and our communities *safely* with thoughtful public health guidance.

We ask that you quickly modify or re-issue your report to more accurately reflect the realities of public library spaces and programs to better guide state and local leaders. We know there is great

need for public health guidance, and we hope we can work together to bring our knowledge of the library field (including a [recent survey of public library responses during the pandemic](#)) together with your expertise, along with other authors and staff at the Center for Health Security.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Barbara Macikas  
*Executive Director*  
Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association

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**UPDATE: The following response was received from Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security on April 22, 2020.**

Thank you for your feedback. We appreciate you taking the time to get in touch.

These risk assessments are primarily oriented around customers, attendees, and members of the public, who would make up the majority of people interacting with a business or other noted setting in this report. However, we acknowledge that risk to employees will likely be greater in many of these organizations and settings, as their duration of exposure and number of interactions will be higher. Special precautions should be taken to protect employees, potentially including restructuring duties to minimize person-to-person contact, changing work flows or operations to diminish risk, providing personal protective equipment for employees (if sufficient supplies make it † This text was added on April 20, 2020, after publication, to clarify the population under consideration for the risk assessments. Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors 12 feasible to do so outside the healthcare system), and providing enhanced sanitation and hygiene supplies (eg, disinfecting products and alcohol-based hand sanitizer).

We've updated the report to clarify the assessment: [https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs\\_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/reopening-guidance-governors.pdf](https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/reopening-guidance-governors.pdf)

Thank you,  
Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security