CDC guide to reopening was trashed by the Trump admin. It just leaked

Enlarge / Signage stands outside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S, on Saturday, March 14, 2020.

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Public health experts at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have leaked their recommendations on how to safely reopen businesses amid the COVID-19 pandemic—after officials in the Trump administration rejected the guidance and allegedly told CDC officials their plan would "never see the light of day."

The 17-page document (PDF found here) was initially set to be published last Friday but was nixed. Instead, it was released to the Associated Press by a CDC official who was not authorized to release it.

The guidance lays out detailed, phased recommendations for how to safely reopen child care programs, schools, day camps, faith communities, businesses with vulnerable workers,

restaurants, bars, and mass transit. Though some of the general points laid out already appear on federal websites—such as an emphasis on hand hygiene—the document uniquely offers tailored recommendations for each type of business.

For instance, the section on reopening child care facilities recommends that the facilities avoid plush toys, make sure each child has their own plate during meal times, and stagger drop-off and pick-up times for parents. The recommendations for restaurants include installing physical barriers, such as sneeze guards, around host stations and avoiding the use of hand-held "buzzers" to inform waiting patrons that their table is ready.

Though such detailed recommendations from experts in public health are likely welcomed from business owners, they were allegedly a sticking point for the Trump administration. According to unnamed sources close to the administration who spoke with the AP, the White House has refrained from offering such specifics because different areas of the country have varying levels of disease transmission. Areas with less disease may want to take fewer precautions, for instance.

Likewise, an unnamed administration official told CNN that the White House's coronavirus task force felt the guidance was "overly prescriptive" because "guidance in rural Tennessee shouldn't be the same guidance for urban New York City." The official also noted that the CDC guidance did not fit the "phases" outlined by a reopening guidance already released by the task force.

As the AP noted, traditionally it is the CDC's role to offer such guidance and inform the public on the best evidence-based health practices. However, during this pandemic, the Trump administration has largely sidelined the agency. CDC officials have not hosted a news briefing on the pandemic in nearly two months.

“CDC has always been the public health agency Americans turn to in a time of crisis,” Dr. Howard Koh told the AP. Koh is a Harvard professor and worked in the Obama administration during the 2009 H1N1 swine flu pandemic. “The standard in a crisis is to turn to them for the latest data and latest guidance and the latest press briefing. That has not occurred, and everyone sees that.”

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