

White House reportedly orders hospitals to bypass CDC during COVID-19 data collection

The Trump administration is now ordering hospitals to send coronavirus patient data to a database in Washington, DC as part of a new initiative that may bypass the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), according to a report from *The New York Times* published on Tuesday. As outlined in a document posted to the website of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), hospitals are being ordered to send data directly to the administration, effective tomorrow, a move that has alarmed some within the CDC, according to *The Times*.

The database that will collect and store the information is referred to in the document as HHS Protect, which was built in part by data mining and predictive analytics firm Palantir. The Silicon Valley company is known most for its controversial contract work with the US military and other clandestine government agencies as well as for being co-founded and initially funded by Trump ally Peter Thiel.

The database is the very same one built by Peter Thiel's Palantir

"A unique link will be sent to the hospital points of contact. This will direct the [point of care] to a hospital-specific secure form that can then be used to enter the necessary information. After completing the fields, click submit and confirm that the form has been successfully captured," reads the HHS instructions. "A confirmation email will be sent to you from the HHS Protect System. This method replaces the

emailing of individual spreadsheets previously requested.”

While the White House’s official reasoning is that this plan will help make data collection on the spread of COVID-19 more centralized and efficient, some current and former public health officials fear the bypassing of the CDC may be an effort to politicize the findings and cut experts out of the loop with regard to federal messaging and guidelines, *The Times* reports. Four former CDC directors penned an opinion article published in *The Washington Post* earlier today, arguing that “no president ever politicized its science the way Trump has,” and that the White House is undermining public health in its handling of the coronavirus.

The Times reports that the data centralization under the control of a cabinet-level executive branch, and not a national health institute with bipartisan support, is exacerbating fears the White House coronavirus response team may be politically motivated in this decision.

“Sadly, we are not even close to having the virus under control. Quite the opposite, in fact,” the opinion in the *Post* reads. “Trying to fight this pandemic while subverting scientific expertise is like fighting blindfolded. How well and how quickly we adhere to the advice of public health experts at the CDC will determine whether, how soon and how safely our schools can reopen. It is not too late to give the CDC its proper role in guiding this response. But the clock is ticking.”

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/14/21324688/white-house-covid-19-coronavirus-data-collection-cdc-bypass-trump-hhs>