

Trump administration suppresses Centers for Disease Control coronavirus guidance document

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The Trump administration reportedly shelved a document from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which would have provided detailed instructions for local authorities on appropriate measures to reopen a variety of businesses and institutions. The document is reportedly undergoing “revisions,” according to White House Coronavirus Task Force member Dr. Deborah Birx, who appeared on CNN Thursday evening.

A leaked version of the report, headlined “Guidance for Implementing the Opening Up America Again Framework,” was given anonymously to the Associated Press by a federal official. A second official, from the CDC, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity, informed the AP that the public health organization’s infectious disease specialists were told that the document “would never see the light of day.”

This news has emerged as the pandemic continues to sweep across the globe. There are now 3.9 million cases internationally and more than 270,000 deaths. Even as physical distancing measures have to some extent mitigated the spread of the virus in certain areas of the US, the pandemic has in fact accelerated in rural areas, many of which are ill-equipped to deal with the health crisis.

The spread of the pandemic is being exacerbated as the back-to-work drive becomes increasingly hysterical. Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has demanded that Americans “sacrifice” their lives by going back to work. US President Donald Trump indifferently noted Tuesday that as a result of his policies, “There’ll be more death.”

The CDC report lays out step-by-step instructions for childcare programs, schools, churches, employers with

vulnerable workers, restaurants, bars and mass transit agencies. As the agency notes, all of these are “critical” to the lives of large sections of the population as well as places people gather in large numbers.

It includes a variety of flow-charts and lists designed for state and local officials to use to determine whether or not these institutions should open and how they should operate during the pandemic. For example, it notes that sneeze guards should be placed between patrons and employees, and guidelines to ensure that only items and tools that can be easily sanitized are used.

The document also explicitly notes that “vulnerable workers” includes anyone with “chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, hypertension, severe heart conditions, weakened immunity, severe obesity, diabetes, liver disease, and chronic kidney disease that requires dialysis.” Millions of people suffer one or more of these conditions, which makes explicit the dangers of the coronavirus as the pandemic continues to infect more and more people.

The document, however, also provides a variety of caveats that business can use to not provide a safe working environment for their employees. It notes multiple times that CDC recommendations—including providing personal protective equipment and extra sick leave—should only be implemented where “feasible” and that employers should coordinate with local officials on whether or not they should reopen and with what level of safety precautions.

By introducing such flexibility, the CDC ultimately made its own document toothless. What exactly is “feasible” is never defined, which would allow companies to do essentially whatever they want in

regard to reopening. Nowhere does it even imply that if companies cannot safely reopen, they simply should not do so in order to preserve workers' lives.

Yet this report was unacceptable to Trump, even with these gaping loopholes. This is in line with other efforts by the Trump administration to prevent a coordinated, rational and scientific response to the coronavirus crisis. Any guidance released by the CDC is generally acted on at the national level, which conflicts with the president's assertion in his own guidelines that the response should be dealt with at the state, county and local level.

It also comes in the wake of reports that Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease specialist and a member of the Coronavirus Task Force, was prevented from testifying before Congress. Fauci has at times expressed opinions differing from that of the administration for dealing with the pandemic, at one point stating on television that a national shutdown was necessary. For the most part, however, he has lent his authority to the Trump administration's pandemic response.

At the same time, Trump is doing his best to dismantle even the nominal response of the federal government to the pandemic. He suggested on Tuesday that the Coronavirus Task Force would be disbanded, likely at the end of May, before walking this back the next day, claiming that it would "continue on indefinitely." He made the point, however, that its focus would shift to "opening up our country."

This is ultimately the primary focus of the United States government. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to funnel \$80 billion per day from the treasury to Wall Street and the major corporations, under the guise of providing relief in response to the economic calamity caused by the pandemic.

There are no suggestions that such sums should be spent to provide relief for the tens of millions that have been thrown out of work. Nor is even a fraction of this amount being spent to research the pandemic or develop the necessary testing and contact tracing infrastructure to contain the disease.

Such sentiments are shared by Trump's co-thinkers internationally. The fascistic Jair Bolsonaro has attempted to downplay the dangers of the coronavirus by referring to it as the "little flu." He fired the country's health minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta after

a public disagreement over the government's response to the pandemic. And he has called Brazilians "cowards" for isolating themselves from the disease and demanded they go back to work.



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