News



Ashley Weiser, the great granddaughter of The Varsity founder Frank Gordy, wearing a face mask holds a sign Tuesday, April 28, 2020 at 61 North Ave NW in downtown Atlanta. All the Varsity locations are open with limited hours for drive-thru and drive-in only service and are accepting only debit and credit cards. The restaurant is assuring customers they are following the guidelines from the CDC and Governor's office during the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP/Atlanta Journal-Constitution/John Spink)

Mike Stobbe

View Author Profile

Jason Dearen

View Author Profile

The Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

New York — May 14, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

U.S. health officials on May 14 released some of their long-delayed guidance that schools, businesses and other organizations can use as states reopen from coronavirus shutdowns.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention posted six one-page "decision tool" documents that use traffic signs and other graphics to tell organizations what they should consider before reopening.

The tools are for schools, workplaces, camps, childcare centers, mass transit systems, and bars and restaurants. The CDC originally also authored a document for churches and other religious facilities, but that wasn't posted May 14. The agency declined to say why.

Early versions of the documents included detailed information for churches wanting to restart in-person services, with suggestions including maintaining distance between parishioners and limiting the size of gatherings. The faith-related guidance was taken out after the White House raised concerns about the recommended restrictions, according to government emails obtained by the AP and a person inside the agency who didn't have permission to talk with reporters and spoke on condition of anonymity.

On May 14, a Trump administration official also speaking on condition of anonymity said there were concerns about the propriety of the government making specific dictates to places of worship.

The CDC drafted the guidance more than a month ago and it was initially shelved by the Trump administration, The Associated Press reported last week.

The agency also had prepared even more extensive guidance — about 57 pages of it — that has not been posted.

That longer document, which the AP obtained, would give different organizations specifics about how to reopen while still limiting spread of the virus, including by spacing workers or students 6 feet apart and closing break rooms and cafeterias to limit gatherings. Many of the suggestions already appear on federal websites but they haven't been presented as reopening advice.

Some health experts and politicians have been pushing for the CDC to release as much guidance as possible to help businesses and organizations decide how to proceed.

"They want to be able to tell their own employees the guidance of the federal government," Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Center for Health Security at Johns Hopkins University, said at a congressional hearing May 13. "They want to be able to tell their customers, 'We've done everything that's been asked of us.'"

The guidance relates to another document released by the Trump administration on April 17. That phased-in reopening plan broadly outlines how to move away from stay-at-home orders, school closures and other measures designed to stop the spread of the new coronavirus that has caused more than 1.3 million reported U.S. illnesses and more than 80,000 deaths.

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat, on May 13 offered a resolution — blocked by Republicans — to encourage release of all the documents.

"America needs and must have the candid guidance of our best scientists unfiltered, unedited, uncensored by president Trump or his political minions. The CDC report on reopening the country is an important piece of that guidance," Schumer said.

The decision tools have been undergoing review by different federal officials, and they've been edited from earlier versions.

For example, an earlier draft of the one-page document on camps obtained by the AP asked organizers if their program would limit attendance to people who live nearby. If the answer was no, the camp was advised not to reopen. That local attendance limitation was dropped and was not in the version posted May 14.

And in that document and others, language has been dropped that asked if the organization is in a community that is still requiring significant disease mitigation. If the answer was yes, the organization was advised not to reopen.

(AP reporters Mary Clare Jalonick and Zeke Miller in Washington, D.C., contributed to this report. Dearen reported from Gainesville, Florida.)

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Reopening post pandemic** feature series. View the full series.