

US Health Guidance Under Fire as Politics Eclipses Science

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Once considered the global benchmark for evidence-based public health information, the United States government is now at the center of a growing controversy over the erosion of its health guidance. In recent months, federal agencies have quietly removed, rewritten, or contradicted long-standing scientific materials, leaving doctors, health advocates, and families grappling with confusion and mistrust.

The shift began shortly after President Donald Trump took office. Webpages maintained by the Department of Health and Human Services that referenced gender identity and sexual

orientation vanished overnight. Though many pages were returned after a court order, they came back stamped with disclaimers rejecting the validity of the information. On topics ranging from HIV prevention to transgender health care, the agency now asserts that materials promoting “gender ideology” are inaccurate and “disconnected from biological reality.”

At the same time, other vital resources have disappeared altogether. The U.S. Global Change Research Program, which produced extensive reports on climate change and health, shut down its website, making those findings inaccessible to the public. Databases from the National Institutes of Health that cover research on cancer and Alzheimer’s disease have been marked “under review,” signaling that more edits could follow.

Perhaps most troubling for many physicians is the inconsistency in vaccine recommendations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now offers mixed messages on thimerosal, a preservative once used in vaccines, and has reclassified the COVID-19 shot for children as an optional “shared decision-making” vaccine. This shift came without the typical scientific deliberation, prompting swift backlash from respected professional groups like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

“What all this is doing is causing a great deal of confusion, and not just for our families and our patients, but also for our providers and our doctors,” said Dr. Eric Ball, a California pediatrician who chairs the state’s American Academy of Pediatrics chapter. “When we can’t trust those sources, that makes it more difficult for us to do our jobs and endangers the health of our communities.”

Child health advocates warn that removing or rewriting official guidance makes it nearly impossible for parents to make informed decisions. Bruce Lesley, president of the nonprofit First Focus on Children, stressed that families depend on reliable, science-based information. “There’s no way to put that burden on parents alone and expect it will be fine,” he said.

For many, this moment feels unprecedented. Dr. Sean O’Leary of the American Academy of Pediatrics called the situation “dystopian” and “deeply frightening.” As America’s scientific institutions face political pressures, experts fear the damage to public trust could last for years and that the country’s reputation as a leader in health science may never fully recover.