

Mar 5, 2021 - Politics & Policy

CDC lets child migrant shelters fill to 100% despite COVID concern



Stef W. Kight



Intensive care tents at overflow shelter in Carrizo Springs, Texas. Photo: Sergio Flores/The Washington Post via Getty Images

The Centers for Disease Control is allowing shelters handling child migrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border to expand to full capacity, abandoning a

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Why it matters: The fact that the country's premier health advisory agency is permitting a change in COVID-19 protocols indicates the scale of the immigration crisis. A draft memo obtained by Axios conceded "facilities should plan for and expect to have COVID-19 cases."

- The document goes on to recommend detailed ways to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in shelters.
- It encourages operators to continue giving COVID-19 tests to newly arrived children, follow 14-day quarantine guidelines, wear masks, improve ventilation and ensure they save room for isolating any child who tests positive, among other actions.
- The memo states that there "is no 0% risk scenario" given the coronavirus, so "facilities should plan for and expect to have COVID-19 cases," [CNN first reported](#).
- A spokesperson for HHS did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Driving the news: The memo, drafted on CDC letterhead and set for imminent delivery, said the "only available options" for housing minors who cross the border without their parents are "prolonged stays at [Customs & Border Protection] facilities operating significantly above COVID-19 capacities."

- The other alternative is increasing capacity at other

- The CDC says there is an assumed higher risk of migrant kids getting the virus at Border Patrol centers, and it alludes to other safety concerns with those facilities. It concludes the HHS shelters are the safer option, even with increased capacity.
- The CDC says these facilities, operated by HHS' Office of Refugee Resettlement, "may temporarily increase capacity to full licensed capacity ... while implementing and adhering to strict COVID-19 mitigation measures."

Between the lines: The memo also spells out the dire problem.

- As Axios has reported, shelters have been getting an average of [321 children per day](#) — up from 47 per day the first week of January — and expect to need [20,000 beds](#) to accommodate an anticipated record number of child migrants.
- "At this time, CBP does not have adequate space for physical distancing, quarantine of persons exposed to COVID-19 or isolation of ill or infected persons," the memo says.
- "As of March 1, 2021, four CBP sectors are over COVID-adjusted capacity."

Between the lines: The memo also comes amid a ferocious national debate over whether and when to

children have been less affected by the coronavirus than adults, the memo makes clear its recommendations are only in response to rising numbers of migrant children — and don't apply to other group settings.

- The memo was drafted in a response to requests for guidance from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.



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Stef W. Kight
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Biden confronts mounting humanitarian crisis at the border

Just over a month into his presidency, President Biden is staring down a mounting crisis at the border that could be just as bad as the ones faced by Barack Obama and Donald Trump, if not worse.

Why it matters: Immigration is an issue that can consume a presidency. It's intensely and poisonously partisan. It's complicated. And the lives and welfare of vulnerable children hang in the balance.

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Jonathan Swan, Stef W. Kight

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Scoop: Leaked HHS docs spotlight Biden's child migrant dilemma

A group of undocumented immigrants walk toward a Customs and Border Patrol station after being apprehended. Photo: Sergio Flores/The Washington Post via Getty Images

Fresh internal documents from the Department of

overwhelming the administration's stretched resources.

Driving the news: In the week ending March 1, the Border Patrol referred to HHS custody an average of 321 children per day, according to documents obtained by Axios. That's up from a weekly average of 203 in late January and early February — and just 47 per day during the first week of January.

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Sarah Mucha
6 mins ago - Politics & Policy

Biden to sign executive orders focused on women's rights

President Biden. Photo by Samuel Corum/Getty Images

President Biden will sign executive orders Monday establishing a Gender Policy Council and directing the Department of Education to review the federal law

Why it matters: The Biden administration is signaling its priorities to advance gender equity and equality as women, particularly women of color, have been [disproportionately affected](#) by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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