

RESPONDING TO A GLOBAL CRISIS: CDT AND COVID-19

The global crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19 has thrust technology issues into the center of civic life. Around the world, people are rapidly turning to technology to improve public health, work and study remotely, and to connect, communicate, and organize in new ways. But such quick adoption has also exacerbated real threats: responses to the coronavirus' impact have the potential to result in real harms to individual privacy, free expression, cybersecurity, and other civil rights. Without action now, these temporary measures could become permanent. **As society searches for solutions during this global health crisis, the Center for Democracy & Technology is battling to protect civil liberties as options and use cases emerge.**



Government Surveillance

Governments around the world are turning to the rich location information provided by smartphones to track population movement, disease outbreak, and in some cases individual location. CDT has convened a task force of a select group of technologists, academics, advocates, and representatives from industry to push back on dangerous ideas. Our goal is to provide rapid and meaningful guidance for policymakers both on the strengths and limitations of the technology, and the necessary privacy and security safeguards as they work to protect citizens from the spread of disease.

Student Privacy

As educators are working around the clock and more students move online, CDT is finding efficient ways to protect student privacy by getting our resources on data portability, deletion, and algorithmic systems into the right hands. In the coming weeks, we will also release short training modules that allow education professionals to quickly understand key policy issues that are immediately relevant to guiding their teachers, parents, and students. At the same time, we are gathering facts on the ground through polling and remote focus groups. CDT's efforts will help protect students and ensure their success as technology becomes more integrated into their education.

Free Expression

At a time when misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 are spreading and social distancing is creating a spike in online communication, some platforms are adopting new rules for sharing scientifically inaccurate pandemic information. But human moderation cannot be performed remotely, so technology platforms have been forced to scale back their efforts and switch to less accurate automated systems. CDT is working directly with platforms to mitigate the impact of this change on free expression, while also encouraging them to document the spread and use of misinformation and disinformation, as well as the harms caused by cyberbullying and harassment. The goal is to protect free speech online, while also determining how best to fight mis- and disinformation that undermines public health, online safety, and democratic principles more broadly.

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|||| Election Security

As primary elections in the U.S. are postponed, how should election officials respond? How can they keep primary and general elections secure, and voters informed, at a time when they are especially vulnerable to misinformation? CDT has spent the last two years developing a trusted partnership with election officials around cybersecurity. We are expanding beyond our online, on-demand training to create a PSA on misinformation aimed at voter suppression, and create field guides to help election officials spot and mitigate misinformation online. The goal is to ensure that however elections are held in the wake of the current global pandemic, those on the ground have the resources to respond now, and tools that can help them going forward.

|||| Health Data, Privacy, & Security

CDT expects commercial health information to become a key battleground in the coming months. Collected from smartphones, web quizzes, connected devices, and web browsing, this information is largely unregulated in the U.S. It is a gold mine for those attempting to understand the spread of the virus, but also for those who would exploit it to market dangerous products, make unfair employment or insurance determinations, or take advantage of vulnerable communities. In response, CDT has convened nearly 100 experts from public health, academia, advocacy, and industry to determine the scope of the issue, identify appropriate uses of commercial health data, and craft common rules that data holders can agree to adopt. The goal is to protect consumers against exploitation while aiding government and health officials' efforts.

|||| Competition & Emergency Response

Companies need to be able to coordinate emergency responses, and CDT is helping to guide them and government enforcers on how to collaborate without running afoul of antitrust laws. We are also building policy recommendations for how to protect competition and consumers in the longer-term economic response to this crisis, ranging from right-to-repair restrictions on ventilators to non-compete clauses that, unless modified, may make it harder for out-of-work Americans to take new jobs. The goal is to ensure that the spirit of antitrust laws continue to protect consumers while also allowing for reasonable collaboration during these unprecedented times to ensure the public good.

|||| Ensuring Essential Internet Access

The pandemic has served as an urgent reminder that access to the internet is a core necessity for everyday life. The digital divide has never been more stark, and CDT is urging lawmakers to make access issues part of any recovery efforts. In addition, we must ensure that open internet principles are front and center when determining what traffic is prioritized across networks. The goal is to ensure equity of access and use to what is an essential service for education, business, communications, and being active in today's society.

CDT is using our unique blend of policy expertise, advocacy savvy, and consensus-building approach to protect individual rights. Join us and learn more at cdt.org/coronavirus.

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