

# CDC Tracked Millions of Phones for COVID-19 Lockdown and Vaccine Compliance, Documents Show



Another so-called “conspiracy” theory turns out to be true. Newly released documents [obtained by Motherboard](#) through a Freedom of Information Act Request (FOIA), show the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) bought location data from tens of millions of Americans’ phones to track compliance with lockdown orders and vaccination efforts.

The agency [specifically monitored](#) Americans’ visits to churches and schools, tracked “detailed counts of visits to participating pharmacies for vaccine monitoring” and reportedly tracked peoples’ movements during curfews and visits between neighbors.

In addition, the CDC used the data to monitor the effectiveness of a public policy targeting the Navajo Nation.

CDC used COVID-19 as the reason for expediting the purchase of the data, although it intended to use it for “more general” purposes, [according to VICE](#).

SafeGraph, a highly controversial data broker [banned](#) from Google’s Play Store last year initially provided data to the CDC for free during the pandemic. The agency made a deal with SafeGraph in 2021 for \$420,000 for continued access, documents show.

The CDC [argued](#) in the documents that data from SafeGraph – backed by billionaire Peter Thiel and ex-Saudi intelligence chief Turki bin Faisal Al Saud – helped give the agency “deeper insights into the pandemic as it pertains to human behavior.”

The CDC also considered [using the data](#) to track “adherence to state-level policies to quarantine after arrival from another state” – a particularly problematic use, as state quarantines were constitutionally suspect and unsupported by federal law.

The agency claims the data was designed to follow trends that emerge from the movement of groups of people, but location data can be deanonymized and used to track specific people.

Zach Edwards, a cybersecurity researcher, [told](#) Vice after reviewing the documents:

“The CDC seems to have purposefully created an open-ended list of use cases, which included monitoring curfews, neighbor-to-neighbor visits, visits to churches, schools and pharmacies, and also a variety of analyses with this data specifically focused on violence.”

In a statement to [The New York Post](#), the CDC said mobility data obtained under the contract would be available for agency-wide use and would support numerous CDC priorities.

“SafeGraph made their social mobility data available free-of-

charge to governmental and non-governmental agencies at the beginning of the pandemic for a period of approximately one year,” said CDC spokesperson Jasmine Reed. “In April of 2021, CDC awarded a contract to SafeGraph to purchase mobility data for an additional year, through April 2022.”

A SafeGraph spokesperson told The New York Post they had been public about the CDC’s use of their data since 2020, so “there is not much new news here.”

SafeGraph disputed the ban from Google, but when asked about the allegation, Google confirmed it had banned SafeGraph last year.

U.S. citizens would have no idea they were being tracked by the CDC if Motherboard hadn’t filed a FOIA request to obtain the documents.