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US racial/ethnic data for COVID-19 cases: Still missing-in-action

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3) Author contributions: NK conceptualized the study, contributed to locating and interpreting the data, and drafted the manuscript; JTC and CT both obtained, analyzed, and contributed to interpreting the data; all authors contributed to revising the text and approving the final version.

No IRB approval was required, since the study analyzed de-identified aggregated publicly available data.

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TEXT

On June 4, 2020, the Trump Administration, responding to criticisms regarding the incompleteness of racial/ethnic and other demographic data for COVID-19 test results, including as reported by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), released new reporting requirements [1]. The guidance stated: “this information should be made available in all reporting (including through methods using existing technical infrastructure such as an HIE) to state and local public health departments and subsequently the CDC as soon as possible, but no later than August 1, 2020” [2].

To our knowledge, no reports have evaluated whether reporting of racial/ethnic data for US COVID-19 cases has improved since August 1, 2020. On September 15, 2020, i.e., 6 weeks after the data for cases was required by law, we checked the publicly available websites. Our key findings are that:

1) The current CDC demographic tracker for COVID-19 cases first reported data on August 28, 2020, at which time 2,263,017 (51%) of its 4,458,258 cases were missing data on race/ethnicity [3]. As of September 16, 2020, 2,445,731 (50%) of its 4,880,315 reported cases were missing these data [3]. Mathematically, this means that 43% of the 422,057 cases added between these two dates were missing racial/ethnic data.

2) The COVID-19 Racial Data Tracker, which uses publicly available data from state and local health departments, as well as the CDC, reported on September 13, 2020 that among the notably larger tally of 6,448,573 cases, 37.5% were missing data on race (Table 1); the range spanned from 0% (MN, SD, WV) to 100% (NY), with a median of 21% [4]. For ethnicity, the range of percent missing extended from 0% (MN, SD) to 100% (LA, ND), with a median of 24% [4]. However, several states do not appear to report any ethnicity data at all (WV, HI, NY) [4]. As also shown in Table 1, states that are the base for leaders of the US government – President, Vice President, Senate Majority Leader, and Speaker of the US House of Representatives – have upwards of a quarter to over a third of COVID 19 cases missing data on race and ethnicity.

These findings suggest that compliance with regulations to report data on race/ethnicity for US COVID-19 cases is inadequate and continues to hamper understanding of and efforts to mitigate racial/ethnic inequities in COVID-19 [5].

Table 1. COVID-19 cases: number and percent missing data on race, ethnicity, or race/ethnicity, by political geographic unit in the United States, as of September 13, 2020.			
Political geographic unit	N of cases	Percent missing data	
		Race	Ethnicity
US	6,448,573	38%	44%
Florida (state of President Trump)	663,994	26%	32%
Indiana (state of Vice President Pence, in charge of the federal COVID-19 task force)	105,804	22%	54%
Kentucky (state of Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader)	56,945	35%	37%
California (state of Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives)	754,923	32%	32%
Source of data: reference 4			

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