

COVID-19 vaccines lies and hoaxes: How to inoculate yourself, family and friends against deadly misinformation

7 January 2021, by Jessica Guynn



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Top scientists have created an online guide to arm people with scientific facts and practical tips to fight lies, hoaxes and conspiracy theories that are threatening public trust in the COVID-19 vaccines.

More than two dozen leading experts in vaccine psychology, education and virology say they volunteered contributions to The COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook to take on misinformation and propaganda spread by anti-vaccination activists that could lower vaccination rates and cause needless deaths.

Even as coronavirus cases surge and hospitals overflow with critically ill patients, opposition to the vaccines is resonating, not just with fringe communities but with swaths of mainstream America. Studies show that belief in COVID-19 falsehoods can dissuade people from getting the vaccine.

"While we now have COVID-19 vaccines, we also

have a vaccine against COVID-19 misinformation—[critical thinking](#)," said John Cook, who heads the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University.

When you spot harmful misinformation on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Google's YouTube, here's how Cook and the other scientists recommend you confront it.

- Offer a factual alternative, for example: "The vaccine is safe."
- Avoid scientific jargon or technical language. Opt instead for graphs, videos and photos.
- Repeat the misinformation once right before you correct it.
- Provide specifics such as why the information was thought to be correct, why it is in fact wrong and why the information you are providing is accurate.
- Finish by reinforcing the fact many times.

Also, when possible, "prebunk" misinformation, scientists recommend. Because falsehoods travel so quickly on [social media](#), explaining these misleading or manipulative narratives in advance can help people develop "cognitive antibodies."

Fight COVID vaccine lies with facts

The online guide offers examples of common falsehoods about the COVID-19 vaccines and how to counter them.

Myth: "The COVID-19 vaccine may give you COVID-19."

Fact: "There is negligible risk of any vaccine giving you the disease—and in the case of COVID-19, none of the vaccines currently being rolled out use

the live virus at all, not even in a weakened form."

Myth: "We can't know the COVID-19 vaccine is safe if it's only been around for a few months."

Fact: "Even though COVID-19 vaccine development was accelerated, [vaccine](#) testing was still required to proceed through a rigorous series of steps to establish the vaccines' safety and efficacy. The vaccines' safety will continue to be closely monitored as they are rolled out, to ensure they don't have serious side effects at unacceptable rates."

Myth: "mRNA vaccines change the human genome."

Fact: "mRNA vaccines are synthetic and do not contain a weakened form of the actual virus. Instead, mRNA vaccines deliver instructions that allow your body to make a protective response. This is just as unlikely to change your genome as eating fish will make you grow gills."

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