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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 15, 2021

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U.S. Surgeon General Issues Advisory During COVID-19 Vaccination Push Warning American Public About Threat of Health Misinformation

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy is issuing the first Surgeon General's Advisory of this Administration to warn the American public about the urgent threat of health misinformation. Health misinformation, including disinformation, have threatened the U.S. response to COVID-19 and continue to prevent Americans from getting vaccinated, prolonging the pandemic and putting lives at risk, and the advisory encourages technology and social media companies to take more responsibility to stop online spread of health misinformation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have been exposed to a wide range of misinformation about masks and social distancing, treatments, and vaccines. As of late May, [67% of unvaccinated adults](#) had heard at least one COVID-19 vaccine myth and either believed it to be true or were not sure of its veracity. Health misinformation has already [caused significant harm](#), dividing families and communities and undermining vaccination efforts. [An analysis of millions of social media posts](#) found that false news stories were 70 percent more likely to be shared than true stories. And a [recent study](#) showed that even brief exposure to misinformation made people less likely to want a COVID-19 vaccine.

"Health misinformation is an urgent threat to public health. It can cause confusion, sow mistrust, and undermine public health efforts, including our ongoing work to end the COVID-19 pandemic," said U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. "As Surgeon General, my job is to help people stay safe and healthy, and without limiting the spread of health misinformation, American lives are at risk. From the tech and social media companies who must do more to address the spread on their platforms, to all of us identifying and avoiding sharing misinformation, tackling this challenge will require an all-of-society approach, but it is critical for the long-term health of our nation."

Health misinformation is information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence. It is not a recent phenomenon, and persistent [rumors about HIV/AIDS](#) for decades have undermined efforts to reduce infection rates in the U.S. During the Ebola epidemic, misinformation spread rapidly on social media. A [2014 study - PDF](#) found that Ebola-related tweets that contained misinformation were more likely to be politically charged and have content promoting discord.

This advisory lays out how the nation can confront health misinformation by helping individuals, families, and communities better identify and limit its spread, and issues a number of ways institutions in education, media, medicine, research, and government stakeholders can approach this issue. It also underscores the urgent need for technology and social media companies to address the way misinformation and disinformation spread on their platforms, threatening people's health.

Surgeon General's Advisories are public statements that call the American people's attention to a public health issue and provide recommendations for how it should be addressed. Advisories are reserved for significant public health challenges that need the American people's immediate attention.

Read the full Surgeon General's Advisory here: surgeongeneral.gov/healthmisinformation

For more information about the Office of the Surgeon General, please visit: www.surgeongeneral.gov.

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