

Full Fact briefing: building trust in information at a time of crisis

Full Fact fights bad information. We're a team of independent fact checkers who find, expose and counter the harm it does. Bad information can damage public debate, pose risks to public health and erode public trust.

This week saw the publication of concerning new [research](#) from the Reuters Institute in Oxford that found "a significant increase in the percentage of people who say they are concerned about false or misleading information about coronavirus from the UK government (up 11 percentage points to 38%) and from politicians (up 9 percentage points to 40%)."

Parliamentarians and their staff can help build trust during this time of crisis by fact checking any statements you make in advance; giving the sources for what you do say; and quickly correcting any mistake you make publicly.

This is the **fourth** in a [series of briefings](#) keeping you up to date. Full Fact has [now written over 150 articles](#) on claims about Covid-19, the lockdown and the government's response.

- Following reports on social media that **scammers could be exploiting the new Test and Trace service with fake messages**, we [wrote a piece about how to verify you are actually being contacted by the government's service](#).
- We investigated two separate (and, as we discovered, incorrect) claims circulating that newspapers have been using **misleading photos** to accuse people of not social distancing. We checked a claim on Twitter that the [Daily Express used an old photo of Brighton seafront](#), from before the coronavirus outbreak, on a front-page story about people failing to social distance during lockdown. This is incorrect and metadata from the photo shows it was taken during lockdown. We also checked whether [the Mail used an old photo of Jeremy Corbyn MP](#) to claim he wasn't social distancing on his birthday, and found that all the evidence suggests this photo was taken on 26 May 2020, the day the Mail reported.
- We looked into claims circulating on social media that **hand sanitiser can catch fire in a hot car at temperatures of 21 degrees** - [at these temperatures there would need to be a spark for hand sanitiser to catch fire](#).
- As stories about **Dominic Cummings** dominated the news agenda, we checked a number of claims about him. We took an in-depth look at [what the lockdown rules said when he travelled to Durham](#), and we also checked the claim that his [blog was recently edited to include a specific reference to coronavirus](#) - which is correct. We checked false claims [that Cummings' sister is the director of the company that runs the NHS track and trace app](#) - the woman in question is not his sister and her company is not involved in the track and trace app - and a false claim that [Cummings appears in a photograph of the Bullingdon Club](#) alongside Boris Johnson and David Cameron.

- We've also continued to see claims about **vaccines for Covid-19**, including a [false claim that the new coronavirus is patented](#), and that there is already a vaccine patented and owned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Correcting bad information

[Research](#) shows that fact checking information has an impact on the public and that it contributes to a culture of accuracy. There is also evidence that fact checking is more effective if the person who made the inaccurate claim corrects themselves.

That's why Full Fact goes beyond the fact check: we follow up to ask public figures, media outlets and others to correct or clarify claims that are incorrect or misleading.

So far this year, we have followed up on our fact checks 62 times, with some 25 of these requests leading to a full resolution. In May, four newspapers - the [Express](#), the [Mirror](#), the [Times](#) and the [Sunday Times](#) - issued corrections after we contacted them.

For more detail of our follow-up work you can read our recent report, [The Full Fact Report 2020](#), where we also make recommendations for how the processes that allow people and organisations to correct the record could be improved.

What does research tell us about tackling bad information about health?

Covid-19 is certainly unprecedented in terms of the speed of its spread and the impact it has had on people's lives. And yet, health myths are not unique to the new coronavirus. We saw it with Zika, with Ebola, and it has persisted for a long time with vaccine hesitancy.

In a [new research briefing](#) from Full Fact, our Researcher Dr. Dora-Olivia Vicol looks at health misinformation, and how fact checkers and the general public can stand up to crises, conspiracies, and inaccurate everyday health advice.

We make a number of timely and important **recommendations**, including:

- the importance of being clear and consistent with messages and using credible information sources in a public health crisis;
- the need to prevent the spread of vaccine misinformation to reduce the likelihood of it reaching new audiences, since evidence suggests anti-vaccine conspiracies are complex to counter once they have taken hold; and
- tackling everyday health myths by cultivating the public's ability to think slowly and carefully about what they read, and building trust in information sources over time.

If you have any questions about this briefing please email cassie.staines@fullfact.org.