

Full Fact briefing on the new coronavirus/Covid-19

Full Fact fights bad information. We're a team of independent fact checkers and campaigners who find, expose and counter the harm it does.

Bad information can harm our health. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 began, we have been fighting a tide of false claims and exaggerations. Much of this has originated and spread on social media, often reaching private messaging apps such as WhatsApp. But journalists in the mainstream media have also been reporting some harmful false claims as fact. This risks people using ineffective or harmful treatments for the disease, and not taking appropriate precautionary measures to prevent the spread due to false advice that can suggest they don't have the disease when they do.

What we've seen

Full Fact is monitoring daily for information being shared about Covid-19. Full Fact has published over 44 fact checks on claims relating to Covid-19 since January 2020. All of our fact checks can be found on our website: <http://fullfact.org/coronavirus>

Social media

A lot of what we've seen on social media has been spreading organically, as worried users share information with their family and friends. This is often how information spreads between platforms too - e.g. from Facebook onto WhatsApp or Twitter.

[A post on Facebook](#) claiming to be from a user's uncle was shared over 300,000 times. This included a mixture of accurate and inaccurate claims. While the post did include some basic advice that is worth following, it also contained some claims which could have falsely led people to believe they don't have Covid-19 when they do, or which suggested ways of preventing infection that will not work. The post was updated to remove the false claims after we published the fact check. We have seen this post, or claims from within it, in various forms circulating on Twitter and WhatsApp.

We've also checked claims - including by a broadsheet columnist - that [children are immune from the new coronavirus](#), which is false. There are confirmed cases in children, though they have been found to present generally milder symptoms than adults. We also got LBC to correct a claim about this online.

Mainstream media

The Daily Express recently claimed that a study showed that '[coronavirus may have been genetically engineered for the "efficient spreading in the human population"](#)'. Our fact check found the study did not claim this, and the Express have amended their story since we contacted them. We've seen this claim shared on Twitter, including by public figures. Where we can, we have contacted them and asked them to correct their posts.

Four newspapers incorrectly claimed that [a set of heat maps showed SO2 levels in the Wuhan regions](#). The maps in question were not satellite images, and did not show actual levels of sulphur dioxide. They are simply forecasts based on historical data and weather patterns. We asked the Metro, the Daily Mail, the Daily Express and The Sun to make significant corrections to their articles, with the Metro and the Mail changing their articles entirely and the Express and the Sun deleting the articles.

What we are doing

We are Facebook's UK partner for their Third Party Fact Checking programme. This covers Facebook and Instagram but not WhatsApp. Unfortunately no similar programme exists for any other major online channels, including search, social media, and email. Facebook's programme gives us access to a queue of posts being shared in the UK which have been flagged as potentially false by Facebook or its users. In addition our team monitors newspapers, broadcasts, other social media sites such as Twitter and statements from public figures, including Parliamentarians.

We launched [an online form](#) to allow users to directly ask questions or share claims about Covid-19 that they would like fact checked. This will be useful to inform us of information being shared that is not publicly available, for example information shared on WhatsApp and other private messaging services. Since the launch on 16 March we have had over 1300 responses, asking about issues from how the virus travels and how long it lingers on surfaces, to claims that sipping water regularly will prevent you catching the virus.

Once claims are identified we check them for accuracy against the best available evidence from reputable sources such as the NHS or government guidance documents, or get in touch with the claimant to ask for more information about their claim.

We will always challenge people putting bad information into public life. When we spot inaccurate claims we ask people to correct the record - whether they are the Prime Minister, a business or a charity. We have a track record of doing that: last year we followed up on 75 fact checks. Finally, we publish fact checked claims on our website, and on our social media channels. In March there have been more than three million page views for coronavirus related content on our website.

How we can help you and your constituents

We know that your constituents may be worried at this time and may be sharing information that could be harmful to people's health. We are here to help. You can refer your constituents to our [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) accounts to check information they may see. If you see information which could be false or misleading, and could cause harm to people's health or wellbeing, you can send that to us through the google form on our website. Remember that you can also report content directly on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

We have also published [tips on how to combat false information effectively](#), and specifically [tips on how to fact check coronavirus content](#). We encourage everyone to be responsible about the information they share online. **If you have any questions you can email our Policy Manager: cassie.staines@fullfact.org.**