

Written evidence submitted by Full Fact

Submission for DCMS Committee: **Summary of the Covid-19 misinformation Full Fact is seeing**

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 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.

All of this risks people using ineffective or harmful treatments for the disease, or 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.

You can find all our latest fact checks of claims [here](#), and we have also produced resources about how to fact check information about Covid-19 [here](#).

This document sets out what we monitor and what we are seeing.

What we monitor

Facebook & Instagram

We are one of Facebook's UK partners for their Third Party Fact Checking programme. This covers Facebook and Instagram but not WhatsApp. 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 which we can fact check and attach ratings to. Our last transparency report on the partnership can be read [here](#).

WhatsApp

While there is not yet a formal scheme for WhatsApp, we have launched a project that sees over 90 volunteers monitoring WhatsApp who circulate our fact checks and send us examples of misinformation they see.

Mainstream media and Twitter

Our team monitors claims in print and online newspapers, broadcasts including news programmes on TV and radio, and other social media sites such as Twitter. We also check statements from public figures, including parliamentarians.

Questions from the public

Since we launched our [online form](#) on 16 March we have received over 2,300 questions, claims or concerns about misinformation from members of the public, including questions about social distancing rules, medical conditions and treatments, and how the virus spreads. We also get sent many posts and claims via email and on social media.

Claims we've been able to address from our readers in the last few weeks include:

- [Do face masks protect against the new coronavirus?](#)
- [How does the new coronavirus affect pregnancy?](#)
- [What counts as essential travel during the Covid-19 lockdown?](#)
- A [video that claimed to show patients with Covid-19 lying on the floor of St Mary's Hospital](#) in London, but was actually filmed in Spain.

Output and what we are seeing

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 we've published **over 80 fact checks on claims about the virus or its effects**. Since the start of the year we've had over six million page views on our website.

Conspiracy theories about the origins of the virus

5G and Covid-19

We've seen a range of claims continue to surface and spread on social media about a link between 5G and the outbreak of Covid-19, with amplification from a range of public figures, celebrities and some media outlets.

These include the claim circulating on social media [that the design of the new £20 note contains a symbol representing a "5G tower" and the coronavirus](#). The '5G tower' is Margate Lighthouse and the 'coronavirus' is based on a famous staircase at the Tate Britain art gallery. We have also challenged reporting in the mainstream media that links 5G and the new coronavirus, including asking the Daily Star to change [this headline that suggested 5G might be accelerating the spread of the disease](#).

We've also produced [an article that looks more deeply at the theories around 5G and where they come from](#) which has had over 80,000 views since it was published on 9 April. From what we have seen, it's not clear that simply dismissing the theories about 5G and Covid-19 is the right approach, so we have done some digging into where historical and more general concerns about 5G come from and what happened when they 'met' Covid-19. While the idea that 5G is harmful may seem to have exploded from nowhere during the coronavirus pandemic, in fact it has been steadily building online for years. Its origins can be traced back even further, to panics about earlier generations of mobile phone and wireless technology at the turn of the millennium.

Claims that Covid-19 was created in a lab

In February we checked [claims in a number of newspapers](#) that the virus had originated in a Chinese government laboratory, and more recently, 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.

Claims that the Chinese were covering up mass cremations

Four newspapers incorrectly claimed that [a set of heat maps showed SO2 levels in the Wuhan regions](#), and said they showed possible evidence of mass cremations. 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.

Claims about cures or treatments

Ways to prevent infection

[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.

Hydroxychloroquine

[MailOnline](#) misreported a survey of doctors on whether hydroxychloroquine is the most effective treatment, which they later clarified in the article after we contacted them.

Drinking water and holding your breath

We [checked claims circulating on WhatsApp and Facebook](#) that you can test whether you have Covid-19 by holding your breath, and that drinking water will help protect you against the virus by washing it down through the oesophagus. There is no evidence to support either claim.

Have you seen or shared
this image? **IT'S NOT REAL ADVICE**

COVID - 19

Take 01 Minute and read

Be understanding !!! A Japanese doctor offers excellent advice on preventing COVID-19
New coronavirus may not show symptoms for several days (14-27 days). How can one know if a person is infected? By the time he has a fever and / or a cough and goes to the lung hospital, the patient may have 50% fibrosis, and then it's too late!
Taiwanese experts provide simple self-monitoring that we can do every morning:

Take a deep breath and hold your breath for more than 10 seconds. If you can do this successfully without coughing and without difficulty, without anxiety or chest tightness, it shows that you do not have fibrosis and generally indicate no infection. Check yourself every morning in a fresh air environment.
The Japanese physician treating COVID-19 provides the best advice on preventing this:

Everyone should make sure the mouth and throat are always moist. Drink some water every 15 minutes. Why not? Even if the virus gets into your mouth, drinking water or other fluids will help wash it down the esophagus into the stomach. When the virus is in the stomach - the hydrochloric acid in your stomach will kill the germs. If you do not drink enough water regularly, the virus can enter the airways and into your lungs, which is very dangerous to get.

Spread the message

 @money.secretz

Get the full factcheck

fullfact.org/online/coronavirus-water-breath-test-bad-advice

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Claims about government response and decisions

Audio clips on WhatsApp

We've seen an increase in audio clips like [this one](#) being shared on private messaging apps such as WhatsApp. The voice recording on WhatsApp claimed that one third of deaths at the peak will be children with no underlying health conditions, ambulances won't be sent to people struggling to breathe, and all ice rinks are now being used as mortuaries. Public Health England have confirmed the information is inaccurate.

Claims about Boris Johnson's treatment

We [checked a false Facebook post](#) claiming that two of the nurses who treated Prime Minister Boris Johnson for coronavirus are not registered in the UK.

False blood drives

We also checked a post shared across social media that was [asking people in Manchester with O negative blood to go to the Royal Infirmary](#), saying they had run out of blood. The social media accounts for NHS Blood and Transplant have stated that the claim is not true and could worry patients. As with many of the claims we check online, this was not the first time we had seen this claim. Versions of this post have been circulating on social media since just after the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, and they regularly reappear.