

Facebook may hide anti-vaxx posts after it's accused of spreading fake health news

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Facebook says it has 'taken steps' to reduce fake health news, anti-vaxx posts amid measles outbreak

Facebook is considering making anti-vaccination content on its site less visible amid a measles outbreak that has reignited a conversation about preventative shots.

The social media giant that's been criticized for spreading [fake news](#) told USA TODAY it's "taken steps to reduce the distribution of health-related misinformation on Facebook, but we know we have more to do."

Facebook has been fighting misinformation on its platform since the 2016 presidential election after fake accounts and news stories aimed at sowing discord among users were discovered.

"We're currently working with outside experts on additional changes that we'll be announcing soon," Andy Stone, a spokesperson for Facebook, said in a statement. Stone couldn't comment on exactly how soon those changes would be announced.

Facebook told Bloomberg this might look like "reducing or removing this type of content from recommendations, including Groups You Should Join, and demoting it in search results, while also ensuring that higher quality and more authoritative information is available."

This response follows a letter from Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) partly

blaming Facebook and Instagram for spreading false information about vaccine safety.

"As a Member of Congress who is deeply concerned about declining vaccination rates around the nation, I am requesting additional information on the steps that you currently take to provide medically accurate information on vaccinations to your users, and to encourage you to consider additional steps you can take to address this growing problem," Schiff wrote to Mark Zuckerberg.

Right after the 2016 election, Facebook introduced a series of changes to stop fake information from spreading on its service, including making it easier for people to report hoaxes and fact-checking organizations to flag fake articles.

In August 2018, Facebook introduced reputation scores to users to weed out malicious actors who abuse the system for flagging fake articles. "We developed a process to protect against people indiscriminately flagging news as fake and attempting to game the system," said the company in a statement.

Last fall, Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey testified before Congress ahead of the 2018 midterm elections on how they planned to keep foreign actors from using their platforms to spread misinformation.

Fears of misinformation have grown as more people use social media to consume news. A survey released in September by the Pew Research Center found two-thirds of Americans get their news on social media platforms.

As of now, health-related information is eligible for fact-checking through Facebook's partners certified through a non-partisan

International Fact-Checking Network.

People choosing not to vaccinate have become a global health threat in 2019, the World Health Organization reported. Also, the CDC recognized that the number of children who aren't being vaccinated by 24 months old has been gradually increasing.

Some parents opt not to vaccinate because of the discredited belief vaccines are linked to autism. The CDC said that there is no link and that there are no ingredients in vaccines that could cause autism.

Currently, an anti-vaccination hot spot in Washington state is battling a measles outbreak that's been declared a public health emergency. More than 50 people have been infected, mostly unvaccinated children. The state is also entertaining a bill that would remove parents' ability to refuse the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine for their school-age children.

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