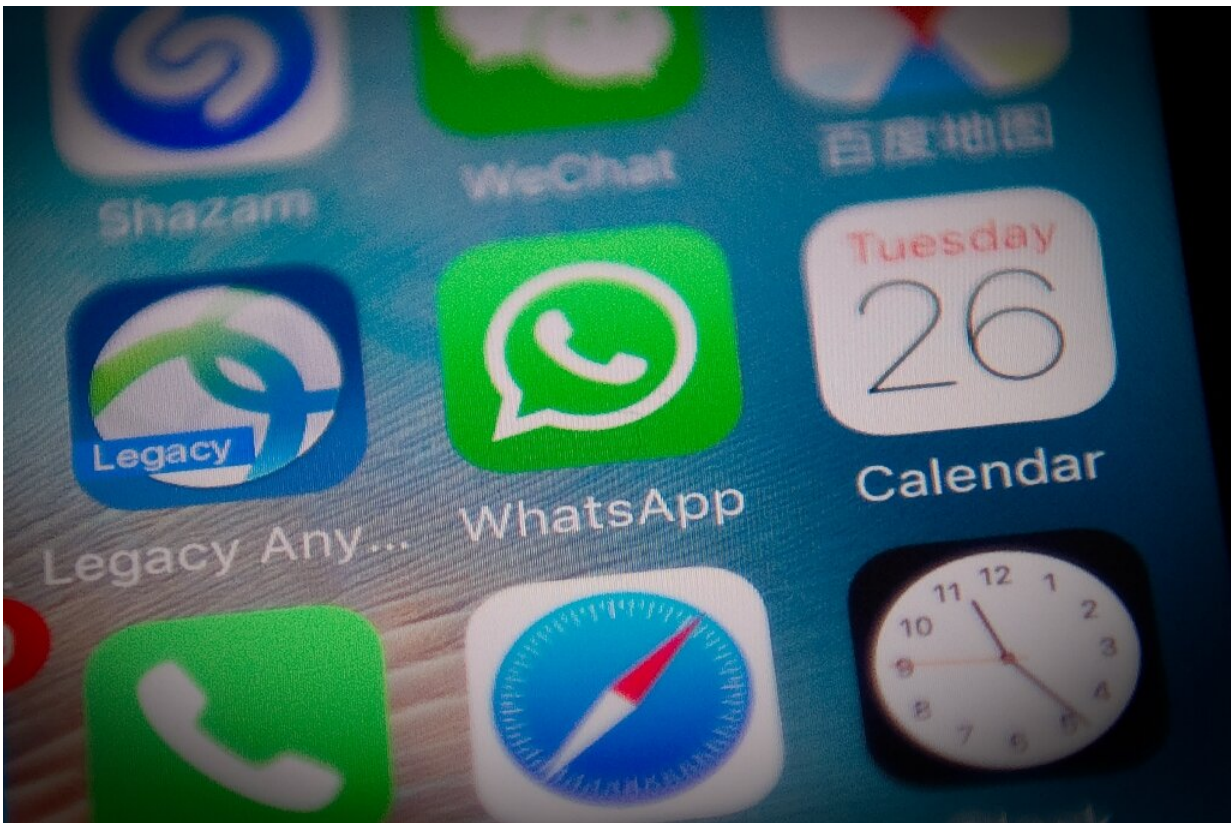


WhatsApp tightens sharing limits to curb virus misinformation

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WhatsApp users will face new limits on forwarding of certain messages as part of an effort to curb the spread of misinformation about the pandemic

WhatsApp on Tuesday placed new limits on message forwarding as part of an effort to curb the spread of misinformation about the coronavirus

pandemic.

The new policy limits users to forwarding certain messages to one "chat" at a time, aiming to limit the rapid propagation of content that is provocative but likely to be false.

The Facebook-owned messaging platform said it took the action to enable people to concentrate on personal and private communications during the health crisis.

In recent weeks, "we've seen a significant increase in the amount of forwarding which users have told us can feel overwhelming and can contribute to the [spread of misinformation](#)," WhatsApp said in a blog post.

"We believe it's important to slow the spread of these messages down to keep WhatsApp a place for personal conversation."

Last year, WhatsApp set limits on forwarded messages to five chats at a time, "to constrain virality," responding to events in India where the rapid proliferation of unverified [information](#) led to mob violence.

The new policy applies to messages forwarded "many times" and marked with a double-arrow, indicating that it did not originate from a close contact, according to WhatsApp.

"In effect, these messages are less personal compared to typical messages sent on WhatsApp," the blog said.

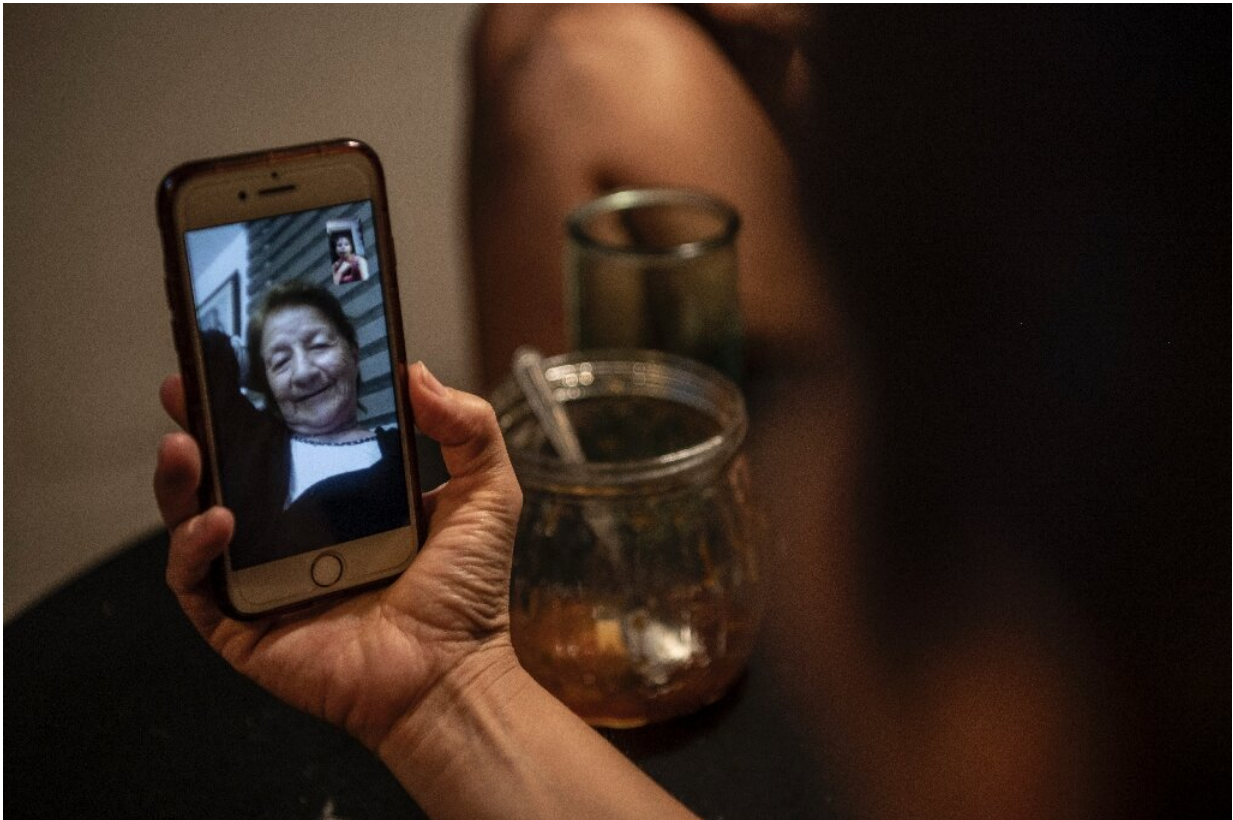
"We are now introducing a limit so that these messages can only be forwarded to one chat at a time."

Damian Collins, a British member of parliament and co-founder of the

Infotagion fact-check blog, called the move "a timely intervention," noting that WhatsApp was being used to spread recent hoaxes that 5G wireless networks were spreading the virus.

"The online conspiracy theories about #5G exposed last week, and their real-life consequences, are a clear call to fight disinformation about #COVID19," Collins tweeted.

"A lot of the false content sent to us at @infotagion came from @WhatsApp."



WhatsApp use has risen during the coronavirus pandemic for sharing messages and calling, but the platform has also been used to spread misinformation

Scrambling to stop hoaxes

WhatsApp along with its parent Facebook have been scrambling to curb an explosion of rumors and hoaxes about the coronavirus and at the same time seeking to promote verified content.

With more than a billion users worldwide, WhatsApp has become a key source of information and communication during the pandemic.

Facebook said last month it has nearly doubled server capacity to power WhatsApp as people in isolation place more voice and video calls using the popular messaging service.

But WhatsApp has also been used to spread inaccurate information about the COVID-19 outbreak including about untested treatments.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar last month warned people against sharing unverified coronavirus information on the messaging platform.

"These messages are scaring and confusing people and causing real damage. Please get your info from official, trusted sources," the leader tweeted.

One problem faced by the messaging service is that the encrypted information is seen only by the sender and recipient, making it harder for fact-checkers to debunk.

WhatsApp said that as part of its efforts to fight the spread of false information, it was working with the World Health Organization and some 20 national health ministries, "to help connect people with [accurate information](#)."

The platform has been funding fact checking organizations and created a

Coronavirus Information Hub within the app.

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