

COVID vaccine: Instagram suggested posts recommended anti-vaccine misinformation, report says

March 9 2021, by Jessica Guynn



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Instagram's "suggested" posts feature recommended anti-vaccination content to users, even as parent company Facebook intensified efforts to

combat false and misleading statements about COVID-19, according to new research from the Center for Countering Digital Hate.

The nonprofit says Instagram suggested anti-vaccination posts to volunteers who created accounts and showed an interest in conspiracy theories.

In all, 104 suggested posts contained false or misleading statements such as COVID is a hoax and vaccines are unsafe, the research found.

"Suggested" posts from accounts you don't follow launched last year.

Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, called on Instagram to suspend the feature "until it can be sure it is not promoting misinformation, hate and lies."

Facebook told U.S. TODAY the research conducted between Sept. 14 and Nov. 16 is out of date and does not reflect recent changes to crack down on COVID misinformation. It also pointed out that accounts researchers created that followed credible sources of health information did not get suggestions for posts containing misinformation.

"We've been focused on connecting people to credible information, which is why, when people search for content related to COVID-19 and vaccines on our apps, we direct them to authoritative health organizations," Facebook said in a statement. "We're also working on improvements to Instagram Search, to make accounts that discourage vaccines harder to find."

False claims about vaccines have circulated on [social media platforms](#) for years, giving rise to a powerful anti-vaxxer movement with deep roots and a long reach.

Facebook announced earlier this month that it is cracking down on [false statements](#) related to COVID-19, COVID vaccines and vaccines in general on Facebook and Instagram, targeting a long list of claims debunked by [health authorities](#) including that vaccines are ineffective and more dangerous than contracting COVID.

Facebook also warned that groups, pages and accounts that repeatedly shared these falsehoods may be removed. Earlier this month Instagram suspended anti-vaccination activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Public health officials and misinformation researchers say the spread of COVID [vaccine](#) misinformation warn the riptide of misinformation is undercutting [public trust](#) in the immunizations which have proved effective in preventing COVID-19 illness in clinical trials and are critical to stopping the virus's spread.

(c)2021 U.S. Today

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: COVID vaccine: Instagram suggested posts recommended anti-vaccine misinformation, report says (2021, March 9) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-03-covid-vaccine-instagram-anti-vaccine-misinformation.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.