



Virality Project Weekly Briefing #19

April 28, 2021 - May 4, 2021

This report was created by analysts from the [Virality Project](#), a coalition of research entities focused on real-time detection, analysis, and response to COVID-19 anti-vaccine mis- and disinformation. The Virality Project aims to support information exchange between public health officials, government, and social media platforms through weekly briefings and real-time incident response.

Public officials and health organizations interested in officially joining this collaboration can reach the partnership at info@viralityproject.org.

In this briefing:

<p>Events This Week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virality Project recommends actions for successful vaccine misinformation Rumor Control site • Story of Miami private school asking teachers to not get vaccinated due to false “shedding” claims discussed widely online • COVID-19 cases in India - timed after the start of the vaccine rollout - leveraged for false claims that vaccines are causing death and infections • Articles about military members experiencing heart inflammation after COVID-19 vaccines spread in online military communities with #Milvax
<p>Non-English Language and Foreign Spotlight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sputnik V Twitter account pushes misinformation about relative safety of Sputnik V and Pfizer vaccines. • Claims about vaccines causing miscarriages spread in Spanish • Harvard report recirculating on WeChat used to claim vaccines may not be effective against variants • Stories on WeChat about vaccination sites shutting down in US reframed to suggest authorities are questioning vaccines
<p>Ongoing Themes and Tactics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A second Worldwide Rally for Freedom protest planned on Telegram; March protests attracted thousands of protesters globally • Key Statistics • Appendix

Key Takeaways

- As vaccine supply outpaces vaccine demand, the Virality Project provides insights into how to set up a successful vaccine misinformation Rumor Control site to address.
- The false “shedding” narrative that unvaccinated women can experience side effects after being around vaccinated women continued to spread leading to discussions of businesses and schools restricting vaccinated people.

Events this week:

This section contains key events from this past week as identified by our analysts and stakeholder partners.

Virality Project recommends actions for successful vaccine misinformation Rumor Control site

- As vaccine supply outpaces vaccine demand, we [expect](#) vaccine misinformation to increase in intensity and continue to limit the speed of the US’s COVID-19 vaccine rollout.
- [In a blog post](#), we discuss how rumor control websites can counter existing misinformation by addressing specific rumors with facts from trusted sources with authoritative voices.
- We build off of lessons learned from the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s 2020 Election Rumor Control page](#) to provide justification and best practices for setting up and operating a vaccine Rumor Control page.
- Based on [First Draft’s criteria for discussing misinformation](#), we suggest thresholds of pervasiveness that Rumor Control operators should consider in determining when to address rumors from various online sources.

Miami private school asks teachers to not get vaccinated due to false “shedding” claims

- Last week, we released a [rapid response analysis on the false vaccine “shedding” narrative](#) that claims unvaccinated women can experience reproductive health issues after being around vaccinated people.
- This narrative has spread significantly in the past week, [leading to some businesses banning recently vaccinated individuals](#) to “protect” their women customers.
- The story of a private school in Miami asking its teachers not to get vaccinated for similar reasons [received significant coverage](#) online, with roughly 366.5K interactions on Facebook, the vast majority of which has been critical and negative.
- There was some [discussion in anti-vaccine communities](#) who supported the move as a response to potential vaccine mandates in institutions.
- Several [notable anti-vaccine activists](#) have children & grandchildren who attend the school.
- **Takeaway:** The vaccine shedding narrative continues to take hold in anti-vaccine and right-wing online communities.

COVID-19 cases in India - timed after the start of the vaccine rollout - leveraged for false claims that vaccines are causing death and infections

- A misleading infographic falsely correlates the increase in daily COVID-19 cases in India and deaths with the start of the vaccine rollout, despite [only 9.5% of the country being partially vaccinated](#). This infographic has been shared in Telegram groups and has had [6K interactions on Instagram](#) and [1K on Facebook over the past week](#).
- [A video claims to show Indian villagers chasing away a “vaccination squadron”](#) due to the false belief that vaccines are responsible for India’s second wave. According to a fact check from [India Today](#), the video shows villagers chasing away police who had intervened to break up a crowded gathering. The incident had nothing to do with vaccines. However, the video, which furthers false claims that vaccines are harmful, has still received over 343.1K views on Twitter and [is being shared in multiple languages](#).

Articles about military members experiencing heart inflammation after COVID-19 vaccines spread in online military communities with #Milvax

- [An investigation into 14 cases of heart inflammation among service members](#) and families that were vaccinated through the military healthcare system has spread concern about vaccines in military communities.
- The articles appear to be shared across [several military and veteran Facebook groups](#), with users expressing varying degrees of hesitancy in the posts and subsequent comments.
- There was a small [increase in the use of the hashtag #Milvax](#) alongside shares of this article among members of the anti-vaccine community this week in discussions about heart inflammation.
- Anti-vaccine outlet Children’s Health Defense [framed an investigation](#) in Israel and a [campaign to vaccinate US service members as coercion](#) to vaccinate military members against their will.
- [The CDC has not seen a link](#) between COVID-19 vaccines and heart inflammation.
- **Takeaway:** Based on the spread of the article and hashtag #Milvax, the story is not yet getting significant traction. However, it represents a potential entry point for the spread of vaccine misinformation in the veteran and service member community who may be suspicious of vaccination programs [due to their history of being exposed to experimental vaccines](#).

Non-English and Foreign Spotlight:

This section highlights content in additional languages and content spread by foreign state media. The non-English content and foreign state media targets users in the US though may also have international spread.

Sputnik V vaccine Twitter account pushes misinformation about relative safety of rival vaccines

- On April 28th, the EU’s European External Action Service [published a report on Russia’s campaign](#) to promote the Sputnik V vaccine through state media and online disinformation.

- The Sputnik V official Twitter account, which is part of that alleged campaign, has posted a significant amount of disinformation regarding [safety data on rival vaccines](#), in particular Pfizer.
- One tweet which was supposedly based on data from Mexico [claimed](#) Sputnik V has “7 times fewer adverse effects than the Pfizer mRNA vaccine.” Researchers and experts were quick to [criticize these manipulated findings](#).
- After the Brazilian Health Regulator ended importation of Sputnik V vaccines based on safety and efficacy concerns, the Sputnik V account [threatened to sue the regulator](#) and [accused them](#) of spreading misinformation.

Claims about vaccines causing miscarriages spread in Spanish

- A [blog post](#) shared to at least two Spanish language [Telegram groups](#) (2.3K members total) claims that COVID-19 vaccines cause miscarriage at a rate of 14%.
- However, this rate of miscarriage [is expected among those who have not been vaccinated](#) as well.
- A Spanish-language [anti-vaccination blog](#), which claims affiliations with notable anti-vaccine activists, published a [post](#) spreading the false narrative that vaccinated people could trigger miscarriage in unvaccinated pregnant people and that breast milk from a vaccinated mother could harm babies.
- The post has received 1K [Facebook](#) engagements and 580+ on [Twitter](#).
- **Takeaway:** Fears of adverse events, in particular their effect on pregnancy and pregnant people, continue to feed anti-vaccination narratives, and these narratives have spread in Spanish.

Harvard report recirculating on WeChat used to claim vaccines may not be effective against variants

- A year-old Harvard University report [about the potential for a resurgence of COVID-19](#) in the future is recirculating on WeChat and being shared as if it is new and is being used to claim that vaccines may not be able to offer adequate protection.
- The study was first referenced on WeChat in [April 2020](#) and received more than 100K views (the point at which WeChat stops counting views). The study was referenced again on WeChat in [August 2020](#) by a public account called North American Observer. Neither article referenced the study in an anti-vaccine context.
- It is unclear why the study is spreading again now.
- In the last week, at least 8 WeChat accounts have shared some version of the story, achieving more than 92.3K views.
- **Takeaway:** Authoritative sources can be used to dis-inform when stripped of critical contextual information -- in this instance, the original date of publication.

Stories on WeChat about vaccination sites shutting down in US reframed to suggest that authorities are questioning vaccines

- A WeChat public account [published](#) an article (4.5K views) highlighting vaccination sites in the US that have recently shut down due to decreases in demand.
- Though these stories are true, the WeChat article frames the reports in an anti-vaccine context, claiming that the shutdowns of sites represent a questioning of the effectiveness of the vaccines.

- The list of vaccination sites referenced in the WeChat article appears to be lifted from a recent [Forbes](#) article.

Ongoing Themes and Tactics:

This section highlights ongoing themes and tactics that we track each week including notable vaccine injury stories and overall key statistics about online vaccine discussions.

A second Worldwide Rally for Freedom protest planned over Telegram after March protests attracted thousands of protesters globally

- The large [Worldwide Rally for Freedom protests that took place across Europe and in major cities in March](#) advocated against COVID-19 restrictions, mask-wearing, and vaccines.
- A second round of demonstrations is due to take place on May 15 and content announcing the events is beginning to gain traction online among core COVID-skeptic influencers in both English and French.
- Much of the activity around the events is concentrated on the hashtag #WewillALLbethere (also used during the first protest), with a central Telegram channel used for coordination. Promotion for local events includes [Paris](#), [Bulgaria](#), and [Hawaii](#).

Key Statistics

Here we contextualize the above narratives by examining the engagement of other posts from this week.

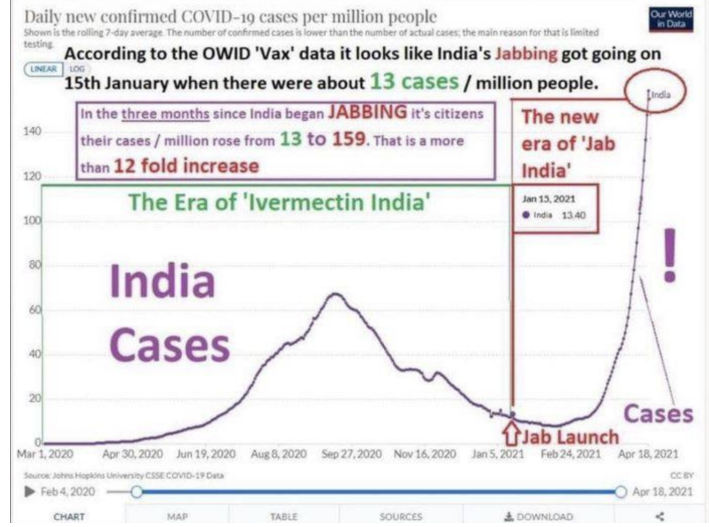
- The top COVID-19-related **Facebook post** from this week with the word “vaccine” was a video shared by UNICEF of a Nigerian activist encouraging vaccination. The post has received 107K interactions.
- The top COVID-19-related **Instagram post** from this week with the word “vaccine” was from an Indian actor discussing his eligibility for the vaccine. The post has received over 1M likes.
- The top COVID-19-related **Reddit post** from this week with the word “vaccine” shared a [news article](#) about criticisms of Joe Rogan’s comments about vaccines made by White House officials. The post has received 37.1K upvotes and 6.1K comments.
- The top COVID-19 vaccine-related **post** from a **recurring anti-vaccine influencer on Facebook** was from Ben Tapper, a chiropractor who frequently posts misinformation about COVID-19. The post asks his followers to share their stories of vaccine injuries. The post has received about 800 interactions.
- The top COVID-19 vaccine-related **post** from a **recurring anti-vaccine influencer on Twitter** was from Alex Berenson, a right-wing influencer. The post, which has received 14K interactions, criticizes the PCR threshold used by the CDC to determine post-vaccine infections.

Appendix

We have included some notable screenshots from the above incidents. More screenshots and assets can be made available, upon request and as needed!

Links	Screenshot
<p>After the “shedding” narrative spread widely this week, some businesses posted on their social media that vaccinated individuals would no longer be allowed.</p>	<p>The screenshot shows a social media post from the account 'fearlessboxingclub'. The post features a video thumbnail of a man in a maroon hoodie standing with two young girls in a boxing ring. A large black text box is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, containing the following text: 'Attn: For The Safety Of Our Members, The Fearless Boxing Club Will No Longer Be Accepting Those Who Recieved The Experimental Covid Vaccine. Our Current Members Including Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Parents & Many Youth Feel Safer Waiting Until More Research Is Done On The Side Effects Being Discovered Right Now. Thank you!'. The post also includes a hashtag '#JUSTSAYNO' and several user avatars and handles at the bottom, such as @FEARLESSABEDEEN, @RAWJUCECURU, @GASON_CHRISTO, @MOEMIND, @RIS, @MUNON2020AWAHENING, @THATBLINDMUSL, @CANADARISINCUP, @MANDAN2THARONE, and @TANIATHEHERRA1ST.</p>

A graph falsely linking the rise in COVID-19 cases in India with the introduction of vaccines spread on Telegram, Facebook, and Instagram.



Articles spread on WeChat citing a year old Harvard article to suggest that vaccines are insufficient against COVID-19.

之前，哈佛大学公共卫生学院发了一篇Science：根据论文中的描述，**无论是否能研发出疫苗，新冠病毒都可能会陪伴人类到2025年。**

那么，2025年以后人类能摆脱新冠病毒吗？不，只是到时我们就已经习惯了这种隔离的生活方式了.....

Projecting the transmission dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 through the postpandemic period

