



# Virality Project Weekly Briefing #5

January 20, 2021 - January 26, 2021

This report was created by analysts from the [Virality Project](#), a coalition of disinformation research entities focused on real time detection, analysis, and response to COVID-19 anti-vaccine disinformation. The Virality project aims to support information exchange between public health officials, government, and social media platforms through both 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](mailto:info@viralityproject.org).*

## Key Narratives

- [California's pause on using a batch of Moderna vaccines](#) has fueled both the anti-vaccine online community's concerns over the safety of COVID-19 vaccines and foreign state media's efforts to undermine confidence in US vaccination efforts.
- Currently, the most vocal group driving concerns about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine while pregnant are health freedom Facebook Groups who are using the lack of data about pregnancy and mRNA vaccines as their loudest argument against vaccine mandates.
- The high profile death of Hank Aaron, who received the vaccine 2 weeks prior, as well as detailed descriptions of nurses experiencing paralysis and anaphylaxis after receiving COVID-19 vaccines were used to sow doubt about the vaccine's safety in wellness and anti-vax groups.

## California Moderna Allergic Reaction Story

- [Reports](#) from health officials about a cluster of allergic reactions associated with a batch of Moderna COVID-19 vaccines have received attention among [anti-vaccine influencers](#) and groups, who perceived the event as validating their claims that the [Moderna vaccine is experimental](#) and unsafe.
- Foreign state media outlets have leveraged the event to undermine confidence in the vaccines and processes in place in the United States, in contrast to alleged successes in [China](#), [Iran](#), and [Russia](#). However, this content did not seem to have received high engagement nor was it shared widely outside of their own Facebook Pages.
- **Expected Impact:** Thus far, the California Moderna narrative has had medium engagement (around 10,000 cumulative likes, comments, and shares on Facebook and Instagram); its spread peaked around January 18th and has mostly been contained within anti-vaccine communities, with some continued spread on Instagram. We expect similar narratives around vaccine safety to surface in the future.



## mRNA Vaccines and Pregnancy Concerns

- Producers of **accurate information** about mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and pregnancy are receiving the highest engagement on [FB](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Reddit](#).
  - Notably, [ACOG's recommendation](#) has been cited in these posts as reason to believe that receiving the COVID-19 vaccine while pregnant is safe.
- Currently, the most vocal group driving concerns about receiving the vaccine while pregnant are [health freedom Facebook Groups](#) who are using the lack of data about pregnancy and mRNA vaccines as their loudest argument against vaccine mandates.
- Two specific VAERS anecdotes of pregnant women having pregnancy complications after receiving the vaccine had high engagement in the last week in natural parenting groups on [Facebook](#) and from an anti-vaccine account on [Instagram](#).
- **Expected Impact:** While individual, unverifiable anecdotes of pregnancy will continue to drive vaccine safety concerns in health freedom and anti-vaccine online communities, the successful spread of accurate information among mainstream channels on Facebook and Instagram is an optimistic finding.

## Hesitancy in Tier 1 Populations

Among groups included in Tier 1 vaccination programs, stories of individual adverse events continue to be used by anti-vaccine groups to push doubts about safety, however this content **has stayed mostly in wellness and anti-vax communities**.

## Healthcare/Essential Workers

- As in previous weeks, personal [anecdotes](#) of healthcare workers having adverse reactions to vaccination continued to spread in wellness and anti-vax communities.
- An article about [health care worker vaccine hesitancy](#) has been shared by high profile [anti-vaccine Facebook accounts](#) in efforts to legitimize COVID-19 vaccine safety concerns.
- [Positive stories](#) about the vaccine on medical Facebook pages received high engagement.
- The most visible content around essential workers and vaccines discuss the speed of the vaccine rollout. This includes posts from official sources [communicating](#) local vaccine rollout plans. We did not observe much negative or false content about the vaccine and essential workers.

## Seniors

- The death of MLB star Hank Aaron weeks after his high-profile publicized vaccination was used by [some](#) prominent anti-vaccine influencers to cast doubt on the safety of the vaccine for [African-Americans](#) and [seniors](#).
- The announcement of dozens of deaths in Norwegian nursing homes following vaccination subsequently led to the Norwegian government recommending “frail” citizens hold off on getting a vaccine. This was spun by [some](#) in the anti-vax community to cast doubt on vaccine safety for seniors.
- However, counter-narratives dispelling this doubt received [high engagement](#), such as the Mayor of Atlanta's post on Instagram.



## Key Statistics

*One key piece of understanding the above narratives is putting them into context of the wider information ecosystems. We hope this section provides some context about vaccine conversations more generally, along with some reference for the relative scale of different narratives.*

- Top post on **Facebook** this week containing the word “vaccine” was from [UNICEF](#), with close to 500k interactions (likes, comments and shares). The post encouraged people to share a photo of themselves receiving their COVID-19 vaccine with #Vaccinated. **We intend to track the success of this hashtag.**
- Top posts on **Instagram** this week containing the word “vaccine” were from [Potus](#), followed by a video of [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) receiving the vaccine, followed by [Bill Gates](#) receiving the vaccine. The posts received 743.5k interactions, 3 million views and 459.9k interactions, and 409k interactions, respectively.
- Top post on **Reddit** this week containing the word “vaccine” was a [post on r/politics](#) about how the Biden admin discovered that “Trump had zero plans for the COVID-19 distribution.” It received 126.3k upvotes and 8.3k comments.
- Top post this week from a **known anti-vax influencer on Facebook**, Erin at Health Nut News, was a [post asking people if they will receive the vaccine](#). The post shared a [CBS News article](#) about health care workers refusing the vaccine. The post received 7.3k interactions (likes, comments, shares).
- Top post this week from a **known anti-vax influencer on Twitter**, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., was a [post about Hank Aaron’s death](#) after he received the Moderna vaccine as part of a “ wave of suspicious deaths among elderly.” The post received 19.5k interactions (likes, comments, shares).

# Appendix

Links	Screenshot
<p><b>CA Moderna Pause</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of <b>state media</b> using to highlight US failure. Articles from state media emphasize adverse effects from Moderna/Pfizer vaccines, such as the California incident, and high number of US COVID-19 cases.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">China Daily on Facebook</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">RT on Facebook</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Foreign state media outlets are simultaneously publishing articles on the successes of their own state's vaccination efforts.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">China state media article</a> on Serbia using Sinopharm vaccine.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Iran state media</a> describing Iranian and Cuba vaccine efforts despite US sanctions.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• This content did not seem to receive high engagement nor was it shared widely outside of the state media's own Facebook Pages.</li> </ul>	 <p>RT posted a video to playlist <b>COVID-19 Pandemic</b> — in <b>USA</b>.      Russia state-controlled media · January 19 at 12:00 PM · 🌐</p> <p>California has become the first state in the US to top three million cases, and as if that weren't bad enough, the mass vaccination program there has not been without its challenges. State officials have now called for a temporary halt of a particular batch of the Moderna vaccine over a 'higher-than-usual number of adverse events.'</p>  <p><b>CALIFORNIA TO HALT MODERNA BATCH OVER NUMBER OF ADVERSE REACTIONS</b> NEW YORK</p> <p>NEW YORK 17 ALMOST HALF OF FRENCH TEACHERS SELF-CENSORING ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES - POLL</p> <p>175 42 Comments 121 Shares</p>  <p><b>China Daily</b> · China state-controlled media · January 19 at 1:00 PM · 🌐</p> <p>As the overall <b>#COVID19</b> death toll in the <b>#US</b> neared 400,000, health officials in <b>#California</b> reported that a second variant of the virus has appeared across the state and also have halted one lot of vaccine doses due to allergic reactions.  <a href="http://ow.ly/Cc1750DcAod">http://ow.ly/Cc1750DcAod</a></p>  <p>265 4 Comments 4 Shares</p> <p>Like Comment Share</p> <p>Most Relevant</p> <p>Write a comment...</p> <p>Sol 太阳 翁      US corporate pharma just wants to maximize profit, and the govt only exists to assist the corporations.      Inhumane barbaric society.</p>

## Pregnancy Concerns

- Accurate pregnancy info receiving high engagement. These cite [the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) in their recommendations.
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Instagram](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [Reddit](#)

**Doctor Mike** Jan 21, 2021 at 9:00 AM

**The (incomplete) Truth About Pregnancy and COVID Vaccines**

Just last week I answered many of your burning questions about the COVID-19 vaccines. In the comments, there were many more questions about whether the vaccine is safe for women who are pregnant,...

See more

**COVID-19 VACCINE**

**AND PREGNANCY**

437.9K POST VIEWS      469.6K TOTAL VIEWS

6.0K      1.1K      1.8K

**Viki Male** @VikiLovesFACS

I have updated my explainer on [#COVID19](#) [#vaccination](#) [#fertility](#) [#pregnancy](#) and [#breastfeeding](#) to include a trial-by-trial breakdown of what happened to the people who became accidentally pregnant during the vaccine trials.

You can find it here:

[Explainer on COVID19 vaccine and fertility.docx](#)  
drive.google.com

2:56 AM · Jan 24, 2021 · Twitter Web App

226 Retweets    48 Quote Tweets    594 Likes

**nurseabnormalities** · Follow  
Vaccinated USA

nurseabnormalities I got vaccinated at 17 weeks pregnant with the @pfizer vaccine. I have had many messages asking me about it so I thought I would make this into a post.

After pregnancy, I became increasingly worried about covid and my personal experience with pregnant covid patients had not been great, so I starting thinking about the vaccine, which full disclosure, did scare me too.

I researched online through various IG OBGYNs and Facebook forums with people much smarter than me. The consensus was that the mRNA vaccine is not a live vaccine, does not enter the nucleus and cannot alter DNA.

6,876 likes  
4 DAYS AGO


Log in to like or comment.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health freedom Facebook groups push “unknowns” about pregnancy and COVID-19 vaccine as reasons against vaccine mandates.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Georgia Coalition for Vaccine Choice</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal engagement (10 reactions, 6 shares)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VAERS instances of fetus death and early delivery after vaccine received high engagement in anti-vax parenting accounts.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Facebook</a></li> <li><a href="#">Instagram</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p><b>Tier 1 Hesitancy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal accounts continue to drive safety concerns. This week, a number of long form stories went viral             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Instagram</a> - anaphylaxis</li> <li><a href="#">Instagram</a> - paralysis</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Concerns about Hank Aaron's death after receiving the vaccine             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Facebook</a> Black author and influencer arguing this reinforces racial concerns</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Facebook</a> Robert Kennedy J. (6.7K reactions); Facebook has applied a fact check label to the post.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

**Robert F. Kennedy, Jr**  
January 22 at 2:38 PM · 🌐

Hank Aaron's tragic death is part of a wave of suspicious deaths among elderly closely following administration of COVID vaccines. The baseball legend received the Moderna vaccine on Jan. 5, in an attempt to inspire other Black Americans to step up to the plate and get the vaccine.



CHILDRENSHEALTHDEFENSE.ORG  
**Home Run King Hank Aaron Dies of 'Undisclosed Cause' 18 Days After Receiving Moderna Vaccine • Children's Health Defense**

**Partly False Information.** Checked by independent fact-checkers.

[See Why](#)

👍👎🗨️ 6.8K 990 Comments 4.5K Shares

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share