



Tips for Consumers

How to Navigate
Trusted Health Information
& Identify Misleading
And False Content



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Introduction

We understand that you are increasingly called upon to make health care-related decisions for yourself, your families, and the communities in which you live.

You deserve access to trustworthy, scientifically valid, and understandable information on which to base your health-related decisions.

Unfortunately, the health care sector, like much of today's society, is plagued by the proliferation of misinformation that can harm people and communities.

This toolkit will help you identify how to access and evaluate information, as well as give you tools on how to take action and go a step deeper into topics associated with understanding health and acting on information.

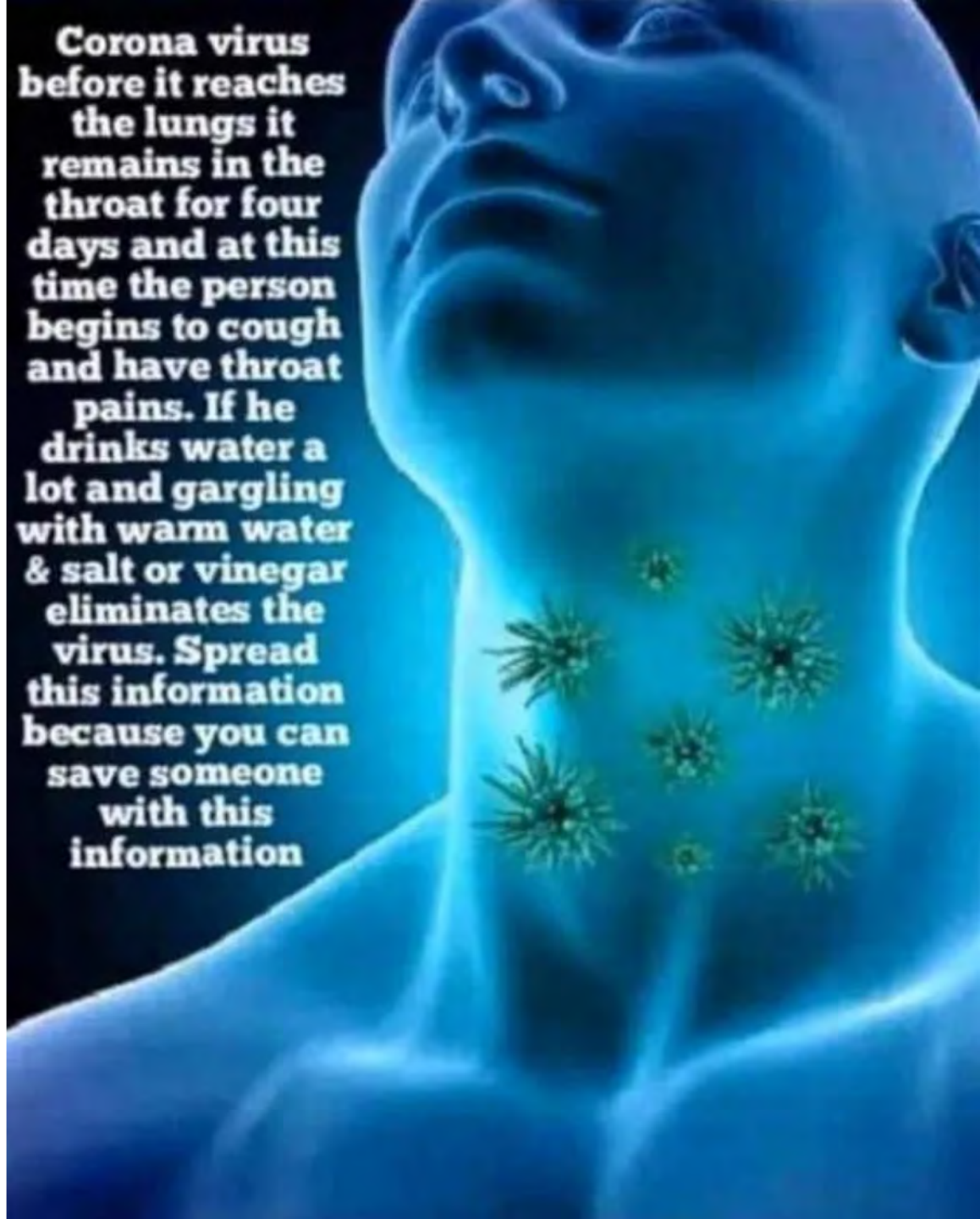
Please note, this toolkit does not provide medical information. If you have specific questions about your medical condition, please contact your health professional. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, dial 911.

What Do You Think...

Is this information true?



Corona virus before it reaches the lungs it remains in the throat for four days and at this time the person begins to cough and have throat pains. If he drinks water a lot and gargling with warm water & salt or vinegar eliminates the virus. Spread this information because you can save someone with this information

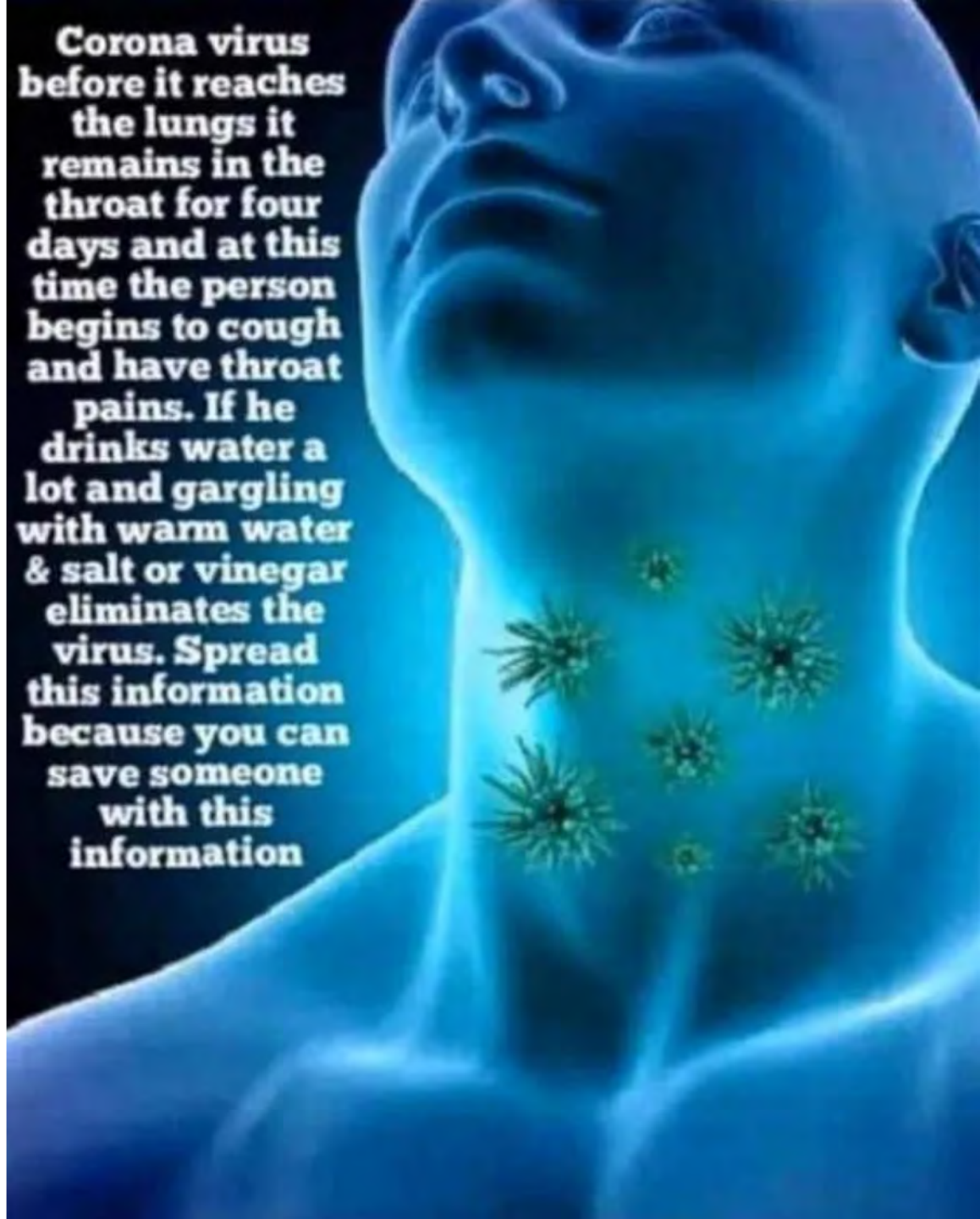


What Do You Think...

Is this information true?

The answer is NO.

This post is not scientifically or medically accurate and urges you to spread false information...and could harm to your health by not following sound medical advice for prevention or treatment.



Corona virus before it reaches the lungs it remains in the throat for four days and at this time the person begins to cough and have throat pains. If he drinks water a lot and gargling with warm water & salt or vinegar eliminates the virus. Spread this information because you can save someone with this information

What Do You Think...

Do you trust this content?



A screenshot of a social media post, likely from Twitter, featuring a yellow 'FAKE' watermark. The post is from a user with a profile picture of a red circle containing a white horse head. The text of the post reads: 'BREAKING: Mass vaccination for COVID-19 in Senegal (West Africa) was started yesterday (4/8) and the first 7 children who received it died on the spot.' Below this, the user says: 'I just saw this disturbing news 🤔', 'They started Mass Vaccination for COVID-19 in Africa and the first 7 CHILDREN who received it, DIED on the spot !!', 'You listened well, they are killing people with a new vaccine !', and 'Please retweet this!'. The post ends with the hashtags '#coronavirus #COVID19 #SARSCoV2 #Senegal'. There are two small downward-pointing arrows in the top right corner of the post area.

What Do You Think...

Do you trust this content?

This is a highly sensationalized FALSE post from an unidentified source to deliberately discourage people from becoming vaccinated against COVID-19.



Misinformation

is false or misleading information shared



without the intent

to deceive or cause harm

Misinformation

is false or misleading information shared



without the intent

to deceive or cause harm

Disinformation

is spreading false or misleading information



with the intent

to deceive or cause harm

Context

In the context of health information, mis/disinformation can undermine public health efforts and affect the relationship between patients and their health professionals. As a result: *people's lives could be at risk.*

Who is at risk of consuming and spreading misinformation?

Given the plethora of misinformation circulating daily throughout our society, everyone, regardless of age, education level, or social position is at risk of making potentially harmful decisions based on inaccurate information. Also, if we are not attentive, all of us could inadvertently spread misinformation to others.

It is important to consider the intent of the purveyors of health information.



The Five Ws of Misinformation

WHAT kinds of false content should I watch out for?

WHY is it being spread around?

WHO is spreading it?

WHEN did it start spreading?

WHERE can I go to confirm the accuracy of the information?

WHAT kinds of false content should I watch out for?

- ➡ Hoaxes and false news
- ➡ Scams
- ➡ Too good to be true

Before sharing information you're unsure of, stop and ask these questions:

1. Could acting on this "information" impact my health or that of my family?
2. Is the guidance from a credible source, and is it consistent with guidance from other reputable sources and knowledgeable experts?
3. Is the content designed to manipulate you through appeals to emotion rather than credible scientific evidence?

It is important to consider the intent of the purveyors of health information.

- ➡ **Are they trying to scare you into making an unsupported decision?**
- ➡ **Are they appealing to anger and fear?**
- ➡ **Are they appealing to anger and fear?**

Often, there is a hidden agenda not based on a mission of helping people achieve their optimal health status but rather one to gain profit and/or to undermine the relationship between people, health professionals, and the scientific community.

WHY
is it being
spread
around?

WHO is spreading it?

➡ **It could be anyone... including you!**

We routinely share information with our friends and family, especially information we find online and on social media.

We know that adults are more likely to trust the content of a story if it is shared by someone they trust.

Be aware that incorrect and unsubstantiated health information can have serious consequences for others, *so exercise care in your ethical duty not to harm another person.*

WHEN

did it start
spreading?

Since the beginning of humans communicating with each other, there has been a spread of misinformation.

- ➡ **Today, things get spread more than once**, watch for repeated images and stories that are out of context or untimely
- ➡ **On social media, how long has the content creator been active** (if an account appears new or recently started posting with no prior history, be cautious)

WHERE can I go to confirm the accuracy of the information?

YOUR TRUSTED HEALTH PROFESSIONAL!

Discuss the information you encounter with your health care professional as you work together to make your best personally appropriate decisions.

For pictures, try a reverse search for images at TinEye (www.tineye.com) to tell you where else the picture has appeared and provides similar pictures (which is a good way to find out if a picture has been manipulated).

Check out hoax-busting sites like Snopes through a search like this: "shark subway station site: www.snopes.com"

The Columbia Journalism Review guide to understanding legitimate and fake news: www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-real-news-list.php

The News Literacy Project publishes a weekly newsletter, *The Sift*, and offers interactive lessons at <https://get.checkology.org>

The KFF Health News website includes a health-specific fact-checking service at <https://kffhealthnews.org/news/tag/healthcheck/>

Source: https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/tip-sheet/tipsheet_false_content.pdf

Tips for Accessing Credible Information Online

When seeking health information online understand the purpose of the website or the social media influencer and ask...

- Is the site, organization, and/or individual credible?
- Is the intent to advance optimal health and healing OR to create confusion for other purposes or to serve other agendas?
- Is the information aligned with science-based experts with a track record of reliability and trustworthiness?

Tips for Accessing Credible Information Online

When seeking health information online understand the source of the content and ask...

- Does the website's "about us" page provide confidence in its authenticity and purpose?
- Is there a listing of the credentials of the sources of the information provided?
- When was the information written and last updated?

When in doubt: Conduct a simple online search to verify the legitimacy of a "fact" or "source."

Tips for Accessing Credible Information Online



Understand the purpose and owner of the website

The website URL can give you some clues about ownership:

.gov identifies a government agency in the United States

.edu identifies schools, colleges, or universities

.com identifies commercial websites

.org usually identifies nonprofit organizations



Commercial websites can provide accurate information; however **some might be trying to promote or market products**



Apply similar fact-checking and critical thinking to social media, books, and newspapers

Misinformation can spread across many platforms

A Checklist for Reviewing Health Information Online

- What is the purpose of this site? Is the goal of the website made clear?
- Who owns the website – a government agency, educational institution, nonprofit organization or other?
- Does the site offer contact information?
- When was the information on the website written and last updated?
- Is the website secure?
- Does the website offer quick and easy solutions for resolving health problems?

DEEP DIVE

What Does Scientific Evidence Mean?

Scientific evidence is information gathered from experts engaged in scientific research, which takes much time (and patience!).

Scientific Evidence comes from the application of the “**scientific process**,” where a researcher develops a “hypothesis,” tests it through various means, and then modifies the hypothesis based on the outcome of the tests and experiments.

The modified hypothesis is then retested, further modified, tested again, and eventually evaluated by knowledgeable peers in the particular field during publication.

From that data and the many different scientific investigations undertaken to explore hypotheses, scientists can develop explanations, scientific theories, and guidance.

Importantly, Scientific Evidence is objective and unbiased.



DEEP DIVE

Why Does Our Scientific Understanding Sometimes Change?

New scientific knowledge is increasing rapidly, just as the tools and techniques of scientific innovation continue to advance.

Scientists and clinicians consistently challenge what is known today as they seek deeper understanding and strive to advance health.

As a result, guidance is continually reviewed and, when necessary, revised based on new knowledge.

It is essential to know the source and date of health and science information you engage with and whether the content is based on the results of a valid and timely study.



DEEP DIVE

Making Sense of Medical and Scientific Uncertainty

While scientific knowledge is the foundation for health interventions and medical care delivery, scientists do not have the answer to every challenge, especially as new issues emerge in real-time.

As a result, health professionals draw upon available knowledge and the informed judgment of credible subject matter experts in formulating guidance.

Health professionals increasingly understand that, when there is uncertainty, they have a responsibility to share that uncertainty with their patients or the public in a manner that allows individuals to assess the risks of competing choices and make the best possible decisions for themselves, their families, and the community of people who might be affected by an individual's decisions.



DEEP DIVE

How to Navigate Medical and Scientific Uncertainty



While dealing with uncertainty can be very overwhelming, these tips might help ease some of the associated anxiety:

- Recognize that uncertainty is a normal part of the human experience – no area of life is untouched by uncertainty
- Talk with trusted health providers, ask questions and share your concerns
- If possible, connect with other patients facing similar uncertainties through support groups and peer-networks

DEEP DIVE

Risk/Benefit Analysis



➡ **Risk** means the possibility that something bad might happen

➡ **Benefit** means the possibility that something good might happen.

In summary, most aspects of health decision-making involve identifying and weighing the potential risks and benefits associated with the decision. This is true for everything from over-the-counter medicines to major surgeries.

When evaluating risk and benefit, you might consider the following:

- What will happen if I choose not to go forward?
- Will my decision impact my family and community?
- Are there evidence-based alternatives to explore?
- Create a “pro” and “con” list of the risks and benefits

Always seek professional guidance as you weigh the balance between the possible benefits with the possible risks of all health-related decisions.

DEEP DIVE

Being an Empowered Patient



Do your research, but don't always rely exclusively on "Dr. Google."

Ask questions of all the providers you engage with (from your physician to pharmacist).

It can help to make a list of your questions, concerns, and/or symptoms before your appointment.

Speak up! Although appointments are becoming shorter, it is important to express your concerns, ask questions, and provide answers to the questions asked of you.

TAKE ACTION

Fact Checking



A simple online search to cross-check the legitimacy of a "fact" or source is key to being an empowered consumer of health data!

If you're unsure if it's misinformation, ask a trusted health care professional, such as a doctor, nurse, nurse or pharmacist.

If you've found the information online, check the website's "about us" page to check the page's authenticity and purpose.

TAKE ACTION

Engaging with Peers who Spread Misinformation



Listen with empathy and don't dismiss or ridicule those who believe in conspiracies.

They are likely searching for answers to frightening or confusing issues; conspiracies provide simple answers in the form of stories.

Do your best to engage the person struggling with misinformation one-on-one; avoid public shaming or online confrontation.

Use inclusive language like "I understand," "I've been confused too," "our community," "we," and "us," so the person feels that you identify with them.

CONTINUED LEARNING

Becoming an Empowered Patient

- Upstate Medical University's "The Informed Patient" website: <https://www.upstate.edu/informed/>
- "Know Your Chances: Understanding Health Statistics" an interactive quiz: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK126169/>
- Online Pharmacy Safety Resources: <https://scriptyourfuture.org/online-pharmacy-safety/>
- "Be More Engaged in Your Healthcare: Tips for Patients": <https://www.ahrq.gov/questions/be-engaged/index.html>

CONTINUED LEARNING

Media & Health Literacy

- “Identify and Tackling Manipulated Media”: <https://www.ronikdesign.com/project/manipulated-media>
- News Literacy Project's "Be Health Informed" a free lesson: <https://get.checkology.org/lesson/be-health-informed/>
- “How To Read and Evaluate A Scientific Paper: A Guide for Non-Scientists”: <https://www.halletecco.com/blog/how-to-evaluate-a-scientific-paper-a-guide-for-non-scientists>
- “Understanding Medical Words Tutorial”: <https://medlineplus.gov/medwords/medicalwords.html>

CONTINUED LEARNING

Countering Misinformation

- [The Debunking Handbook 2020](#) is a guide to combating disinformation and misinformation.
- “7 ways to avoid becoming a misinformation superspreader when the news is shocking”:
<https://theconversation.com/7-ways-to-avoid-becoming-a-misinformation-superspreader-when-the-news-is-shocking-157099>
- “How to avoid falling for misinformation and conspiracy theories” from the *Washington Post*:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/misinformation-ai-twitter-facebook-guide/>

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