

# Social Media & the Spread of Misinformation

By Heather Simpson,  
Back to the Vax

The rate at which false news & information spreads on social media is quite alarming. The most ridiculous stories can be posted on Facebook and be spread thousands of times before your very eyes. Take these wild statistics, for example:

- 80% of us actually have consumed fake news.
- 50% of Americans think that fake news is a significant problem.
- 56% of Facebook users can't recognize fake news that aligns with their beliefs.
- In 2020, there were 1.8 billion fake news engagements on Facebook.

When I first came out of my anti-vax days, I was supposed to get my flu shot at noon on a Friday. I had just started taking an antibiotic and started to have a very bad reaction to it. I started throwing up blood due to the antibiotics causing esophagitis.

Since I started throwing up blood a few hours before my flu shot was scheduled to happen, I canceled my flu shot. However, had I gotten my flu shot early that morning then started throwing up blood, I could have easily taken that to Facebook.



All I would have had to say was “OMG, I just got the flu shot and now I’m throwing up blood!” That would have likely gotten shared many times, even though the flu shot had nothing to do with it.

That is exactly how misinformation spreads. Stories without proven causation run amuck and freely on social media.

One of the most compelling stories for the lack of proven causation is from Dr. Paul Offit, the director of vaccine education at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, tells this story:

*"There's a story that I tell because I think it's a powerful one. My wife is a privately practicing pediatrician in the suburbs. And she was in the office one day and there was a four-month-old sitting on her mother's lap. And my wife was drawing a vaccine into a syringe that she was about to give this child. Well, while she was drawing the vaccine into a syringe the child had a seizure, and actually went on to have a permanent seizure disorder: epilepsy. And there had been a family history of epilepsy, so she was certainly at risk for that. If my wife had given that vaccine five minutes earlier, I think there's no amount of statistical data in the world that would have convinced that mother that anything other than the vaccine caused the seizure, because I think those sort of emotional events are very hard to argue against."*

*-Dr. Paul Offit*

Social media is great, but remember that many of those posts and stories about vaccines that sound scary aren't true. Do your own real research to fight misinformation and spot fake news.

## Spot Misinformation using IKC's Identifying Vaccine Misinformation Education Module



Learn how to navigate through websites, media reports, and social media platforms to base your health decisions on accurate and reliable information.



Reviewed by: Melissa Ballenthin, RPN

**This resource is a collaboration of Immunize Kansas Coalition and Back to the Vax.**  
Scan the QR code to see more Vaccine Fears Overturned by Facts.

