

Inoculating yourself against coronavirus conspiracy theories

To understand why there's so much misinformation out there — for example, that the [virus](#) was purposely created in a lab — The Verge spoke with John Cook, a cognitive science researcher at George Mason University and one of the authors of a new [Conspiracy Theory Handbook](#).

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[Cook:] Why has the conspiracy theory about the virus being engineered in labs become so popular? In the handbook, we talk about different conditions that make the public more vulnerable to [conspiracy theories](#), more likely to gravitate toward them. And I think the two that are really applicable to this situation is the feeling of powerlessness and coping with threat.

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[W]hen you do address conspiracy theories, do it in a way that doesn't reinforce or promote them. Basically, inoculation is delivering misinformation in a weakened form by explaining how it can't be true and explaining what the facts are instead. For example, with the conspiracy theory that the novel coronavirus was created in a lab, [scientists have found that](#) it has natural origins.

If your goal is to convince conspiracy theorists, then an empathetic approach is necessary just to have a genuine dialogue.

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