

Over 60 years, vaccines have prevented 4.5 billion cases and saved 10 million lives. Now anti-vaxxers want to roll back the clock

The misleading claims Americans will soon hear about the newly released COVID-19 vaccines are nearly identical to claims [made about smallpox immunizations 120 years ago](#): The ingredients are toxic and unnatural; the vaccines are insufficiently tested; the scientists who produce them are quacks and profiteers; the cell cultures involved in some shots are an affront to the religious; the authorities working to protect public health are guilty of tyrannical overreach.

In the [British Medical Journal](#) in that period, a Dr. Francis T. Bond frets about what to do about his era's anti-vaxxers and their arguments, which have since become [well-trod canards](#) because they are effective in frightening people.

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Today's anti-vaccine activists, however, enjoy a speed, scale, and reach far greater than those of Dr. Bond's day. Bottom-up networked activism is driving the spread of anti-vaccine COVID-19 propaganda. Americans are about to see a deluge of tweets, posts, and snarky [memes](#) that will attempt to erode trust in the vaccine rollouts.

Society's ability to return to a semblance of normalcy depends on how effectively public-health authorities counter this misinformation and how assiduously media outlets and internet platforms refrain from amplifying it—but also on whether average Americans recognize that the material they click on and share has real-world consequences.

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