Vaccine rejectionism and disinformation spreading as fast in Asia as the virus itself

Microchips. Magnets. "Mark of the beast." Those are just some of the things that U.S. anti-vaccine warriors have falsely claimed Covid-19 shots contain. That same disinformation is now spreading halfway around the world, sparking fear and endangering millions in Southeast Asia, where the virus still rages.

From Thailand to the Philippines, parts of the population are reluctant to take Covid-19 shots. That's worrisome for a region where tens of thousands of new infections are still being reported daily, partly due to more transmissible variants, and where inoculation has been sluggish, mainly due to shortages after rich nations snapped up stock.

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With richer Western nations getting the lion's share of super-effective mRNA shots, poorer countries in the region are left with fewer available brands. Some choose to wait until they can get the higher-efficacy shots.

Governments and companies are fighting back. Facebook and Twitter have been flagging and taking down false claims. Southeast Asian countries have pushed through new laws or used existing ones against falsehoods. Some are even raffling off cows and chickens to encourage residents to take Covid-19 shots. The region's efforts against this propaganda, however, will have to be firmer and faster.

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