

Delta surge sparks spike in virus disinformation

Coronavirus misinformation has spiked online in recent weeks, misinformation experts say, as people who peddle in falsehoods have seized on the surge of cases from the Delta variant to spread new and recycled unsubstantiated narratives.

Mentions of some phrases prone to vaccine misinformation in July jumped as much as five times the June rate, according to Signal Labs, which tracks mentions on social media, on cable television and in print and online outlets. Some of the most prevalent falsehoods are that vaccines don't work (up 437 percent), that they contain microchips (up 156 percent), that people should rely on their "natural immunity" instead of getting vaccinated (up 111 percent) and that the vaccines cause miscarriages (up 75 percent).

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Disinformation researchers say the spike shows that efforts by social media platforms to crack down on misinformation about the virus have not succeeded.

"These narratives are so embedded that people can keep on pushing these antivaccine stories with every new variant that's going to come up," said Rachel E. Moran, a researcher at the University of Washington who studies online conspiracy theories. "We're seeing it with Delta, and we're going to see it with whatever comes next."

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