European Science-Media Hub

Trending mis- and disinformation topics around COVID-19 on social media – February 2021

Analysis Overview:

Time range: 01/02/2021 - 28/02/2021
Sources: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Websites, Blogs
Number of false claims: 90
Number of fact-checks: 53
Content Analysis - False claims

Total items: 90

False claims per category:

- **Vaccine**: 36
- **Masks**: 14
- **Mortality**: 5
- **Medications**: 5
- **Conspiracy / No pandemic**: 4
- **Tests**: 4
- **Lockdowns**: 7
- **Various**: 16
The majority of false claims (36) have been targeting the COVID-19 vaccine:

- Many **deaths** are attributed to the vaccine, especially in **care homes**, in the UK, Germany and other European countries.
- Since the **inoculation** started in the UK, **deaths per reported cases** have allegedly increased.
- The UK government is said to be fiddling with **statistics** to cover up for vaccine-related **deaths**.
- Vaccination is about to cause many **deaths** among the global population. To some, what will happen is nothing short of a ‘**genocide**’.
- The jab is detrimental to human **fertility**.
- Reports of an alleged **miscarriage due to the vaccine** circulate online.
- The vaccine is ‘**experimental**’ and will modify the human **DNA**.
- **No need** to vaccinate. **Natural immunity** is preferable to vaccine immunity, which may only last for three months.
- The COVID-19 vaccine is responsible for **new variants** of the virus.
Featured **false claims** related to COVID-19 in February 2021:

**Lockdown-related claims (7):**
- The common narrative that **lockdowns don’t work** is still present.
- People **should not get tested** for COVID-19, to avoid the continuation of lockdowns.
- Governments **fake data** to prolong lockdowns.
- People only agree to this measure solely out of **fear** for COVID-19.

**Mask related claims (14):**
- People still claim that face masks **do not work**.
- Dr. Anthony Fauci suggests double masking to promote **Chinese KN95 masks**.
- There is still a claim that masks are responsible for **bacterial pneumonia**.
- Masks allegedly “injure every organ of the body”.
Featured **false claims** related to COVID-19 in February 2021:

- The **PCR tests** are a fraud. These tests are highly **inaccurate** and are only used to prolong **lockdowns**.
- There are many claims regarding the need to use **ivermectin** as a treatment of COVID-19. Others continue to argue that **hydroxychloroquine** is effective.
- **Children in Iraq** die because of the new COVID-19 strain.
- **Vapers** are 17% more likely to spread COVID-19.
- The **AMISH** communities do not suffer from COVID-19.
- **Glass wearers** are less likely to contract COVID-19.
- **12 immigrants** in Dover, UK, tested positive for COVID-19.
- Many **alternative therapies** for COVID-19 with **vitamins**, **steam** and other substances are also circulating online.
- In **Nigeria**, an photo depicting **students jumping** from a balcony is used to claim they are escaping a forced COVID-19 **vaccination**.
- The possibility of a **vaccine (health) passport** will be nothing less than an act of submission.
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

Total items: 53

- Vaccines (19): 32%
- Other (15): 25%
- Mortality (7): 12%
- Masks (7): 12%
- Medication/Remedies (5): 8%
- Lockdowns (2): 3%
- Statistics (5): 8%
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- Fact-checks during February focused mostly on vaccine related mis- and disinformation, debunking claims about the death of several people in care homes, which is not attributed to the inoculation of elderly people.
- The vaccine prevents deaths, whilst natural remedies are not proven to work.
- The vaccine is not responsible for new COVID-19 variants.
- The mRNA vaccine cannot alter the human DNA.
- US and European vaccine-related deaths have not been proven.
- The UK death rate has not risen due to the vaccine.
- A Latin American medical professional dismisses the allegation that her miscarriage should be attributed to her vaccination for COVID-19.
Content Analysis - Fact-checkers’ debunked claims

- **PCR tests** are deemed by scientists both **reliable** and **effective**.
- The **UK virus variant** is not proven worse for **children**, as a report claims, in **Iraq**.
- The **UK NHS data** does not show only **3000 deaths** from COVID-19.
- Study does not prove that **glass-wearers** are less likely to contract COVID-19.
- The **AMISH communities** in the USA do suffer from COVID-19 like the rest of the population.
- The **12 immigrants** in Dover have not tested positive for COVID-19 as UK politician **Nigel Farage** alleged.
- **Ivermectin**, **hydroxychloroquine** and other alternative **medicines** and **remedies** have not been proven to work against COVID-19.
- In **Nigeria**, a photo depicting students jumping from a balcony, claiming they were escaping a force COVID-19 **vaccination**, was an out of context old photo.
As regards to **mask-related claims**, face masks do help contain COVID-19.

Scientists believe it is important to wear good **face-covers**.

Masks do not cause **bacterial pneumonia**.

A video showing the **size of virus particles** under the **microscope**, comparing it to the density of mask fabric, is false.
Content Curation – Data/Sources

- Time range of selected content: 1-28 February
- Out of the initial bulk, 143 results have been singled out
- Sources: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Websites
- Main keywords: covid19, lockdown, covid-19, coronavirus, nomask, masks, vaccine, pandemic, plandemic