



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner

Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94103

Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way, Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Vaccine Misinformation

Dear Mr. Dorsey and Mr. Zuckerberg:

I write on behalf of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (the “Health Department”) to urge you to take immediate action to stop the spread of fraudulent and inaccurate information about COVID-19 vaccines on your platforms. The City of New York has invested significant time and resources into educating the public about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines in order to increase vaccine confidence and vaccinations among New York City residents.

To date, 54% of all New Yorkers are fully vaccinated. However, uptake has slowed and our efforts to vaccinate more New Yorkers have been undermined by the active spread of misinformation on social media regarding COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccine misinformation continues to proliferate on your platforms. Your failure to effectively stop the spread of this dangerous information on your platforms and vigorously enforce your own policies targeting misinformation is a threat to the public health of New York City residents and a serious impediment to our efforts to vaccinate all New York City residents to end this public health crisis. In short, the spread of misinformation is costing New Yorkers their lives.

Vaccine hesitancy remains a major obstacle to our full recovery and threatens the health and well-being of those who are not vaccinated. Despite the widespread availability of vaccines in New York City, lower rates of vaccination persist in areas of the city. Alarming, at least 15% of New York City adults remain unsure about whether they will get vaccinated and four percent do not intend to get vaccinated at all. Vaccine hesitancy remains higher among the city’s Black and Hispanic residents.

The key driver in this persistent vaccine hesitancy in New York City is the proliferation and spread of COVID-19 vaccine misinformation on your social media platforms. Surveys have shown that there is a strong connection between exposure to misinformation and vaccine hesitancy. While 54% of adults either believe a common falsehood about COVID-19 vaccines or are unsure if a piece of

misinformation is true or false, those who are reluctant to get a COVID-19 vaccine are much more likely to believe or be unsure about a falsehood about COVID-19 vaccines. Indeed, 81% of those who say they definitely will not get a COVID-19 vaccine believe or are unsure about a falsehood. Recent studies have demonstrated a clear link between exposure to misinformation on social media and reduced vaccine confidence and that individuals who are vaccine-hesitant are more likely to identify social media as their sole source of information.

According to a recent report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate, a dozen individuals who lack medical expertise and are often motivated by financial interests — the Dirty Dozen — use accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter to spread misinformation about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines to more than 59 million followers with just the click of a button. Despite the report being released almost four months ago, many of the Dirty Dozen continue to utilize your platforms to spread misinformation. Alarming, the Health Department has seen that active social media misinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccines has only become more prevalent in New York City in recent months and that “anti-vaxxers” are specifically targeting communities of color and religious communities for vaccine misinformation. Moreover, the algorithms used by social media platforms to determine what content users see compounds the problem by prioritizing content based on its popularity or similarity to previously seen content. As a result, a user who is exposed to vaccine misinformation once could see more and more of it over time, effectively [sending users down a rabbit hole of vaccine misinformation](#).

The Health Department has partnered with community groups and leaders to spread accurate vaccine information, counter misinformation, and launch neighborhood-based in-person canvassing efforts, but our efforts are severely undermined by the COVID-19 vaccine misinformation that is spread daily on your platforms. Your companies can stop this proliferation of misinformation that is contributing to the continuation of the COVID-19 public health crisis. We urge you to immediately take the following actions: (1) consistently and promptly remove all misinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccines from your platforms and ban any user that repeatedly posts misinformation, including the Dirty Dozen, (2) redesign the algorithms used by your platforms to avoid amplifying misinformation, particularly among non-English languages, (3) provide greater transparency to your data to allow health departments to better identify, track and understand the spread of misinformation, and (4) amplify messaging from trusted public health experts and local partners.

Please help us ensure that more New Yorkers do not die from COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave A. Chokshi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner
New York City Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene