

March 7, 2019

Honorable Adam Schiff  
2269 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Schiff,

Thank you for your letter of February 14, 2019, about how Facebook approaches misinformation on our platform, specifically misinformation related to vaccinations. We appreciate the opportunity to address your questions, especially in light of changes we are announcing today about how we treat this kind of content on our platform.

Our current approach to misinformation about vaccinations is best understood in the context of Facebook's overall approach to content that appears on our platform, including misinformation generally. We are a community of more than two billion people, spanning countries, cultures, and languages from across the globe. Every day, the members of our community express themselves on our platform in diverse ways, having conversations and posting everything from text to links to photos and videos. We encourage and are proud of the wide array of expression on Facebook, but also recognize that we have an important role to play in keeping abuse off our platform.

To that end, Facebook has Community Standards that govern what may and may not be on Facebook, and Advertising Policies that govern what may be advertised. For example, among the content we disallow is hate speech, fake accounts, and harassment. When we become aware of content that violates these policies—either through proactive technical measures or through user reports—we remove it.

There are some types of content that, although they do not violate the letter of our policies, are lacking in quality and integrity, are otherwise harmful, or our community has told us they do not want to see on Facebook. When we find this content, rather than remove it, we work to reduce its distribution on the platform and we inform users with additional context so they can decide whether to read, trust, or share the content. This is how we typically handle misinformation (and associated things like clickbait and sensationalism) on the platform.

Facebook is dedicated to reducing the spread of misinformation on our platform. We use multiple means to achieve that goal, including removing fake accounts, disrupting the financial incentives behind propagating false and misleading information, working with third-party fact-checkers to let people know when they are reading or sharing information (excluding satire and opinion) that has been disputed or debunked, and limiting the distribution of stories that have been flagged as false or misleading by these fact-checkers. The third-party fact-checkers with which we work—who are signatories to the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network Code of Principles—investigate claims and make determinations about a post's truth or falsity. This fact-checking process applies to misinformation about vaccinations.

Because misinformation about health topics can be especially harmful, we have been working to do more in this area in particular. Today, we will announce a number of new steps we are

taking to address hoaxes and misinformation related to vaccines. To take these steps, we will rely on the publicly available work of leading health organizations on the issue of vaccines (such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization) to identify verifiable hoaxes on the topic. An example of a claim that has been widely disproven by these organizations is the assertion that vaccines cause autism. When we become aware of groups or Pages on Facebook that propagate this type of misinformation, we will substantially reduce the distribution of their content. First, we will work to remove offending Groups and Pages from recommendation surfaces on the platform (such as "Groups You Should Join") and from predictions when you type into search. We are also working to implement changes so that we won't show or recommend content that contains this misinformation about vaccinations on Instagram Explore or hashtag pages. Furthermore, content from the offending Groups and Pages will be demoted in News Feed, using our ranking systems. Finally, the Groups and Pages themselves will be reduced in search results.

We are also taking additional steps to address hoaxes related to vaccines in advertising. We are investing in systems to better ensure that ads that include this type of misinformation about vaccines will be rejected. We are also removing a number of ad targeting options, such as "vaccine controversies," that might have been used to help spread this sort of misinformation.

Consistent with our overall approach to combatting misleading or false information, in addition to reducing its distribution, we seek to inform users with additional context on the topic. Vaccinations will be no exception. We are working on efforts to inform users by showing them additional true and authoritative information about vaccines. While this work is still in progress, our plan is to provide users who encounter discussions of vaccines, including but not limited to misinformation about vaccines, with additional context and resources in a number of places across our platform.

With this background in mind, please find below answers to your specific questions:

**(1) Does content which provides medically inaccurate information about vaccines violate your terms of service?**

As explained above, misinformation about vaccines (as with other claims rated false by our third party fact-checkers) does not violate our terms of service, but it is content that we recognize has the potential to cause harm. Because of that potential, although the content does not violate our Community Guidelines and will not be removed from the platform, starting today, we will now take additional action to reduce its organic spread on Facebook and Instagram and similarly decrease its spread by restricting it in paid advertising.

We recognize that these are challenging and sensitive issues. We want to help people stay informed and have access to accurate information, but we do not want to prevent people from discussing their personal opinions or experiences, and we do not want to stifle debate. We also want to keep open the opportunity for counter-speech, which might require sharing inaccurate information in order to shine a light on it and rebut it. Our approach, therefore, is to reduce the spread of inaccurate information about vaccines by reducing its distribution in News Feed, removing groups and pages that promote misinformation from recommendation surfaces, and providing authoritative information to people who might encounter it.

We are fully committed to the safety of our community. Today's announcement means that we will now take the additional actions set forth above to further reduce the organic spread of vaccine misinformation on Facebook and Instagram and to restrict its spread through paid advertising, while at the same time increasing the amount of true and authoritative information about vaccines on our platform.

**(2) What action(s) do you currently take to address misinformation related to vaccines on your platforms? Are you considering or taking additional actions?**

See details above regarding our efforts to address misinformation about vaccines. Our approach includes removing the Groups, Pages, and/or Instagram accounts that propagate misinformation about vaccines from relevant recommendation surfaces, demoting the content from those Groups and Pages in News Feed, and demoting those same Groups and Pages in search results.

**(3) Do you accept paid advertising from anti-vaccine activists and groups on your platform? How much has been spent in the past year on advertising on this topic?**

Ads that include misinformation about vaccines are prohibited on Facebook, irrespective of who is running the ad. We do not track advertisements by subject, such as "vaccines," so we do not have data showing how much money was spent on that topic, or sub-components of that topic, such as "anti-vaccine," in the last year.

**(4) What steps do you currently take to prevent anti-vaccine videos or information from being recommended to users, either algorithmically or as a suggested search result?**

See above regarding our efforts to address misinformation about vaccines. Those steps are taken regardless of the media type in which the misinformation appears.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share this information with you. Our announcement today regarding how we will begin treating this content is an important milestone in our efforts to keep the people who use our services safe from the potential harm of misinformation about vaccines. We look forward to working with you and your staff as we continue to address the issue of misinformation about vaccinations on our platform.

Sincerely,



Kevin Martin  
Vice President, U.S. Public Policy