

False virus cure claims infect the internet

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False claims about how to fight the deadly novel coronavirus outbreak are flooding the internet

Gargle salt water, use herbal eyedrops, steam-clean a face mask—false claims about how to combat a deadly coronavirus epidemic emerging out of China are flooding the internet.

Social media giants have promoted their strategies to combat misinformation related to the epidemic, which has claimed more than 560 lives in China and spread to 24 countries.

Twitter, which reported 15 million coronavirus-related tweets in January, said it had suspended auto-suggest search results that would likely produce untrustworthy content.

Facebook also said it was targeting false claims aimed at discouraging treatment or taking appropriate precautions with the [respiratory virus](#).

"This includes claims related to false cures or prevention methods—like drinking bleach cures the coronavirus—or claims that create confusion about health resources that are available," Kang-Xing Jin, Facebook's head of health, said in a statement.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also launched a campaign to discredit specific claims, such as that sesame oil and mouthwash can effectively kill the virus.

Yet the misinformation continues to pollute [social media platforms](#) and messaging apps.

Here is a selection of the false claims that AFP, which has a specialised fact-checking team, has debunked in recent days:

Boiling fresh garlic

A claim that the coronavirus can be cured overnight if sufferers drink freshly boiled garlic water was shared across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in Pakistan.

"There is no [scientific evidence](#) to substantiate the claim that garlic

boiled water cures the novel coronavirus nor is there any proper medical research available on the subject," said Dr Wasim Khawaja, an expert at the Pakistani Institute of Medical Sciences, for an AFP fact-check report.

Antibiotic eye drop

In the Philippines, videos viewed many millions of claim the virus can be cured with an eye drop made of sap from a local shrub that is commonly used to treat fever and stomach issues.

One 11-minute video, claiming the *tinospora crispa* plant is an effective "antibiotic" for the virus, was viewed more than 1.5 million times on Facebook.

There has been no medical evidence to back this claim.

Steaming face masks

A video of a purported doctor advising people to steam disposable surgical face masks to reuse them was viewed hundreds of thousands of times in multiple Chinese-language posts on Facebook, Weibo and Youku.

In Hong Kong, the video was viewed almost 900,000 times within a day after a lawmaker shared it on Facebook.

The WHO, the Hong Kong Red Cross and the Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection have all issued warnings against steaming -- or reusing at all -- single-use masks.

Herbal remedies

In the days following Sri Lanka's first confirmed coronavirus case, an article was shared hundreds of times on Facebook claiming that asafoetida, a plant often used in traditional Indian medicine, can prevent infection.

The claim was widely refuted by health experts who urged Sri Lankans to follow official Ministry of Health recommendations.

"There is absolutely no basis to the claims that various herbs such as perumkaayam can serve as protective barriers against the spread of coronavirus," said Dr Ashan Pathirana, a registrar at Sri Lanka's state-run Health Promotion Bureau.

Gargling saline solutions

A claim that a top Chinese respiratory expert advised people to rinse their mouths with salt water to prevent infection was shared widely on multiple social media platforms, including Weibo, Twitter and Facebook.

"No present findings have suggested that saline water can kill the new coronavirus," the expert, Zhong Nanshan, said as he refuted the false [claim](#).

* AFP currently works with Facebook's fact-checking programme in almost 30 countries and nine languages. Dozens of other media groups, including news organisations and specialised fact-checkers, work worldwide on the programme, which started in December 2016.

Fact-checkers are free to choose how and what they wish to investigate.

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