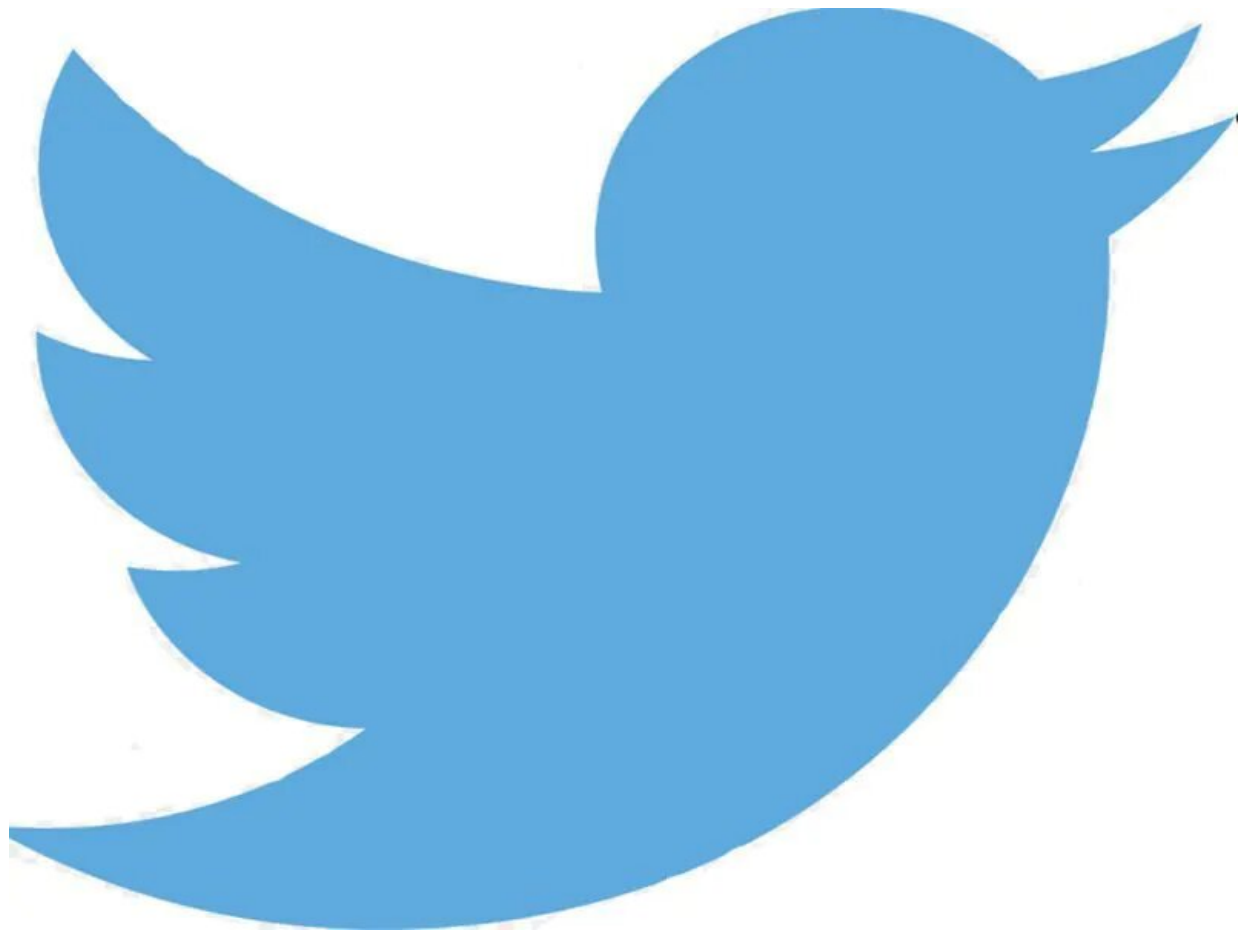


An expert's guide to fact-checking coronavirus info online

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(HealthDay)—With bogus information about the new coronavirus

spreading fast online, how can you separate fact from fiction?

A communications expert at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg said identifying reliable and useful sources of information is key. Here's her advice:

"Be skeptical of [social media posts](#) about the COVID-19 virus, even those that have the superficial look of news items, and check their sources and accuracy," said Adrienne Ivory, associate professor of communication at Virginia Tech. "If you are not sure whether a source of information can be trusted, check multiple [news sources](#) to see if the information is consistent across them."

Always check social media claims about [coronavirus](#) prevention and treatment against official sources such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And, Ivory added, pay attention to summary information in [news stories](#), instead of individual anecdotes.

"Interesting examples of people and events related to the COVID-19 virus may be true, but not typical," she said in a Virginia Tech news release. "In addition to reading stories about individuals, pay attention to general information summarizing more broad populations (numbers of cases, rate of growth, hospitalization rates by age group) because it may be more relevant and representative."

Ivory suggested seeking out information that helps you and others stay healthy, not information that worries you.

"Much of the most 'viral' news you encounter in social media posts about COVID-19 may be focused on frightening stories," she pointed out. "While you should take the COVID-19 virus seriously, make use of information that tells you ways to prevent transmission rather than stories that only frighten you."

Instead of doing what everyone else is doing, take precautions that are known to be beneficial, she recommended.

"Just because you see other people hoarding toiletries or buying masks online doesn't mean you need to do the same," Ivory said. "Follow recommendations from reliable sources rather than following what you see friends and family talking about doing online."

Be skeptical about politically related posts. False information about political figures and organizations has been a big problem for years, Ivory said, and is an issue with posts about the COVID-19 virus.

"While criticism and commentary regarding [government actions](#) related to the COVID-19 [virus](#) are acceptable, be skeptical of posts focusing on political information and check them against other sources," she said.

More information: Here's the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [coronavirus site](#).

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