

Six expert tips for finding good information about COVID-19

July 8 2020, by Jordan Mae Cook



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In the age of COVID-19, news articles and information about the disease, and what we should be doing to prevent its spread, are endless. But how can you tell what information is accurate, what's purely

speculative and what's just plain wrong?

Part of the challenge with COVID-19 is that it's so new.

"There's so much research that's happening on the virus and the pandemic, and so much that is unknown," said Kara Blizzard, a University of Alberta librarian who teaches information literacy skills to students. "More information comes out all the time, and it's always changing, so it can be difficult to know what to read and what to trust."

Blizzard recommends a few steps you can take to evaluate the information you're receiving and make sure what you're reading, watching and listening to is trustworthy and accurate.

Develop a set of sources you trust

When seeking out news, Blizzard recommends looking at more than one site or news publication, because there's always going to be some bias.

"There's no 100 percent fully neutral source out there, so it's always good to look at multiple sources to try to get a balanced view of what's going on."

She recommends looking at a variety of major news publications, as well as the sites of major health organizations. For example, Blizzard said, the Alberta government has been doing a good job of posting [information online](#) for people to follow.

Be critical on social media

Because so many people are on [social media sites](#) daily, they've become major places to get information about COVID-19. That's not inherently

good or bad, said Blizzard.

"There's a wide range of information of varying quality that you can find on social media. But it's often who you're friends with or who you're following that's going to affect the kinds of information you're seeing."

She recommends checking information shared on social media to find out the authors or organizations behind it. If they're listed, search online to find out more about them.

"Do they have specialized knowledge and experience with the topic? Search for other sources that include the same facts to verify them. If you can't find an author or verify facts, be skeptical of the information," she said.

Take your time

Blizzard said a main thing people can do to ensure they're reading and sharing factual information is to simply take a moment and pause before sharing something or using it themselves.

Take time to consider where the information is coming from and who wrote it. If that's not clear, she recommends looking outside the [original source](#) to verify it.

"That might seem like it's a difficult thing to do, but really it's as simple as going to a [search engine](#) and doing a search for either the fact or the publication to see what is known about either."

Pay attention to the details

With the amount of information and the speed with which it's coming

out, you may find even reputable sources will have conflicting information sometimes. If that's the case, said Blizzard, you might have to look deeper.

"If the sources seem credible, take a look at their publication dates. If one is from this week and another is from a few months ago, that could explain the differing perspectives. If multiple credible, recent sources offer conflicting views, it might mean that more research is still needed on the topic."

Limit your time

With seemingly endless information about the pandemic available, it can be tempting to check for updates and scroll constantly to try to get the latest news. But, warned Blizzard, there can be a point where it becomes overwhelming.

"You should be conscious of how much time you spend on news apps or [social media](#) and make sure you don't overdo it in terms of what you can handle."

Blizzard recommended limiting yourself to checking the [news](#) only once a day, and logging into Facebook or Twitter for only 15 minutes at a time.

Become information literate

Being information literate is being conscious about the information you use and being able to figure out its context and how accurate it might be, explained Blizzard.

"It's a challenging skill but it's something that you can develop," she said.

To do so, she recommends visiting [newsliteracy.ca](https://www.newsliteracy.ca), and practising web literacy expert Michael Caulfield's "Four Moves."

Ultimately, Blizzard said, the information we pass on to other people affects what ends up happening, so we, individually, have an impact.

"The information we're using is important because we want to have the most up-to-date, current, [accurate information](#) in order to know, should I be wearing a mask when I go out places? Should I be going to a friend's house?

"The [information](#) we use affects the things we end up doing, and it can make an impact on the outcome of the pandemic."

Provided by University of Alberta

Citation: Six expert tips for finding good information about COVID-19 (2020, July 8) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-expert-good-covid-.html>

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