

Tainted love: Misinformation drives 'vaccine-free' dating

July 28 2023, by Anuj Chopra and Marisha Goldhamer



A slew of dating websites, apps and social media groups are seeking to unite singles opposed to vaccines.

In a private dating group on Facebook, Renee flaunts herself to like-minded singles as a fit, adventurous Kizomba dancer who at 35 exudes "inner child vibes." But her main draw? She is unvaccinated.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have receded, but [dating apps](#), websites and social media groups still offer to unite vaccine-hating singles who believe debunked falsehoods such as that coronavirus jabs alter DNA or cause infertility.

The trend underscores how anti-vaccine sentiment has become an entrenched identity for many who willfully resist or ignore scientific assertions that inoculations saved tens of millions of lives globally when the pandemic was raging.

A prospective match's vaccination status determines compatibility not just for Renee, a self-employed Australian, but for many posting in "unvaxed singles" groups that have cropped up on Facebook.

Dating decisions there are driven by chemistry but not science. In one closed group breached by AFP, many listed "no jabbies" as their top dating criteria, while others cheered anti-vaccine advocates as "pure blood freedom fighters."

One meme popular in the group described their ideal partner: "She's curvy, funny, intelligent, unvaccinated."

It demonstrates how the pandemic turned rejecting vaccines from a personal health decision to the way "people express their personal brand," said Timothy Caulfield, a professor at the University of Alberta in Canada.

"It shows how high the walls of their echo chambers are. Being anti-vaccine has become an ideological flag—a way to demonstrate which team you belong to," Caulfield told AFP.

"It is less and less about science and more and more about the values being antivax signal."

'Swipe left'

According to a 2022 survey by the Pew Research Center, about half of US adults who used a dating site or app said it was important to see the vaccination status on profiles.

"Why is your vaccination status such a big deal? I've even seen it listed as a 'dealbreaker' on some profiles," said a post in a dating discussion group on the online messaging board Reddit.

"The profiles I see most state the following: 'if you're vaccinated then please swipe left.'"

Some comments in the group referred to vaccinated singles as people carrying "biological weapons," an apparent reference to the debunked claim the vaccinated spread "super strain" variants.



Dating decisions may be driven by chemistry but not science.

Vaccine falsehoods often overlap with other types of misinformation, introducing believers to those espousing the QAnon conspiracy theory and anti-LGBTQ narratives.

"Studies have consistently shown that if a person is anti-vaccine—or unvaccinated—you can make a strong guess about that person's positions on a host of other issues," Caulfield said.

Spreading falsehoods can also be profitable.

The Florida-based Wellness Company sells a detoxification supplement

that it claims counteracts the harmful effects of coronavirus jabs, destroying spike proteins to get back "that pre-COVID feeling." But experts and public health authorities told AFP's fact-checkers there is no evidence the nearly \$65 supplement does that.

The same company also backs a dating website for [unvaccinated people](#) called Unjected. Before being accepted, its members are required to have their "vaccination status certified by a medical professional," according to the website.

In 2021, US media reported the Unjected app, dubbed as the "Tinder for anti-vaxers," was removed from Apple's App Store over COVID-19 misinformation.

A slew of similar apps for unvaccinated singles are available on the Google Play Store. One such platform is called Unjabbed, whose user reviews expressed concern about bugs and phone hacking attempts after the app was downloaded.

'Tall, dark, handsome'

At the height of the pandemic in 2021, conventional online dating platforms including Tinder, Hinge and OkCupid sought to boost vaccinations.

As part of a White House-backed effort, many platforms allowed users to create badges displaying vaccination status, with OkCupid calling the inoculated the "new tall, dark and handsome."

Users who were vaccinated or planned to be saw a spike in matches and engagement, OkCupid said in a blog, adding the "vaccine is really helping people find love."

But any future inoculation drive could be jeopardized by anti-vaccine sentiment, which appears resilient even as the pandemic ebbs and travel restrictions are lifted around the world.

The allure of finding an unvaccinated partner is reinforced by false social media posts sharing unfounded fears that vaccines can be "shed" or passed onto people through body fluids, threatening fertility.

"The only real utility a dating platform like this could have is finding a partner that aligns with your 'medical freedom' views," Katrine Wallace, an epidemiologist and assistant professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, told AFP.

"There is no clinical reason to do so."

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