

23 February 2021

PRESS RELEASE

CAC issues warning about Covid-19 anti-vaccination content online

- **The Council has identified and reported 40 videos on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, which question vaccines and claim they cause infertility, genetic alterations and even death**
- **The CAC chair describes them as scientifically unfounded videos that can cause confusion about the vaccination process and pose a health risk**
- **The CAC report has been validated by the Council of the Col·legis de Metges de Catalunya (Colleges of Physicians of Catalonia) and the Council of the Col·legis d'Infermeres i Infermers de Catalunya (Colleges of Nurses of Catalonia)**
- **Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the CAC has published four reports on medical disinformation online**
- **The CAC and the Platform for Media Literacy are holding a webinar today on disinformation about Covid-19 vaccines, which will include recommendations aimed at the public on how to spot fake news**

The Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC) has issued a warning about Covid-19 anti-vaccination content on the main video-sharing platforms and social networks. The CAC report has identified and reported 40 videos on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, which question the safety and efficacy of the vaccines and the need for vaccination.

The vast majority (70%) explicitly urge people not to be vaccinated against Covid-19. They contain such messages as: "Please do not have the vaccine", "Don't let them inoculate you!", and hashtags such as "#NoTeVacunes" (#DontGetVaccinated).

The most widely repeated message in these videos is that the vaccines are unsafe. This narrative is based on two facts: the rapid development of the vaccine since the start of the pandemic and the use of innovative techniques (such as

messenger RNA), which is described as dangerous and with the potential to cause genetic alterations.

Furthermore, in almost half of the videos (40%), the vaccines are alleged to cause sterility and nerve damage in those vaccinated. For example, one says: *“The price of having this vaccine is that 97% of men vaccinated will be made sterile, but also, when given to small children they will never develop secondary sex characteristics. They will turn into a kind of androgen, with no sexual desire [...]. It will make 45% of girls sterile. The nerve damage will affect part of your frontal cortex.”*

The report by the CAC has been validated by the Council of Colleges of Physicians of Catalonia and the Council of the Colleges of Nurses of Catalonia. The CAC has informed the content providers in question about the Covid-19 anti-vaccine videos.

CAC Chairperson **Roger Loppacher** said: “At this time of intense, coordinated actions to fight the pandemic, and when the entire scientific and medical community recognises that vaccines are one of the main ways for us to overcome it, disinformation and denial of their safety and efficacy is a very serious matter. Contents that have no scientific credibility hinder the vaccination process and therefore pose a health risk. We are appealing to the responsibility of internet platforms and service providers for them to rectify the situation immediately.”

The chair of the Council of Colleges of Physicians of Catalonia, **Jaume Padrós**, stated: “Vaccines have saved millions of lives. They undergo extremely stringent safety tests, both before and after they are approved. Covid-19 vaccines have been developed rapidly, thanks to use of new technologies and global collaboration. The priority now is for vaccines to reach everyone and fake news is obstacle that must fight to achieve this absolutely necessary goal.”

The dean of the Council of Colleges of Nurses of Catalonia, **Estrella Martínez**, stressed: “Disinformation about vaccines is not a new phenomenon, but it used to be easier to locate and counteract. The global nature of Covid-19 and the amplification potential of social networks has increased it exponentially and makes it very difficult to monitor. We need to empower people to spot this pseudoscience and cooperation from nurses and the media is a good way.”

They trivialise the serious nature of Covid-19, propose infection as a way to achieve immunity, and present themselves as medical professionals

Over a quarter (27.5%) of the videos found reject the need for coronavirus vaccines, with messages that trivialise the severity of the disease and downplay

the actual mortality rates. They suggest taking vitamins as an alternative and state that Covid-19 has not killed anyone who did not have a pre-existing illness: *“Covid-19 does not kill, that is a lie. That is a big lie. Only people with pre-existing conditions have died.”*

In doing so they argue that immunity by catching the virus is better and suggests we should do away with the safety measures that have been put in place: *“We should all be free on the streets now, catching this disease and immunising ourselves.”*

We also found that 70% of the videos feature people who purport to be experts in science or medicine (60% present themselves as doctors and 10% as nurses), in an attempt to lend credibility and authority to claims that are contrary to scientific consensus.



Most of the videos analysed also include calls to spread the content, using a multi-network strategy to get around the measures to combat disinformation that some platforms use. However, platforms such as YouTube, where only one video was found, are clearly stepping up measures to prevent disinformation.

Webinar on information quality in the pandemic

On a related note, the CAC and Platform for Media Literacy (PEM) are holding a webinar at 10am today on the need to access good quality information during this pandemic. To access, please **click here**.

Moderated by journalist and PEM member **Carlos Baraibar**, the online seminar will be presented by the chair of the CAC, Roger Loppacher, with the participation of Deputy Director-General of Health Promotion of the Government of Catalonia, **Carmen Cabezas**; the Vice-Dean of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya (Catalan Society of Journalists), **Núria de José**; epidemiologist and chair of the Multidisciplinary Collaborative Group for the Scientific Monitoring of Covid-19 – promoted by the Col·legi de Metges de Barcelona (College of Physicians of Barcelona) and ISGGlobal, **Sílvia de Sanjosé**, and the representative of the College of Nurses of Catalonia, **Pepi Estany Almirall**.

A text drafted by the PEM with recommendations for the public on how to spot fake news on Covid-19 vaccines will be presented at the webinar. Entitled “Spot fake news. Stop, think and check,” the document invites readers to consider whether all information is available, where it has come from, the credibility, and whether the images or sound files may have been manipulated. It also suggests analysing whether the case described is a one-off and if it is a good idea to share it on social media.

The proposals include getting in-depth information rather than merely reading the headlines, using recognised media outlets, evaluating the solvency of the information source, and cross-checking information to ensure the authenticity. Health authorities, and health and science professionals and experts are all deemed to be accredited sources. The text also recommends considering if a story is merely anecdotal and not sharing anything unless you are sure that it is true.

Six reports on medical disinformation since 2018

The CAC has published six reports on medical disinformation online, four of which have been published since the outbreak of the pandemic. The first round of the Council's reports comprised one on disinformation about cancer (2018) and another on the anti-vaccine narrative (2019).

In the second round, following the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the CAC published two reports in March and April 2020 on content about proposed non-scientific treatments (such as sodium chlorite and similar). Once safety measures had been put in place around the world, the CAC drafted a fifth report in October 2020 on denialist content about face masks, PCR tests and social distancing. This is the sixth report and comes in a response to the Covid-19 anti-vax movement.

The CAC also drafted a series of media recommendations for audiovisual content on Covid vaccines in December 2020.

All of these reports have been drawn up in collaboration with the Catalan Ministry of Health, the Colleges of Physicians of Catalonia the Catalan Society of Journalists, and the Colleges of Nurses of Catalonia.

[Report 21/2021 Covid-19 anti-vaccination content on social platforms and networks.Conclusions.](#)

[Recommendations: How can I spot FAKE NEWS about Covid-19 vaccines?](#)

More information: CAC Communications • C / Vergós, 36-42 • 08017 Barcelona
Tel .: +34 935 575 000 and +34 627 480 483 • **Fax:** +34 935 575 003
Email: comunicacio.cac@gencat.cat
Website: www.cac.cat