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Coronavirus Myths, Debunked: A Cattle Vaccine, Bioweapons and a \$3,000 Test

Source: Grace Hauck, *USA Today*, March 6, 2020

We've all heard some outlandish rumors about the new coronavirus.

Fake stories circulated on WhatsApp have falsely stated that the virus has killed millions of people worldwide. Social media posts have claimed that drinking garlic water cures the deadly disease. Conspiracy theories that the virus is a bioweapon engineered in a Chinese lab have been voiced by TV pundits and even an American lawmaker.

There's a lot of misinformation out there, and it's transmitting faster than the virus itself. We're setting the record straight.

A cattle virus we've known about for years is the real cause of coronavirus

Absolutely not. Users on Facebook are spreading a photo of a vaccine used on cattle to falsely imply that the new coronavirus infecting humans globally has been known about "for years." That suggestion is false.

When we say "the coronavirus," we're referring to a new strain of virus that emerged from a family of coronaviruses. Coronaviruses can infect animals and people, and we've known about other coronaviruses for years. The novel coronavirus, which causes the COVID-19 disease, was first publicly reported in late 2019.

The vaccine pictured is used to combat bovine coronavirus, which is a virus that infects cattle. ScourGuard 4K is a vaccine for "pregnant cows and heifers" to help prevent diarrhea in their calves. The bovine coronavirus did not cause the current outbreak in humans.

The coronavirus will be gone by April

We've received many questions from you about whether the virus will be gone by spring as the weather gets warmer, but health officials say that's "premature" thinking.

In a press briefing last month, Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, cast doubt on this rumor. "I'm happy to hope that it goes down as the weather warms up, but I think it's premature to assume that, and we're certainly not using that to sit back and expect it to go away," Messonnier said.

Like the common cold and flu, COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets, and most viral respiratory diseases have seasons. They spread more during the colder months, but you can still get sick from them during the warmer months, too.

Coronavirus live updates: Churches react with new Communion rules Kids seem less likely to get coronavirus, but doctors aren't so sure Trump defends coronavirus effort in first town hall

The coronavirus comes from Corona beer

Funny, but no. In January, the alcoholic beverage from Mexico showed a surge in Google searches, along with the term "corona beer virus" and "beer virus."

In the United States, Google Trends calculated that 57% of the people that searched one of those terms searched for "beer virus," and the remaining 43% searched for "corona beer virus." States like Hawaii, New Mexico and Kansas searched "beer virus" more, whereas states like South Carolina, Colorado and Arizona searched "corona beer virus" more.

The virus escaped from a Chinese lab

Once again, no, the new coronavirus is not a bioweapon engineered by scientists in China. Early last month, bloggers began to circulate a theory on social media and other websites that the virus was man-made. Health officials debunked the claim, but Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., repeated the theory at least three times on Fox News. Right wing media outlets defended Cotton's comments.

Scientists are still researching how COVID-19 emerged but say it is not man-made. The first infection, reported in December 2019, was linked to a market in Wuhan, China. It's still unclear how transmission unfolded, but there are several theories. Some researchers believe that someone bought contaminated meat at the market, ate it, got sick and infected others. Others say the virus originated in bats, spread to an intermediary animal and then to humans.

A coronavirus test costs \$3,000

Nope. Actually, it's free. A claim that it costs patients in the U.S. more than \$3,000 to test for COVID-19 originated on Twitter, where it amassed more than 250,000 likes and retweets. It became a meme that spread on Facebook.

In actuality, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has authorized the use of two tests – one from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and one from the New York State Department of Public Health – and neither agency charges patients for the test.

You should start wearing a face mask

No, you should only wear a face mask if you are sick or if a doctor recommends it, according to the CDC. The best way to prevent infection is to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, avoid close contact with people who are sick, cover your cough or sneeze, clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Lysol 'knew' of the virus before the outbreak happened

Yes, Lysol products have labels that say they disinfect against "human coronavirus." But those labels aren't referring to the new coronavirus, in particular.

The labels are referring to coronavirus, in general, which is a broader family of viruses. The COVID-19 virus is one of many in that family. Certain Lysol products have demonstrated effectiveness against coronaviruses on hard, non-porous surfaces, according to the company's website.

Pope Francis has the coronavirus

A story circulating on social media falsely claims that the Vatican has confirmed that the pope and two of his aides tested positive for the virus. Several Italian news outlets also reported that the Pope was tested for the virus.

The Vatican has not verified any of these claims, nor has it disclosed whether or not the pope was tested for the coronavirus. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni issued a statement saying, "The cold the Holy Father was diagnosed with recently is running its course, with no symptoms related to other pathologies."

The CDC recommends shaving beards to protect against the virus

Social media users sharing a CDC infographic showing various styles of facial hair have suggested that the agency is instructing people to shave beards and mustaches to prevent the coronavirus. To beard or not to beard? The infographic actually has nothing to do with the new virus. The CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health first published the image in 2017 to show workers what types of facial hairstyles work with a tight-sealing respirator. Facial hair that lies along the sealing area of a respirator, such as beards, sideburns or some mustaches, interferes with respirators that rely on a tight facepiece seal to achieve maximum protection, according to the CDC.

The flu vaccine prevents coronavirus

While you should definitely get your flu vaccine, it won't protect you from the new coronavirus. Instead, take the common sense health precautions outlined above.

Why get the flu vaccine? In the U.S., influenza has caused 12,000 to 61,000 deaths annually since 2010, according to the CDC. So far this season, there have been at least 32 million flu illnesses, 310,000 hospitalizations and 18,000 deaths from flu.

African Americans can't get the coronavirus

Rumors about African Americans having a special immunity or resistance to COVID-19 have circulated on social media, and they can be traced to misleading online accounts of the recovery of a young black man from Cameroon who got the virus while studying in China.

The debunked claim even turned up on "Saturday Night Live" when cast member Chris Redd repeated it at the end of his "Weekend Update" segment. After finishing a comedy bit about COVID-19 stealing the spotlight from Black History Month, Redd yelled over the applause, "Black people can't get the coronavirus!"

The CDC rejects this rumor in no uncertain terms. "Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity," the CDC writes on its website. "People of Asian descent, including Chinese Americans, are not more likely to get COVID-19 than any other American. Help stop fear by letting people know that being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19."

Possible Response Questions:

- What rumors have you heard about the coronavirus? Explain.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.