



Virality Project Weekly Briefing #25

June 8, 2021 - June 15, 2021

This report was created by analysts from the [Virality Project](#), a coalition of research entities focused on real-time detection, analysis, and response to COVID-19 anti-vaccine mis- and disinformation. The Virality Project supports information exchange between public health officials, government, and social media platforms through weekly briefings and real-time incident response.

Public officials and health organizations interested in officially joining this collaboration can reach the partnership at info@viralityproject.org.

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Key Takeaways

- The **ongoing data void** regarding the necessity of vaccines for people previously infected with COVID-19 **has deepened political polarization around the vaccine** this week, [as new findings from the Cleveland Clinic were used by Senator Rand Paul](#) to declare the vaccine useless for millions of previously-infected Americans.
- Current tactics by anti-vaccine groups focus on the [use of individual stories to highlight potential vaccine side effects](#) and more **overarching legal action** through [petitions](#) and [lawsuits](#) in multiple states, most notably in Texas.
- Anti-vaccine employers and employees are using [Telegram](#) groups to create professional networks and job opportunities.

Events this week:

Key events from this past week as identified by our analysts and stakeholder partners.

Vaccine's potential links to myocarditis is amplified online via personal stories rather than scientific findings

- On June 10, the **Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices**, a panel of the CDC, **announced that it will be [hosting an emergency meeting](#)** to discuss the heart condition suspected to be related to Pfizer and Moderna vaccination. The meeting is set to take place on **June 18**.
- We have continued to see discussions about myocarditis, though these have had lower engagement than analogous situations such as the J&J suspension.
- Conversations on social networks have **amplified personal stories** rather than the major institutional and scientific updates we're seeing in other news sources.
- The news is being covered across mainstream media platforms. [The Hill](#)'s coverage garnered over 10K interactions on Facebook and 1.4K on Twitter.
- Last week, [a viral TikTok video](#) featured a segment about Alex Franks, a high school junior who experienced heart inflammation after receiving the vaccine. (His doctors did not attribute his symptoms to the vaccine.)
- This video alone amassed 99K+ engagements. (Other general engagement)
- **Takeaway:** The Virality Project has reported on the spread of myocarditis narratives for over a month. Given that the Advisory Committee's meeting takes place this week, we will **monitor the situation until after the meeting is held**, as it may have practical implications on the vaccine's uptake, **especially for boys and young men**.

Children's Health Defense creates a petition, advertised by RFK Jr., to take all vaccines off the market

- Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Dr. Meryl Nass, from the prominent anti-vaccine organization Children's Health Defense have [filed a Citizen Petition with the FDA](#) asking the agency to

immediately **revoke the Emergency Use Authorizations (EUA)** for all COVID-19 vaccines. The petition includes the call to ban participants under the age of 18 in clinical trials and for EUAs permitting the vaccination of children to be revoked.

- A group of “health freedom activists” called [Millions Against Medical Mandates](#) supported the petition.
- An article sharing news of the petition has been shared by “anti-Covid restriction” and “health freedom” groups.
- RFK Jr.’s [retweet of the article](#) garnered 2.7K engagements. Commenters call the shot an “experimental vaccine” and worldwide vaccination a “death economy.”
- **Takeaway:** Two weeks ago, the Virality Project reported that a right-leaning doctors’ group (America’s Frontline Doctors) [had filed a motion for a TRO](#) to block the EUA for the COVID-19 vaccine in 12- to 15-year olds. Here, we see similar legal action being taken by a long-time anti-vaccine and parent wellness group. Individually, these suits may not be particularly impactful. However, their accumulation **hands discursive power to anti-vaccine groups**, allowing them to use their language and tactics in the legal space.

Project Veritas Facebook whistleblower story sees revamped engagement after Morgan Kahmann raises over \$500K from sympathizers

- On May 25, the Virality Project detailed Project Veritas’ release of a [video that “exposed” Facebook’s efforts](#) to downrank vaccine-hesitant content. At the time, the story garnered attention from right-leaning media.
- The video included testimony from “whistleblower” Morgan Kahmann, who was reputedly [fired by Facebook](#) after the incident. Kahmann [gave a new interview with Candace Owens](#) on June 9.
- Project Veritas’s story is gaining renewed engagement after the interview. A CrowdTangle search for “Morgan Kahmann” shows over 350K Instagram interactions and 33K Facebook interactions.
- Kahmann subsequently raised over \$500K via a [GiveSendGo campaign](#).
- In his interview with Owens, Kahmann says Facebook censorship creates an “illusion that everyone is getting the vaccine, the vaccine is good for you, and no one is complaining about it.” A clip of this quote is featured in an [Instagram post](#) with 75K interactions.
- **Takeaway:** This is a nuanced story involving **claims about a social media platform’s classification structure for vaccine-related content**. The perception that Facebook or other platforms are involved in silencing anti-vaccine content is a sought-after narrative and has been quickly picked up as evidence of perceived bias.

Cleveland Clinic finds that previous infection confers the same immunity as vaccination, leading to further politicization of “natural immunity”

- The Cleveland Clinic published a [study on the effectiveness of the vaccine](#) in people with and without history of a previous COVID-19 infection.
- The study’s analysis shows that **the vaccine significantly reduces the risk of COVID-19 for those who have never tested positive**, but not for those who have previously been infected, suggesting that the vaccine may be unnecessary in people who have previously had the virus.

- The study is circulating on right-leaning media. Much of the online sharing [centers on previous comments](#) by **Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) that he would not be vaccinated** because he had already been infected with COVID-19.
- Senator Paul [Tweeted numerous times](#) about the study, amassing over 35K engagements.
- **Takeaways:** For people in the anti-vaccine community, this story vindicates Senator Rand Paul's [controversial comments](#). Senator Paul's adamant stance on this issue has **run counter to various recommendations from Dr. Anthony Fauci and the larger public health community**, which for months have recommended that even previously-infected individuals get the vaccine.
- The topic is being narrativized as "[Rand v. Fauci](#)", further politicizing the issue. More and more often, we are seeing "natural immunity" narratives be backed up by legitimate scientific findings that can be easily twisted to **sow mistrust in American public health institutions** and divert the general public from getting the vaccine.

Judge dismisses lawsuit against Houston Methodist Hospital's vaccine mandate, marking the first of its kind in the state

- In April, the Virality Project first flagged a story about Houston Methodist Hospital's new requirement that its [employees get vaccinated by June 7](#), alongside the hospital's announcement that it would potentially fire workers that did not comply by that date.
- This marked the first hospital system to issue a vaccine mandate.
- In the following weeks, critics claimed the system was violating employees' medical freedom.
- Major news sources from across the political spectrum subsequently reported that [178 hospital workers were being suspended without pay](#) and possibly fired because they were not fully vaccinated by the deadline.
- The hospital's mandate is now in effect. On a Facebook headline that received 2K likes, [Bloomberg](#) reported that 117 staffers sued the hospital in Texas state court last Friday, claiming the "vax-or-pink-slip mandate violates World War II-era ethics codes designed to prevent medical experimentation on unwilling human subjects."
- To justify the suit, staffers [allege](#) that the hospital has broken the Nuremberg Code.
- On Saturday, Judge Lynn. N Hughes [dismissed the staffers' lawsuit](#). The judge's decision was [among the first to rule in favor of employer-mandated vaccinations for workers](#).
- Judge Hughes [wrote](#), "the hospital's employees are not participants in a human trial." This quote was circulated on Reddit.
- In the wake of the lawsuit, a [GoFundMe page](#) for "Freedom of choice! Methodist mandating Vaccine!" received donations from over 1.5K people.
- **Takeaway:** This situation—a hospital setting up a mandate and a judge refusing to overrule the mandate—is the first of its kind. We may see other mandates prompt similar conversation online and vice versa.

Non-English and Foreign Spotlight:

Content in additional languages and content spread by foreign media. The non-English content and foreign media targets users in the U.S. though may also have international spread.

Australian anti-vaccine communities strategically spread news of the government's new investigations into Guillain-Barre Syndrome as a possible vaccine side effect

- In late May, the Australian government began [investigations](#) into whether Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS), which can cause paralysis, may be a possible side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Similarly to investigations into blood clots caused by the AstraZeneca vaccine conducted [across the EU](#) in April, the investigation is considering real cases from vaccine recipients to determine if GBS could be a legitimate side effect.
- Anti-vaccine accounts inside and outside of Australia have used news of the investigation to **promote unsubstantiated GBS claims.**
- One anti-vaccine influencer, who previously created [numerous posts](#) promoting the “magnet challenge” vaccine misinformation, claimed this week that she was diagnosed with GBS “[caused by the Moderna vaccine.](#)”
- Another anti-vaccine Twitter account created a [thread of Tweets](#) from people saying they developed vaccine-induced GBS. The examples were collected from various vaccine injury-focused Facebook groups.
- **Takeaway:** As seen in the case of blood clots, the news of an investigation into severe but unsubstantiated vaccine side effects has been used by anti-vaccine activists to further undermine confidence in the safety of COVID-19 vaccines. Public health experts should be aware of what possible side effects are being leveraged by the anti-vaccine community to spread fears about the vaccine.

Conspiracy theory suggests death of Chinese military scientist last year was linked to a patent for a COVID-19 vaccine he submitted in February 2020

- New reporting from the right-leaning [Weekend Australian](#) alleges that a Chinese military scientist, Yusen Zhou, submitted a COVID-19 vaccine patent three months before his death in February of 2020. The patent was apparently filed on behalf of the People's Liberation Army, the armed forces of the People's Republic of China.
- Yusen Zhou worked closely with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. His death has been a topic of speculation from conspiratorial anti-CCP communities.
- The story gained traction in mainstream and alternative media, including [RT](#), [Fox News](#), and [GNews](#). It also gained significant traction in non-English speaking communities, including those speaking [Thai](#), [Portuguese](#), [Romanian](#), [Vietnamese](#), [Norwegian](#) and more.
- On the QAnonStormBase Telegram channel, an article about the findings was accompanied by the [comment](#), “Now I understand why Yusen Zhou had to die.”
- **Takeaway:** Sub-narratives that help add credence to the theory that COVID-19 is a Chinese bioweapon continue to find traction in a wide mix of communities worldwide.

Conspiratorial website spreads fears of a vaccine passport in India

- A piece published on Great Game India (GGI), a [website](#) dedicated to investigating “Deep State threats facing humanity,” **spread misleading claims about the Indian government’s intent to institute vaccine passports.**
- The Indian government recently relaxed guidelines for certain categories of internationally-bound travelers, enabling them to get their second vaccine doses sooner than the government’s presently mandated gap period. An official press release [noted](#) that vaccination authorities “may issue another certificate linking the vaccination certificate with the passport number of the beneficiary” as a means of **validating unique identification.**
- India’s Health Minister Harsh Vardhan referenced India’s opposition to vaccine passports at the G7 summit, [stating](#) “that the implementation of a vaccine passport will be hugely discriminatory and disadvantageous to the developing countries.”
- GGI [alleged](#) that Vardhan might be “lying outright in front of the whole world.”
- **Takeaway:** The pushback against vaccine passports is not confined to the US, and as countries increasingly open up to international travel, both the narratives and real policy considerations around passport programs will continue to widen globally.

Ongoing Themes and Tactics:

Ongoing themes and tactics that we track each week including notable vaccine injury stories and overall key statistics about online vaccine discussions.

Magnetic vaccine narrative continues to spread, surfacing in the Ohio House of Representatives

- In the newest extensions of the magnetizing narrative, [The Washington Post](#) and [The Hill](#) reported that on June 8, prominent anti-vaccine activist Sherri Tenpenny was invited to testify to the Ohio House of Representatives as an expert witness. There, Tenpenny claimed the vaccine can leave people “magnetized” and can “interface” with 5G technology.
- Tenpenny said: “I’m sure you’ve seen the pictures all over the internet of people who have had these shots and now they’re magnetized... They can put a key on their forehead. It sticks.”
- The majority of users commenting on related posts criticize and mock Tenpenny; some call for her medical license to be revoked.
- Still, **the [once-joke narrative](#) shows no signs of slowing down.** In a video on the Stew Peters show, Peters [interviews Dr. Jane Ruby](#) to discuss “further evidence” of magnetism related to mRNA vaccines.
- Dr. Ruby claims the vaccines use a process called “[magnetofection](#)” to concentrate the mRNA into people’s cells. She calls this a “[forced gene delivery system.](#)”
- The interview received 6.4K interactions on Facebook and 3.8K on Instagram, but had low spread beyond the claims made in the original video.

A new network of Telegram channels has sprung up to help connect anti-mask and anti-vaccine employers and employees

- A new [network](#) of Telegram channels operating in Canada, Australia, and the United States has been created to help “everyone to be able to find mask/vax free employment.”
- The network was formed in May and currently has 20 regional channels and one [central channel](#) working in coordination. They will frequently post the list of channels for members to find their own local group.
- The network facilitates the exchange of information between employers and potential employees, including locations, salaries, CVs, and more. It also serves as a promotional channel for anti-vaccine events such as the [Worldwide Rally For Freedom](#), and a general home for anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown restriction discussions.
- Mary-Jean Harris, who made headlines for her anti-mask [Disney princess party company](#), is one of many employers [recruiting](#) within the network.
- While the Canadian channels were the first to gain sizable followings, the group is quickly expanding in Australia and the US, with plans to build out a new website.
- **Takeaway:** A number of organizations across platforms are focusing on promoting and supporting vaccine-averse organizations and individuals. Online groups that work to solidify these connections and relationships in person have significant public health implications.

Texas Governor Abbott bans businesses from requiring proof of vaccination, representing latest update in vaccine mandate discussion

- On June 7, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill into state law that bans Texas businesses from requiring proof of vaccination or vaccine passports.
- The announcement [worsens the tension between cruise lines and the governors of states](#) that border the Gulf of Mexico. The move comes “just weeks after [Ron DeSantis] [sued the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) over its cruise rules.”
- The story is circulating primarily on right-leaning media. A [Fox New](#) post on the story has around 48K interactions on Facebook alone. A CrowdTangle search for “Abbott vaccine” shows 245K interactions on Facebook, 84K on Instagram, 15K on Twitter, and 4K on Reddit.
- **Takeaway:** This ban marks the latest update in the vaccine mandate discussion, harnessing the language of “freedom” to impose restrictions on businesses’ ability to determine their own safety regulations around vaccination.

Relying on both false “spike protein” narratives and VAERS data, ex-Pfizer VP claims the vaccine is 50 times more likely to kill young people than the virus

- On June 9, Pfizer ex-vice president Dr. Michael Yeadon [claimed on War Room Pandemic](#) with Stephen K. Bannon that “it is crazy to vaccinate with something fifty times more likely to kill (young people) than the virus.”
- Yeadon’s claim was unsubstantiated. He added that the vaccine is unsafe because it creates [“spike proteins which trigger blood clots.”](#) According to Yeadon, 75% of VAERS reports are blood-clot-related.

- Rumble, the Canadian video platform, shows the video had 194K views. On CrowdTangle, two Instagram posts on the subject totaled almost 10K views.
- **Takeaway:** Yeadon has previously given popular anti-vaccine interviews, and his reputation and ties to Pfizer make him a useful advocate for the anti-vaccine movement. Here, we see Yeadon employing **two predictable anti-vaccine tactics:** relying on fears about the vaccine’s **so-called “spike protein”**, and **misinterpreted numbers from VAERS.**

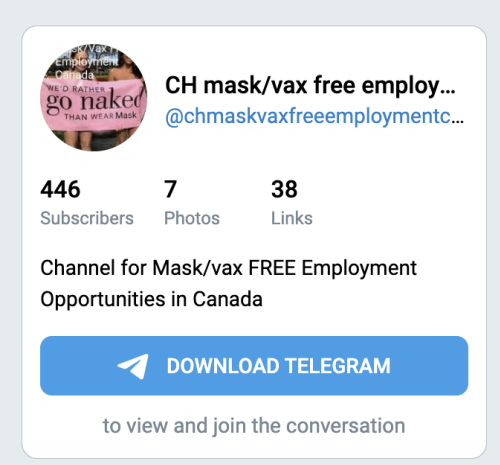
Key Statistics

Here we contextualize the above narratives by examining the engagement of other posts from this week.

- The top **Facebook** [post](#) from this week in English containing the word “vaccine” is by UNICEF, sharing a blog post from a 15-year-old blogger from India that explains why countries with excess supply should share doses with others. The post received 646K interactions (631K likes, 10K comments, and 5K shares).
- This week’s top **Instagram** [post](#) containing the word “vaccine” is a picture posted by Indian singer and composer Darshan Raval showing him getting a vaccine. The post received 826K likes.
- This week’s top [post](#) with the word “vaccine” on **Reddit** shares a TikTok video from a man who uses baby powder to try to prove that the vaccine magnetized him, but fails and realizes that he was wrong. The post received 82K upvotes and 3K comments.
- This week’s top post from a **recurring anti-vax influencer on Facebook** is from Dr. Joseph Mercola, who shared his [Substack article](#) that called for mass, peaceful protests in order to end vaccine passports. The post received 8.8K interactions (7.2K likes, 311 comments, and 1.3K shares).
- This week’s top [Tweet](#) from a **recurring anti-vax influencer on Twitter** is from Alex Berenson, sharing a story about a 19-year-old college student who died from heart failure after receiving her second dose of the COVID vaccine. The Tweet received 10.5K interactions (4.1K retweets, 939 quote tweets, and 5.5K likes).

Appendix

We have included some notable screenshots from the above incidents. More screenshots and assets can be made available, upon request and as needed!

Links	Screenshot
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mask and vaccine-free employment channels on Telegram 	 <p>CH mask/vax free employment... @chmaskvaxfreeemploymentc...</p> <p>446 Subscribers 7 Photos 38 Links</p> <p>Channel for Mask/vax FREE Employment Opportunities in Canada</p> <p>DOWNLOAD TELEGRAM</p> <p>to view and join the conversation</p> <p>June 12</p> <p>CH mask/vax free employment Canada</p> <p>Have you all signed up to join the Canada Health Alliance? 🤝</p> <p>The CANADA HEALTH ALLIANCE 🇨🇦 is a non-profit network of healthcare professionals from across Canada whose common goal is to reclaim and protect each individuals' right to health freedom through education 📖 and empowerment 🙌</p> <p>Canadian Frontline Nurses are proud to be under their umbrella uniting to build a new healthcare framework who will truly aim at providing ultimate care 🏥 which will benefit all individuals throughout our every single community 😊</p> <p>If you are a healthcare professional (chiropractors, doctors 🩺, health coaches, homeopaths, naturopaths, nurses 🧑‍⚕️, nutritionists 🍏, pharmacists 🧴, therapists and many other healthcare and health & wellness practitioners 🧑‍🦲), head to their website & sign up to be a member</p> <p>https://www.canadahealthalliance.org/</p> <p>Together 🤝🤝🤝 we can turn this thing around & make healthcare what we always envisioned it to be 😊</p> <p>Canada Health Alliance</p> <p>The CANADA HEALTH ALLIANCE is a non-profit collaboration of medical doctors, nurses, chiropractors, naturopaths, pharmacists, and other healthcare practitioners from across Canada whose common goal is to protect the rights of our patients to access</p> <p>320 👁 11:18</p>