



World
Organisation
for Animal
Health
Founded as OIE

Organisation
mondiale
de la santé
animale
Fondée en tant qu'OIE

Organización
Mundial
de Sanidad
Animal
Fundada como OIE



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

Disinformation and misinformation; A shared threat for Veterinary Services and Law Enforcement

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The hazards - false, deceptive, misleading, or manipulated information

Misinformation

- False information, spread without knowingly intending to cause harm.
- Common, all around us

Disinformation

- False information, spread with intent to deceive, mislead, or cause harm.
- Less common, greater risks, may be illegal



Lumpy skin disease: Viral cattle disease sends rumours flying in India

🕒 21 October 2022

Misinformation about a viral disease that infects cattle is spreading on social media in India.

Lumpy skin disease has already infected over 2.4 million animals and has led to over 110,000 cattle deaths in India, according to latest data from the government.

India is the world's largest milk producer and has the world's largest cattle population, but the infection is threatening livelihoods of farmers in the country. Meanwhile, misinformation has made some people wary of consuming milk. We debunk three false claims about the disease.

Is milk produced by infected cattle safe for human consumption?

Many viral social media posts falsely claim that milk has become unsafe for human consumption due to the spread of lumpy skin disease, and that drinking milk from an infected animal will lead to the development of a skin disease in humans as well. The posts are often accompanied by images of visibly diseased human bodies covered in lesions, meant to create fear.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-63262411>



REGIONS

An Australian anti-vaccine campaigner has falsely claimed the state of New South Wales has "forced farmers to vaccinate their herd with mRNA jabs" that allegedly led to dozens of cattle deaths. Whilst mRNA vaccines for viral livestock diseases are in development, as of October 11, no such jabs were available or mandated for use for cattle in Australia. AFP has not found evidence the incident described in the posts actually occurred.

"A friend informed me today that her neighbor, a dairy farmer, is now forced to vaccinate her herd with an mRNA vaccine!" reads a portion of a screenshot posted on [Instagram](#) on October 2.

"She complied and of the 200 head of cattle, 35 died instantly!"

The post says the incident happened in New South Wales, Australia's most populous state.



The threat

- Untreated, misinformation and disinformation can:
 - damage lives and livelihoods
 - undermine trust
 - spread confusion
 - consume attention and resources
 - cause economic and social damage
- Countering animal health misinformation and disinformation often requires joint action by Veterinary Services and Law Enforcement agencies.



Motivations to spread

- Belief in something or desire that it is true.
- Disagreement with something or wanting it to end or be changed.
- Undermine the credibility, trust and reputation of a person, organization or course of action.
- Advance a political, religious, economic, cultural or other goal.
- Make money or gain other financial advantage.
- Get attention, be heard or to gain greater online status.
- For fun ... mischief



Enablers – our enclosed ecosystems

- Our digital ‘echo chambers’ and ‘filter bubbles’ mediate the information we see, watch, hear, and share. We are susceptible to misinformation that may infect and influence us.
- Organisations tend to interact in known and safe spaces, so they can easily miss critical debates or lack abilities to intervene beyond their comfort zones.
- Most of us, individuals and organisations, are not aware of these threats and we overestimate our abilities to counter them.





Enablers – technical innovation

- Widely available digital and communication tools can easily create, manipulate and ‘virally’ share or target messages and images.
- ‘Clickbait’, sensationalised headlines link to often misleading information
- ‘Deepfakes’, digitally altered audio, images and video that misrepresent people
- ‘Trolls’, people using social media to attack and undermine others and their ideas
- ‘Bots,’ computer programs automatically disseminate fake news on social media

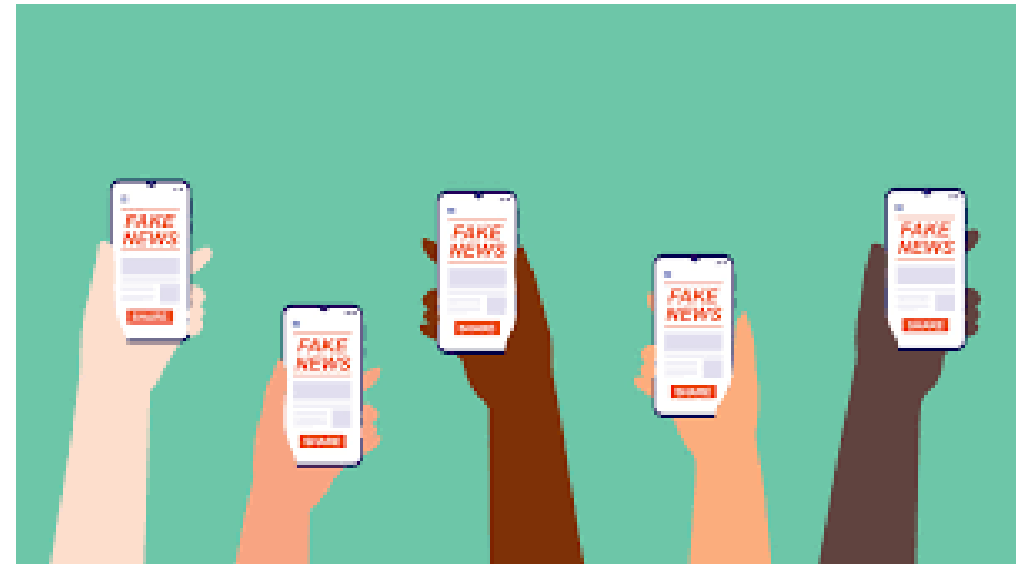


Image: <https://news.sky.com/story/prebunking-the-new-tactic-to-help-you-people-spot-fake-news-12811636>



Countering the threats



Prepare



Detect



Respond



Prepare

Countering the threats

- **Raise awareness and recognize threats**, educate ourselves to take timely action, putting in place robust and agile plans, procedures and capacities.
- **Training, gaming, and other exercises** help people understand threats and get prepared.
- **Coordinate actions** across agencies and borders, bringing in specialised skills and networks when needed.
- Build **'cognitive resilience'** in people and organisations so they can better manage the threats.
- Build **feedback loops and learning** to be better prepared for the next emergency.



Early actions



Prepare

- **Risk planning**
- 1) Communication – engage communities, dynamic listening and gaining trust; 2) Assessment – define hazards and triggers, identify risk pathways, control points, and consequences; and 3) Management – monitoring, surveillance and risk detection, increase the prevalence of true information; decrease the prevalence of false information.
- The Myanmar Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation recently developed a plan for risk communication in animal disease outbreaks and emergencies.
- **Simulating misinformation threats**
- In New Mexico, ‘tabletop’ exercises (TTX) of the Southwest Border Center for Emergency Preparedness and Food Protection worked through several animal disease disinformation scenarios.
- The aim was to develop and facilitate preparedness efforts across different jurisdictional areas and countries (both Mexico and the United States).
- Lessons learned included the need for trustworthy sources, consistent messaging, and to involve everyone, not just public agencies.



Detect

Countering the threats

- Reach out: Build **trust and connections** and extend organisational reach, for intelligence-gathering and readiness to act.
- **Monitor** and assess misinformation/disinformation risks and threats and changes over time.
- **Social listening** draws insights from social media and other online forums to hear what people are concerned about, to pinpoint emerging issues, threats, and risks.



Social listening



- **Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources**
- The EIOS initiative of public health stakeholders – including WOHAI – provides a unified early detection, verification, assessment and communication of public health threats using publicly available information.
- It collates hundreds of thousands of articles from online media and social media sources, web sites, news aggregators, blogs and expert groups, running them through text mining and analytical modules to point up trends and risks.
- <https://www.who.int/initiatives/eios>
- **Social listening dashboard**
- The UNICEF Vaccine Demand Observatory dashboard centralizes misinformation alerts, fact checks, and media data from global and community sources.
- This is used by staff to monitor misinformation and respond to it with evidence-based communication strategies.
- <https://www.thevdo.org>



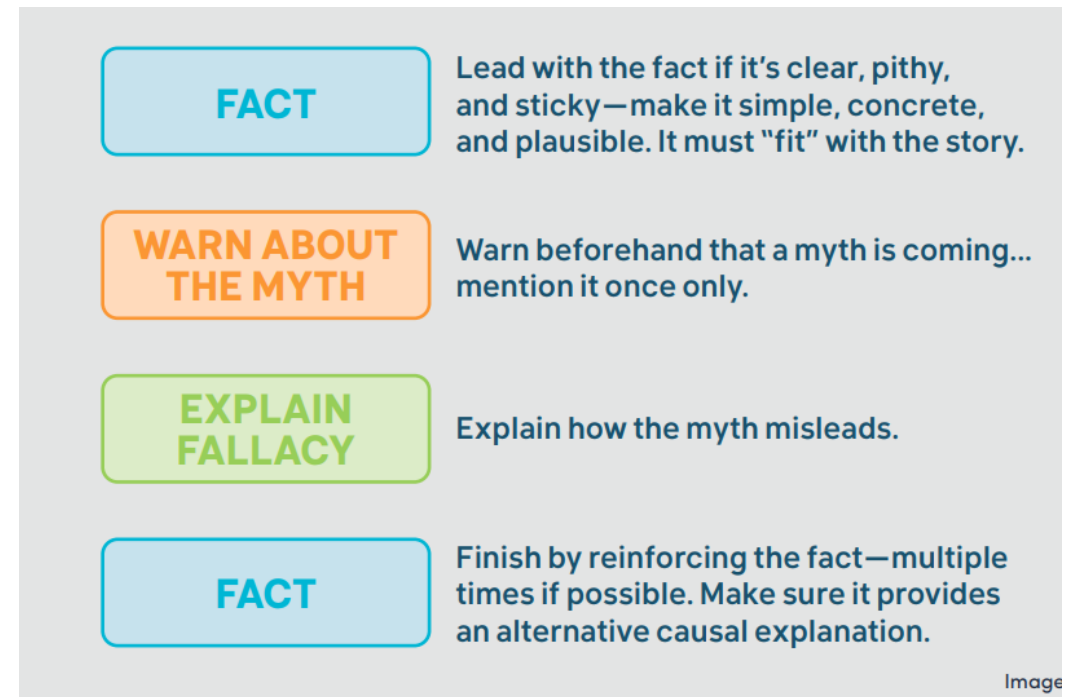
Countering the threats

- **Pre-bunking.** ‘Inoculation’ with facts counteracts false messages before they are widely spread. Fill risky ‘information voids’ in advance of disinformation taking hold.
- **De-bunking and fact-checking.** Challenge and correct the false information.
- **Build alliances** where partners share the load and amplify the impact of counter-messaging.
- An important ally is **media** for fact-checking.
- Work with social or community ‘**influencers**’ to reach and convince ‘distant’ audiences, usually in wider **communications campaigns**



Respond

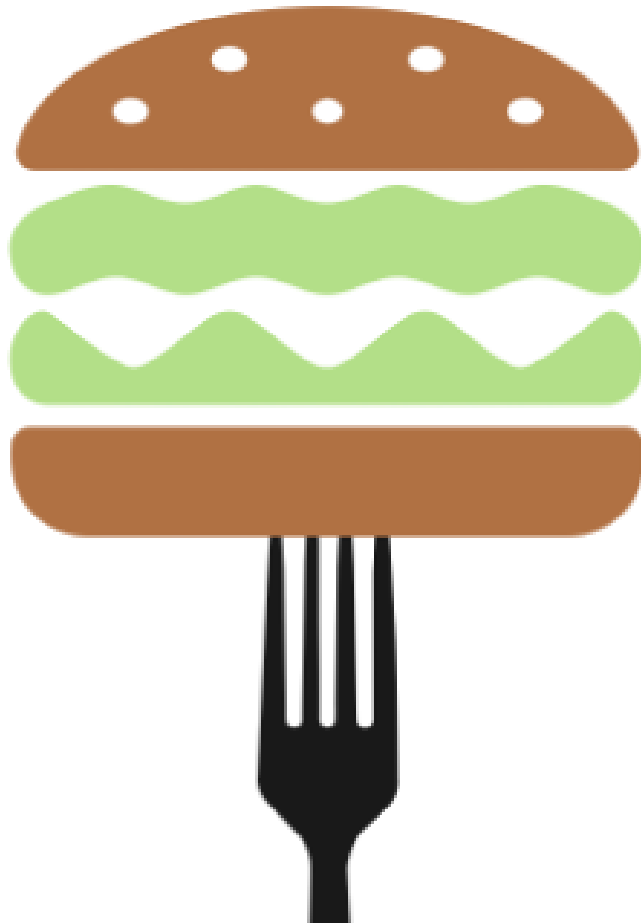
• The ‘truth’ sandwich



<https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/debunking-handbook-2020>



Debunking The Truth Sandwich



- 1 **Fact** → Start with a clear fact
- 2 **Warning** → Disinformation alert
- 3 **Fallacy** → Point out tactics used to deceive and the possible hidden agenda
- 4 **Fact** → Replace disinformation with the fact



Debunking

1 Fact

Monkeypox is an animal-to-human (zoonotic) transmitted disease.

Start with the facts that support the verified information

2 Warning

A **false claim** has been circulating in a video disseminated in different social media platforms.

Add explicit warnings that the content about to be presented is false

3 Fallacy

The **post falsely implies** that monkeypox is biological warfare being unleashed onto the public by the WHO, IMF and Bill Gates.

Explain what is the false claim and why it is wrong

4 Fact

The monkeypox outbreak was not caused by biological warfare. The disease was discovered in 1958 in monkeys, and the first human case was recorded in 1970. There have been several outbreaks in humans, none related to biological warfare.

Replace disinformation with facts at the end of the process



Countering the threats



Respond

- **Correct inaccurate information**
- The United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs runs a 'media blog' to "set the record straight where one or more Defra Group organisations have been misquoted or misrepresented."
- <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk>
- **Work with influencers**
- During the coronavirus pandemic, the UK and US governments and the WHO worked with social media influencers, reality TV and Tik Tok stars as well as local micro-influencers, recruiting them to promote recommended behaviours and to counter anti-vaccine disinformation.
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/01/technology/vaccine-lies-influencer-army.html>
- <https://staffprofiles.bournemouth.ac.uk/display/internet-publication/335200>



Key points

- ‘We’ are more vulnerable than ever before / ‘They’ have great opportunities and tools / national governments start to make disinformation illegal
- Our ‘resistance’ to these hazards can be increased – through resilience-building as well as good planning and real-life simulations
- We can better monitor and detect risks and threats – through social listening, stronger analytical capacities, building trust, and forming alliances
- We can pre-emptively respond to threats, pre-bunking and inoculating people with facts and early warning
- We can counter active incidents with fact-checking, evidence, communications and de-bunking measures

- However, we need to ‘see’ and understand the threats; boost our own emergency preparedness and response capacities; understand when harmful becomes illegal; and build joint actions that integrate intelligence and expertise across diverse agencies.



Acknowledgements

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Thank you

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