

Addressing mpox misinformation: practical tips for communities

KEY MESSAGES

- Communities play a vital role in responding to mpox outbreaks and building local resilience.
- Misinformation and disinformation can spread fear and stigma and increase risky behaviours, undermining community action, weakening trust and public health efforts to control the spread of mpox.
- Everyone can help identify and manage misinformation.
- There are tips and techniques that can be learned to address false and harmful information related to mpox when you encounter it.

Introduction

Communities play a vital role in responding to health emergencies such as mpox, including tackling the “infodemic”. An infodemic happens when there is an overwhelming amount of information, both accurate and false during a health crisis. This can include misinformation (unintentionally false information) and disinformation (deliberately false information) which may affect how individuals and communities behave. These behaviours can harm health outcomes and weaken public health efforts to control the spread of mpox.

Infodemics have been observed in many places during mpox outbreaks, and they can have a negative effect on efforts to get the outbreak under control. Regular social listening can offer useful insights to support the development of mpox-related resources, and guide recommendations for health professionals and for communities.

What can you do if you are confronted with mpox-related misinformation in everyday life, perhaps from a patient at the clinic, a relative during family dinner or in text messages, or people at a religious gathering? How do you respond, in those moments? Everyone can play a role in managing rumours, myths, misinformation and disinformation, regardless of their role or position in the community.

This document describes the ways in which communities can contribute to this. While these tips are focused on mpox, they can be helpful for addressing misinformation on any topic.

Who can use these tips?

These tips are for everyone who lives, works, studies or is part of a community– **it’s for all of us**: community health workers, teachers, first responders, community leaders, influencers, authorities - but most importantly, it’s for all of us as neighbours, friends, and family.

**Remember:****MISINFORMATION**

Is information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading. People often share it unknowingly, or out of concern for others, without intending to cause harm.

DISINFORMATION

Is false information deliberately created to achieve a specific agenda or cause harm, such as making money, gaining influence or spreading distrust. Often it is later shared as misinformation by people who believe it to be true.

Where might I see or hear misinformation about mpox?

Misinformation about mpox can show up in any space where people communicate. It can be found on social media, in family message groups, at the clinic, during community meetings, talking to neighbours, on news websites, on TV or radio, or even on posters put up around town. Information can easily move between online and offline spaces. Most of the time, when people share information about mpox, they are not trying to harm others – they just don't have the full facts.

Why do we believe and share misinformation about mpox?

It can sometimes be really hard to tell what is true and what is misinformation. Even experts feel like detectives at times, trying to track down where a false claim started. Thankfully, there are networks of professionals called fact-checkers, who work to expose and debunk false claims. So, don't worry if you find it tricky at times – it's not just you!

What makes it difficult is that misinformation can come in different forms and often appears convincing. For instance, it might use real graphs or data but not provide an accurate explanation, which can then mislead people. It might include statements from people who sound credible but are not (see box 1). Additionally, photos or videos that seem authentic – such as an image of a long line at a vaccine clinic – might actually be outdated, edited or even artificially generated. Understanding these strategies can help you better identify misleading information and separate fact from fiction.

BOX 1**What we see:**

“Dr John Gruber from Amazing University says he does not think mpox is real and that it was created to sell vaccines.”

What we might not see:

Dr John Gruber has a PhD in musical studies and is not an infectious disease expert. And the Amazing University isn't that amazing...

There are many reasons people share misinformation. Sometimes, they genuinely believe it's true and want to inform their friends. Other times, they might believe they have discovered something new and want to share it quickly to keep others informed. Some misinformation may seem funny or adorable, and people share it just for entertainment.

In some cases, people may not trust science or health authorities and share misinformation as a way to reject or question official information. During situations like health emergencies, when information changes rapidly, misinformation can feel like a way to make sense of complex events.

However, not everyone shares misinformation with good intentions, some people do so to cause harm, create confusion or to make fun of people. Misinformation can be transformed to disinformation. The image below is from a report on misinformation and highlights the common types of misinformation that can circulate online.¹



Memes that were created as a joke, but people started re-sharing thinking it was true.



Websites that look professional but the stories are all false or misleading.



Quotations where the beginning or end have been deleted to change the meaning.



Cherry-picked statistics. Without all the data, people haven't provided all the context.



Misleading graphs or diagrams that look official but don't tell the whole story.



Old images that recirculate as if they are actually very recent.



Videos that have been edited to change the meaning.

Tips for responding to mpox -related misinformation

Why is it hard to address misinformation about mpox?

Misinformation about mpox is challenging to combat because it plays on emotions, not just facts. When people feel stressed, scared or uncertain – such as during a health emergency – they are also more likely to believe and share false information. The current mpox outbreaks and the classification of mpox as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) by WHO may lead people to search for ways to protect themselves and their families. In this situation, misinformation often offers simple answers to complex problems, making it more appealing, especially during an overwhelming infodemic, where there is just too much information to sort through.

¹ Source: Office of the U.S. Surgeon General; 2021.
([Health misinformation toolbox from the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States](#))

IN SUMMARY:

Mpox-related misinformation is causing harm to individuals, families and communities. Talking about it and learning when and how to respond can help slow the spread of incorrect information by prompting us to think and consider before we share.

CONSIDER THIS SCENARIO:

A young woman is worried about staying safe from mpox after hearing reports of a new outbreak in her area. Concerned about the painful rash and wanting to protect herself and her elderly parents she turns to a local community group on social media for advice. In response, several people recommend cassava leaf tea as both a prevention method and cure. They share links to videos featuring testimonials from people claiming to have been cured of mpox overnight by using cassava leaves. The videos seem credible and convincing.

Wanting to understand properly, she visits her local health authority's website but finds no mention of cassava leaves. Still uncertain, she sees more posts online including articles using medical terms and examples from her community. Convinced by this information she shares the articles with her online followers and discusses the tea with her parents at dinner.

Unknowingly, she has fallen for misinformation and is spreading it further. Believing she is doing the right thing in sharing the information, she has moved false claims from online platforms into her local community.

How can I get better at recognizing mpox-related misinformation?

You don't need to be an expert, health professional or a detective to recognize and stop misinformation about mpox. Here are some practical tips:

1. Find and share accurate and credible information about mpox:
 - Look for answers from trustworthy places, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or your local health authority. A list of resources about mpox is given at the end of this document.
 - Share these credible sources with your family and community to help others find accurate information.
2. Pause, think, and check before sharing:
 - Before hitting "share" on social media, take a moment to evaluate the content and apply a critical eye. Does it seem plausible? If something is out of line with what your healthcare professionals are telling you, pause, and consider the information.
 - Read the full article, check links, look at the date of publishing, and review any visuals or claims for accuracy.

- Verify if the information comes from a credible and recognized source like a health authority or government website.
3. Ask a healthcare professional:
 - If something seems unclear or suspicious, reach out to your health care provider to clarify and explain further the information.

How can I talk about mpox misinformation with others?

1. Listen and show empathy:
 - Avoid making someone feel foolish for believing misinformation. Offer to review credible sources together and empathize with how challenging it can be to find reliable information.
2. Help them find reliable information:
 - Direct them to credible websites, brochures or community leaders who share accurate information.
 - Suggest visiting a health professional together or share your own experience of being misled and how you found accurate information.
3. Create a safe space:
 - Be patient and supportive – don't shame others for their beliefs.
4. Know when to step back:
 - Keeping yourself safe is very important, you don't need to challenge everyone in your community every time you see or hear misinformation about mpox. Focus on helping those who are open to learning, rather than those who are firmly convinced by misinformation.
 - It is very hard to change the minds of those who are hard-core believers in any type of misinformation. Focus your energy on those who are unsure, have questions and are looking for answers.
 - If you have tried your best and someone remains resistant, it might be time to step away. They might consider your suggestions later or seek information elsewhere, but it's ok if they don't. Prioritize your wellbeing and relationships.



How might a friend respond to the young woman?

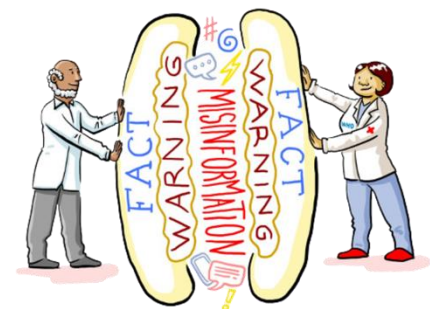
“I really hear you; it is so hard making sense of all of the information. I'm not too sure about that one though. Do you want to show me the articles you have been reading? I can show you some I have been looking at on the Department of Health's website which gave me some good ideas for how I can stay safe from mpox. Why don't we have a chat to our community health nurse about it? She has always given us great advice on other health issues, and I trust she will give us good information. We could go together. I'd be interested in understanding it all a bit more too.”

How to talk about mpox-related misinformation with your patients, clients or community?

- It is important to address questions and concerns about mpox as they are expressed. When people have questions and concerns that they can't find the answers to, these create information voids which makes it much easier for misinformation to take hold.
- Provide plain language summaries of mpox information to make it easy for people to understand the advice.
- Health workers can also contribute to fact-checking and addressing misinformation online and offline.
- Promote credible accurate information sources and trusted messengers through regular monitoring of information environments.
- If there are pathways to report the misinformation you are seeing, as well as the questions and concerns, to health authorities, this is a good idea and can help build a picture of what might need a broader response.
- Try the truth sandwich technique!

The Truth Sandwich

The “Truth Sandwich” is a technique used in misinformation correction where an incorrect statement is corrected with the truth in a way that both acknowledges and preserves the trust of the person receiving the correction. This technique involves sandwiching the correction between two positive statements, one before and one after, in order to soften the blow and increase the likelihood that the person will accept the correction.



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How might a healthcare worker respond to the young woman using the sandwich technique?

“I can see that you are really trying your best to make good decisions for yourself and your family. It’s important to know that there are steps you can take to keep yourself and your parents safe from mpox. You may have heard false claims that drinking cassava leaf tea can prevent or treat mpox, but this isn’t the case. Multiple health authorities have recommended measures such as vaccination, avoiding close contact with people who may have mpox and isolating if you have symptoms of mpox. What questions do you have for me? Let me give you some information to take home and read.”

Remember, the infodemic is more than misinformation

During a health emergency like the current mpox outbreaks, people naturally have many questions about protecting themselves and their families. If these questions, concerns, and gaps in information are not addressed, it makes people more vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation.

Setting up systems to quickly identify people's questions and concerns- and responding to them -can help reduce the spread and impact of misinformation. This proactive approach helps communities stay informed and gives health systems a better chance to manage the infodemic effectively.

Tips for games to play to increase understanding of misinformation

Some digital games, called “pre-bunking” games are designed to help people recognize misinformation when they see it. These games are based on social inoculation theory. Basically, this works on the idea that the more people learn about the tactics and tricks used to spread false information, the easier it is to recognize it when you see it.

Pre-bunking digital games



Bad News Game

Developed by researchers from the University of Cambridge and partners, this game aims to build psychological resistance against online misinformation. Users are prompted to use tricks to become a misinformer, gain followers and spread bad news!



Cranky uncle

Initially developed to expose misleading techniques and increase public resilience towards climate change misinformation, other versions have been produced for health misinformation. Players are mentored by a cartoon and the Cranky Uncle describes 14 techniques of science denial. Cranky Uncle Vaccine launched in East Africa in collab with



UNICEF, the Sabin Vaccine Institute and others.

Go Viral:

Building on the Bad News Game, Go Viral was

developed specifically to pre-bunk COVID-19 related conspiracy theories. Research showed playing

the game was associated with reduced susceptibility to misinformation.

Resources:

Mpox information

- Mpox Q&A, 17 August 2024. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/mpox>
- Mpox Factsheet, 26 August 2024. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/mpox>
- WHO mpox outbreak toolbox, Feb 2025. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/outbreak-toolkit/disease-outbreak-toolboxes/mpox-outbreak-toolbox>

Office of the US Surgeon General

- [A Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation](#)

OpenWHO

- [Infodemic Management: Addressing health misinformation and disinformation](#)

UNICEF

- [Vaccine misinformation management field guide](#)

WHO/ UNICEF How to build an infodemic insights report in six steps

- English: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240075658>
- French: <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/378534>
- Spanish: <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/378430>

IFRC. Volunteer action package

- [Dealing with rumors](#)

This document was produced by the RCCE-IM team, Community Protection and Resilience Unit of the Health Emergency Core Capabilities Department of the World Health Organization (WHO), under the leadership of Nedret Emiroglu and the strategic oversight of Kai von Harbou.