

# Address — don't sidestep — health misinformation to debunk falsehoods, study finds | Nieman Journalism Lab

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A common way to tackle misinformation, especially health misinformation, is to ignore it. And this is a strategy often employed by authority figures — sidestep the misinformation, don't give it airtime, and it might just go away.

But the results of a new study suggest that this method of combating health misinformation is less effective than addressing and then debunking misinformation head on. The results were published November 10 in *BMJ Global Health*.

To conduct the study, researchers at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden recruited more than 730 volunteers in Sierra Leone, and tested them on their knowledge of “typhoid-malaria.” Typhoid and malaria infections can co-occur, but rarely, and a common misconception among the people in the African nation is that they are a joint condition, and that they are caused by the same underlying culprits. (In actuality, typhoid and malaria are very different: Typhoid is caused by bacteria and spread through unsanitary water, but malaria is caused by a parasite that is spread by mosquitoes).

“The diagnostics for typhoid are really poor,” said Maike Winters, a research coordinator at the Karolinska Institute's Department of Global Health and first author of the new study.

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