

Disinformation watch: How a Bulletin story about self-spreading vaccines was used in anti-vaxxer propaganda | Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

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Some media outlets pay too much attention to readership statistics; most pay at least some. And paying attention we were a week or so ago when a *Bulletin* story from September began driving thousands of views per day, even more traffic than when we first published it. Naturally, we debated: Should we produce more coverage on this apparently hot topic, self-spreading vaccines? And who was this interested audience anyway? The answer, as it turns out, was disappointing.

Anti-vaxxers were reading the story.

Self-spreading or self-disseminating vaccines are genetically engineered benign viruses that, instead of spreading disease, can spread the immunity conferred by a vaccine. As wild animals such as bats move in their environment, they could be employed to spread a vaccine that prevents them from getting sick with, say, Ebola. Sounds like a great way to stop emerging infectious diseases in their tracks, before they make the leap from animals to humans. But is it? Regular *Bulletin* readers will know that whether the issue is geoengineering or brain-computer interfaces or [new nuclear weapons](#) or some other emerging technology, we regularly ask this very question.

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