

How Wikipedia Prevents the Spread of Coronavirus Misinformation | WIRED

By Noam Cohen

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[“This edit was VERY poor,”](#) wrote James Heilman, an emergency-room doctor in British Columbia, to a Wikipedia contributor who had made a couple of changes toward the end of the article on the new coronavirus outbreak. Those edits recommended a special type of mask for blocking the transmission of the virus from those who have it, and Heilman, a prominent figure in reviewing medical Wikipedia articles, wanted to inform the editor that this advice was too sweeping and based on insufficient evidence. More than that, he aimed to send a warning. “Please do not make edits like this again,” he wrote.

Wikipedia’s reputation is generally on the ascent. Just last month, no less a publication than Wired deemed it [“the last best place on the Internet.”](#) What was once considered the site’s greatest vulnerability—that anyone can edit it—has been revealed to be its greatest strength. In the place of experts there are enthusiasts who are thrilled to share their knowledge of a little part of the world with all of humanity. As Richard Cooke, who wrote the Wired essay, observed: “It’s assembled grain by grain, like a termite mound. The smallness of the grains, and of the workers carrying them, makes the project’s scale seem impossible. But it is exactly this incrementalism that puts immensity within reach.”

[...]

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