

# Let's Keep the Vaccine Misinformation Problem in Perspective | WIRED

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The most visible vaccine-skeptical public figures, the likes of Tucker Carlson or Senator Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), understand this. They don't *need* to spread demonstrable falsehoods. They can simply focus night after night on outlier cases of severe side effects. Or they can selectively present results of scientific studies or government communications in ways that seem to suggest something ominous about either the virus or the vaccine. Or they can skirt the scientific question entirely in favor of ranting about how the government's vaccine push is really about social control. Like any illusionist, they know that the most powerful tool available is not misinformation, but misdirection.

That subtle distinction is often lost on members of the media and the political establishment. At times, "misinformation" becomes a catch-all term for any material used to dissuade people from getting the shot, whether or not it is objectively false. A recent New York Times article about the influential anti-vaxxer Joseph Mercola, for example, titled "The Most Influential Spreader of Coronavirus Misinformation Online," concluded by noting that Mercola had made a Facebook post suggesting that the Pfizer vaccine was only 39 percent effective against infection by the Delta variant.

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