

Misinformation about science in the public sphere | PNAS

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In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created an urgent demand, not just for scientific information and advice, but also for policy proposals that helped curb the spread of the virus while minimizing economic and other collateral societal effects. The research response has been unprecedented. After just 1 year, PubMed returns more than 100,000 publications, 10 times as many as for Ebola or Zika, and nearly as many as produced in 200 years of work on influenza.

Some saw the COVID-19 crisis primarily as a crisis of misinformation, following a longer trend of “truth decay” (1): that is, an array of confusing and conflicting messages that question facts, blur the line between fact and opinion, and dismiss formerly respected sources of information as merely political interests pushing a partisan agenda. The World Health Organization went so far as to warn against an “infodemic ... an overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it” (2).

[...]

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