

Opinion: Covid Misinformation Comes From the Top, Too | The New York Times

By Bret Stephens

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This spring, the Center for Countering Digital Hate published “The Disinformation Dozen” — a report on the 12 influencers it claimed were responsible for 65 percent of anti-vaccine falsehoods disseminated on Facebook and other social media platforms. Top of the list is Florida osteopath Joseph Mercola, the subject of a recent profile in The Times by my colleague Sheera Frenkel. Other disinformers include Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the environmental activist, and Rizza Islam, a Nation of Islam acolyte.

The misinformation Mercola, Kennedy and the others peddle is ugly stuff, a danger to the health of those who believe it as well as a public hazard to those they expose to their irresponsible choices. It’s also a reminder that today’s anti-vaxxers aren’t merely a right-wing phenomenon, much as some of the media have tried to paint it that way. Most figures on the list come from the woo-woo world of alternative medicine, not usually associated with rock-ribbed Republicanism.

But the story of charlatans peddling fake cures and political conspiracy theories isn’t the only part of the Covid misinformation saga. Distrust in public-health messaging is also sown when public-health messengers show themselves to be less than completely trustworthy.

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