

U.S. anti-vaxxers are coming out in support of the Taliban | Coda Story

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If you are in Afghanistan at the moment, trying to flee or figure out how to survive, it is safe to assume that you have bigger things than the pandemic to worry about.

But the Taliban did make time for Covid-19 last week. On August 12, just a few days before the group completed its rapid advance on Kabul, it banned vaccinations at Paktia regional hospital, in the east of the country. Reportedly, notices reading “Vaccinations are banned” were nailed to walls and no accompanying statement was made.

Amid the chaotic collapse of America’s 20-year long military involvement in Afghanistan, that didn’t get much attention — not even there. In English, it was covered only by the local outlet Shamshad News, which ran a tiny story. Almost immediately, it was picked up by one group of people in the US: anti-vaxxers.

With lightning speed, the news birthed a set of perverse conspiracy theories across social media platforms. According to one, the Taliban’s takeover was timed to coincide with the U.S. rollout of a coronavirus vaccine booster shot. “They want to use the crisis in Afghanistan to draw attention away from vaccine passports/masks,” wrote Midnightstrike3625 on Reddit.

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