

YouTube pulls ads on anti-vax channels

YouTube has removed money-generating advertisements from anti-vaccination conspiracy channels. The Google-owned video platform cited its advertising policy that bans "dangerous and harmful" content from eligibility in its monetisation programme as the reason.



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In January, Professor Dame Sally Davies, the UK's chief medical officer, [criticised](#) social media for fuelling vaccine fears.

Myths peddled about the dangers of vaccines on social media was one reason parents weren't taking their children to get the MMR vaccine, said Davies. "A number of people, stars, believe these myths - they are wrong," she told the *BBC*.



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Marina Joubert & Francois van Schalkwyk 14 Feb 2019



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Despite overwhelming scientific and medical evidence that childhood vaccinations are both safe and effective at curbing disease outbreaks, anti-vaccination sentiments remain rife on YouTube and other platforms.

Vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines is listed as one of the [World Health Organisation's top 10 threats to global health in 2019](#). It threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccination programmes currently prevents 2-3 million deaths a year, and a further 1.5-million could be avoided if global coverage of vaccinations improved.

Measles, for example, has seen a 30% increase in cases globally. The reasons for this rise are complex, and not all of these cases are due to vaccine hesitancy. However, some countries that were close to eliminating the disease have seen a resurgence.

Pressure from advertisers

YouTube's decision is believed to be a result of pressure from some of its large advertisers - including Hasbro, Nestle, AT&T, Kellogg, Epic Games and others - who did not want their content playing alongside videos promoting anti-vaccine views. Some pulled all their advertising until YouTube acted. The firms were looking at where their adverts were appearing, following reports last week about paedophiles posting inappropriate comments on many videos featuring children.

"We have strict policies that govern what videos we allow ads to appear on, and videos that promote anti-vaccination content are a violation of those policies," YouTube's statement said. Alongside the decision to remove ads, it said it was also trying to make "more authoritative content" easier to find on the benefits of vaccination and was also stopping anti-vaccine videos appearing in recommendation lists.

It was also planning to create "information panels" on pages that listed sources where people can fact-check information for themselves. "Like many algorithmic changes, these efforts will be gradual and will get more and more accurate over time."

However, "YouTube's demonetisation of anti-vax videos doesn't help people get the correct information about vaccination, it drives the camp underground and further alienates them", says a [report](#) in *Forbes* magazine.

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