

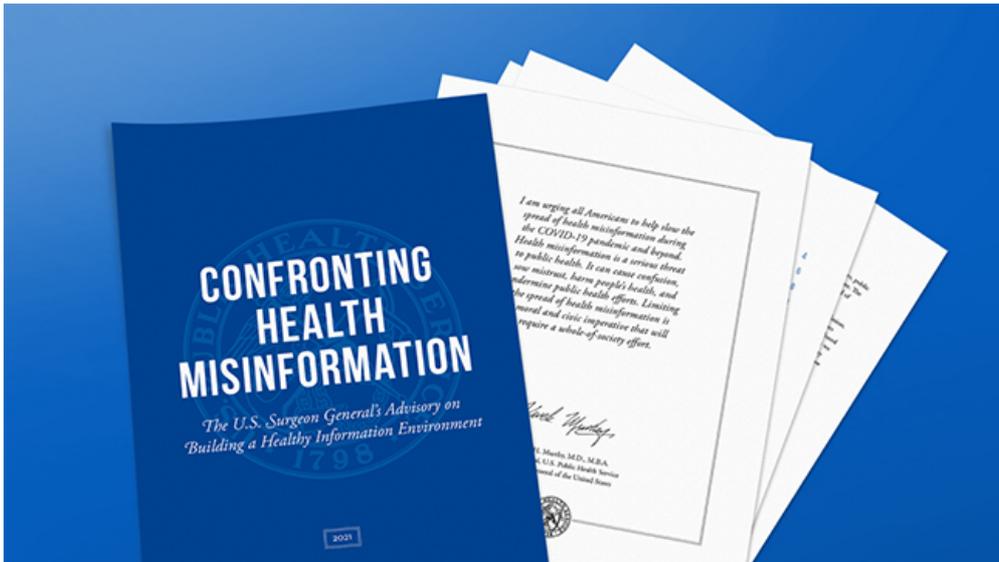


THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

Combating health misinformation focus of surgeon general advisory, webinar

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor



The U.S. surgeon general is urging Americans to combat health misinformation in a new [advisory](#). It includes recommendations for health care professionals and comes as COVID-19 vaccination is slowing and variants are spreading.

Pediatricians can [join an online event](#) with Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A., at 1:15 p.m. EST today. It will include a panel discussion with AAP President Lee Savio Beers, M.D., FAAP, and a Q&A session about the advisory.

"Health misinformation is a serious threat to public health," Dr. Murthy said in the [advisory](#). "It can cause confusion, sow mistrust, harm people's health, and undermine public health efforts. Limiting the spread of health misinformation is a moral and civic imperative that will require a whole-of-society effort."

As public health guidance on COVID-19 evolves based on new research, people may find themselves unsure whom to trust. Polarization in society helps misinformation flourish, and the internet and social media help it travel more quickly and more widely than in the past, Dr. Murthy wrote in [Confronting Health Misinformation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Building a Healthy Information Environment](#).

"We have the power to shape our information environment, but we must use that power together," Dr. Murthy wrote. "Only then can we work toward a healthier information environment - one that empowers us to build a healthier, kinder, and more connected world."

Roughly 65% of people in the U.S. ages 12 and older have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and just over 56% are fully vaccinated, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). As efforts to reach people who are unvaccinated stall, variants are spreading, and cases are starting to rise again. The latest seven-day average of daily new cases increased 43% compared the previous seven-day average.

Dr. Murthy applauded recent efforts to stem misinformation: Trusted community members are engaging people at a local level; media organizations are debunking misinformation; and technology platforms are improving their policies. However, he said these efforts need to be expanded and he laid out recommendations for people from



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a variety of sectors and settings.

He called on health care professionals to engage with patients and the public as trusted members of the community.

"If you are a clinician, take the time to understand each patient's knowledge, beliefs, and values," Dr. Murthy wrote. "Listen with empathy, and when possible, correct misinformation in personalized ways."

Health professionals also can use technology and partner with community organizations to share accurate health information and address misinformation.

The AAP has been waging a battle against health misinformation for years. Its latest efforts include producing a public service announcement encouraging vaccination, animated science explainer videos about COVID-19 vaccines and pediatrician testimonial videos. In addition, the AAP is training chapters on how to use social media effectively to share accurate information.

Dr. Beers said she welcomes the surgeon general's leadership and investment in confronting misinformation.

"Pediatricians are unfortunately not new to confronting the harms of health misinformation online, especially when it comes to vaccines for children," Dr. Beers said in a statement. "During the COVID-19 pandemic, the damage of misinformation has been widespread and been a major source of confusion and concern among families we care for."