

Pushing Back on the Digital Spread of COVID-19 Misinformation

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PGP's Related Projects

Misinformation Monitoring

Collective Impact

Digital Influencers

Campaigns & Programs



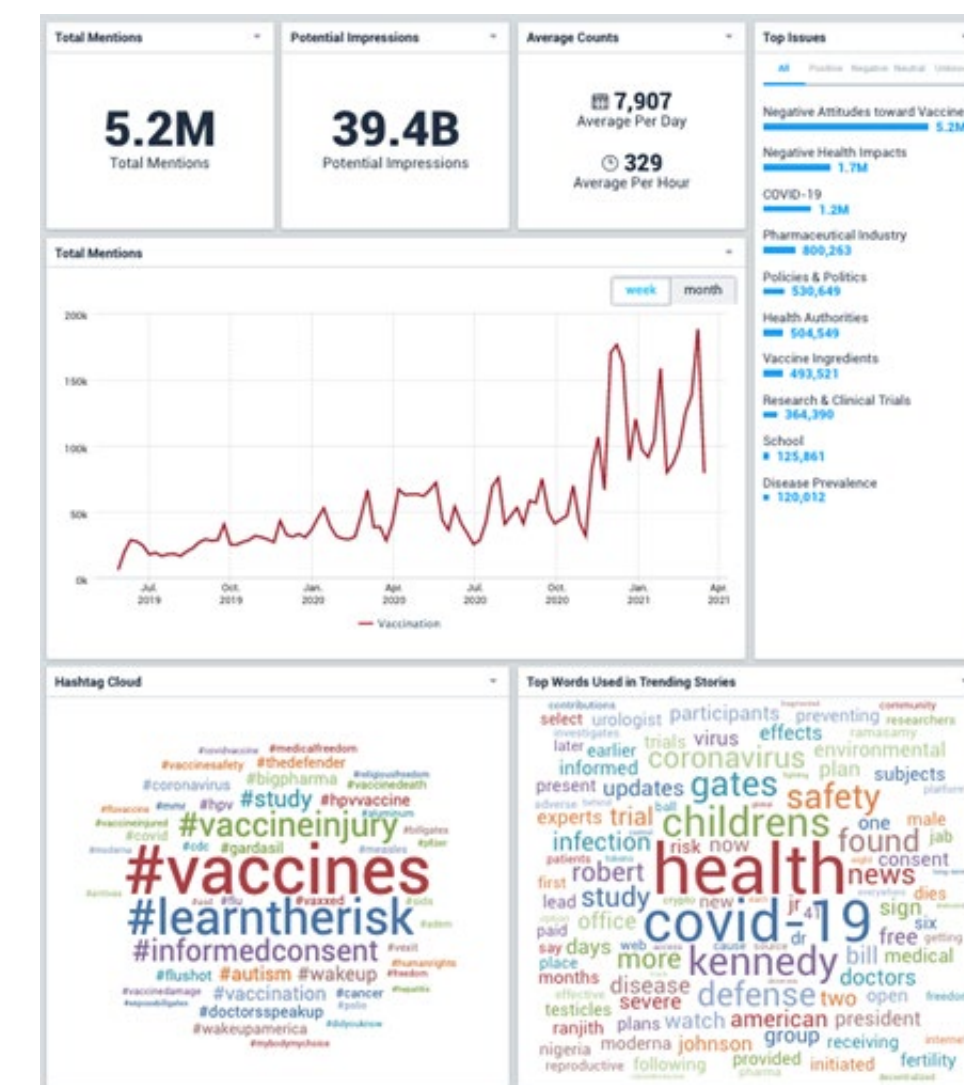
Current Landscape

Project VCTR

Vaccine opposition is a threat to global health. Digital and social media are a primary source of misinformation and means of organizing vaccine opposition.

Since 2019, Project VCTR has tracked vaccine-related communication within all 50 US states, across 12+ media sources. Each week, PGP's public health analysts and journalists provide weekly insights on trending stories across the U.S, including conversation about legislation and advocacy.

Project VCTR is a free resource designed for health organizations, health educators, or members of the press who routinely report on public health. For more information, visit www.ProjectVCTR.com



Terms to Know

1

INFORMATION

'Data with meaning': the basis of knowledge when it is resonant, actionable, trusted

2

RUMOUR

Unverified information: stories/reports that spread rapidly through a group or population - can be true or false

3

MISINFORMATION

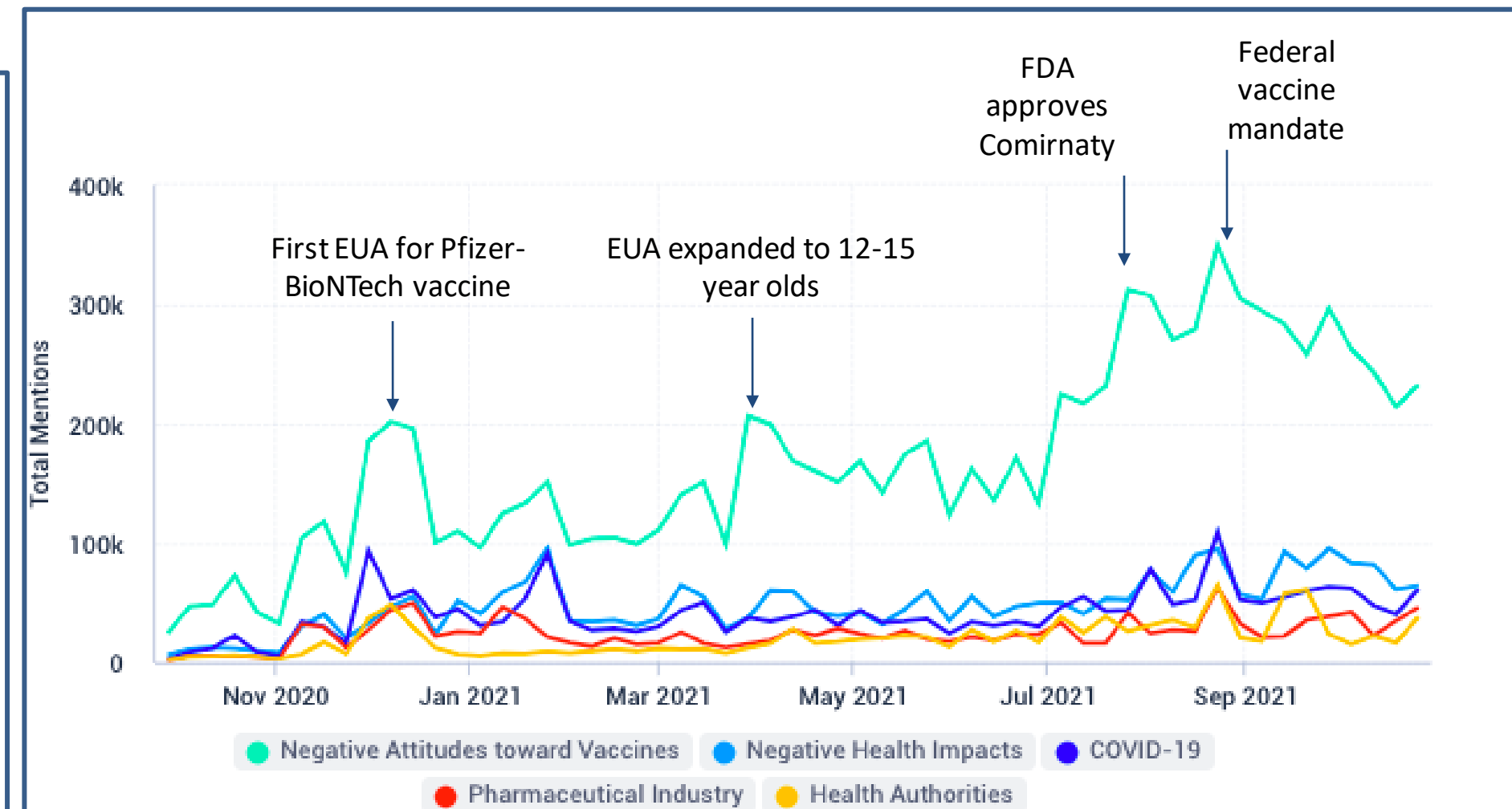
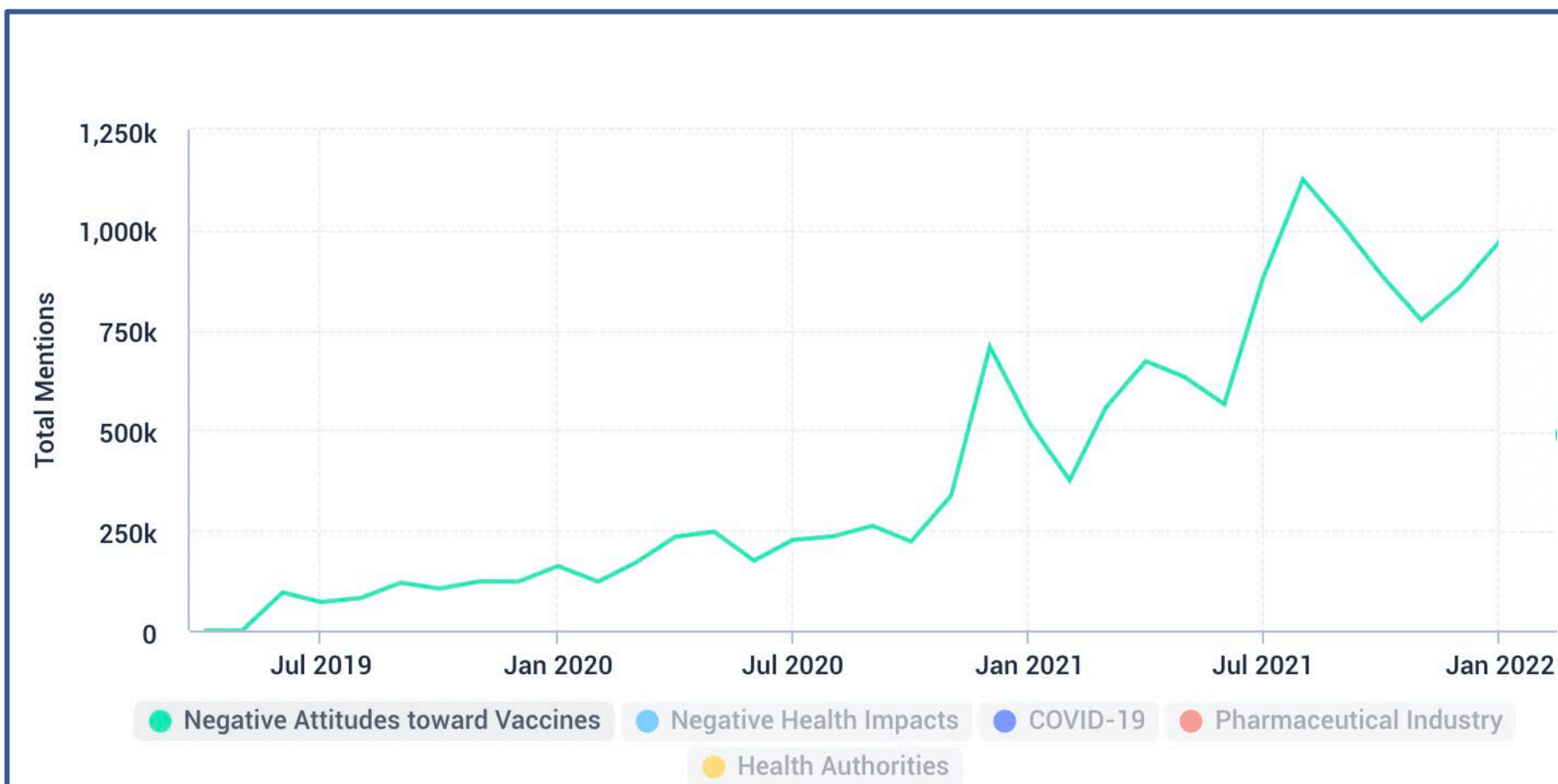
Accidental falsehoods. Wrong or misleading information with the power to dilute, distract, distort

4

DISINFORMATION

Deliberate, engineered falsehoods circulated with malicious intent or for the purpose of serving a personal, political or economic agenda

Vaccine Confidence



<p>Total Mentions</p> <p>14.6M</p> <p>Total Mentions</p>	<p>Average Counts</p> <p>13,356</p> <p>Average Per Day</p> <p>556</p> <p>Average Per Hour</p>	<p>Media Breakdown</p> <p> 13M 361K 57.3K 39.8K 754K 6.7K 46.6K 353K 10.6K 46.4K 101 1 </p>	<p>Potential Impressions</p> <p>104.3B</p> <p>Potential Impressions</p>
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Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine opposition has increased.¹

From Nov 2020 - Nov 2021, Project VCTR identified 8,894,320 conversations demonstrating vaccine opposition and mis/disinformation, an average of 24,368 per day.

From Nov 2019 - Nov 2020, Project VCTR identified an average of 5,368 per day.

1. Bonnevie, E., Gallegos-Jeffrey, A., Goldbarg, J., Byrd, B., & Smyser, J. (2021). Quantifying the rise of vaccine opposition on Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic. Journal of communication in healthcare, 14(1), 12-19.

Vaccine Opposition

Common Motivators



1. Profit
2. Politics
3. Power

Repeat Tactics



1. Cherry-pick data
2. Reference to fake experts
3. Race-baiting
4. Values-baiting

Recurring Themes



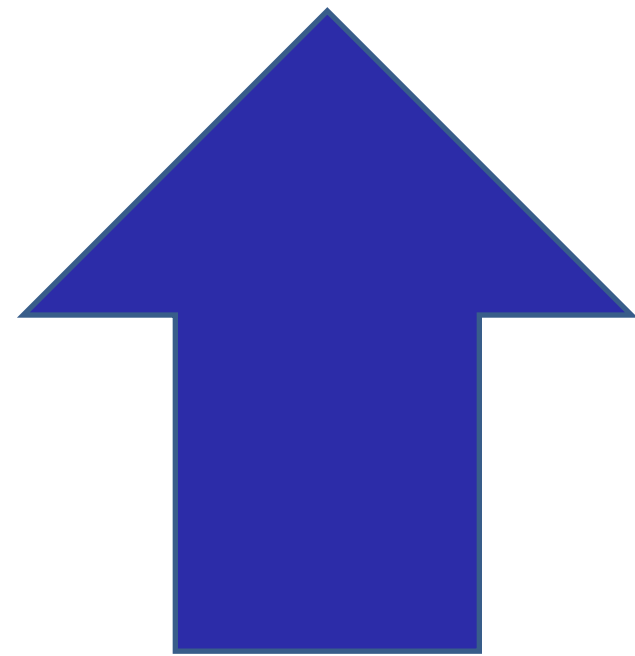
1. Negative health impacts
2. Pharma industry
3. Politics/policies
4. Vaccine ingredients
5. Federal Health Authorities
6. Research/clinical trials
7. Religion
8. Vaccine safety
9. Disease prevalence
10. School
11. Family

Types of Key Players

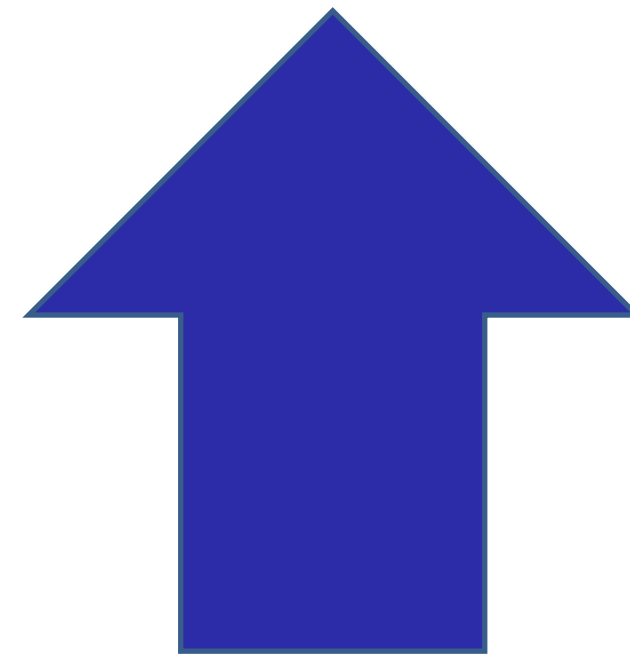


1. Traditional Anti-Vaxxers
2. Conspiracy theorists
3. Opportunists - White supremacists etc
4. Foreign actors
5. Our own politicians

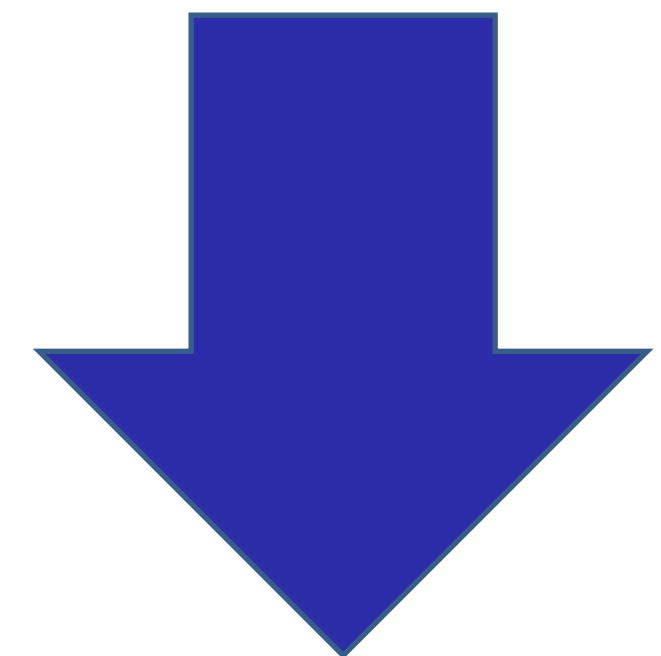
Politicization of Public Health



Preemption by
States



Anti-Vaccine
Legislation by
States



Trust In & Power
of Public Health

The online competition between pro- and anti-vaccination views.

nature

May 13, 2020

Fig. 1: Online ecology of vaccine views.

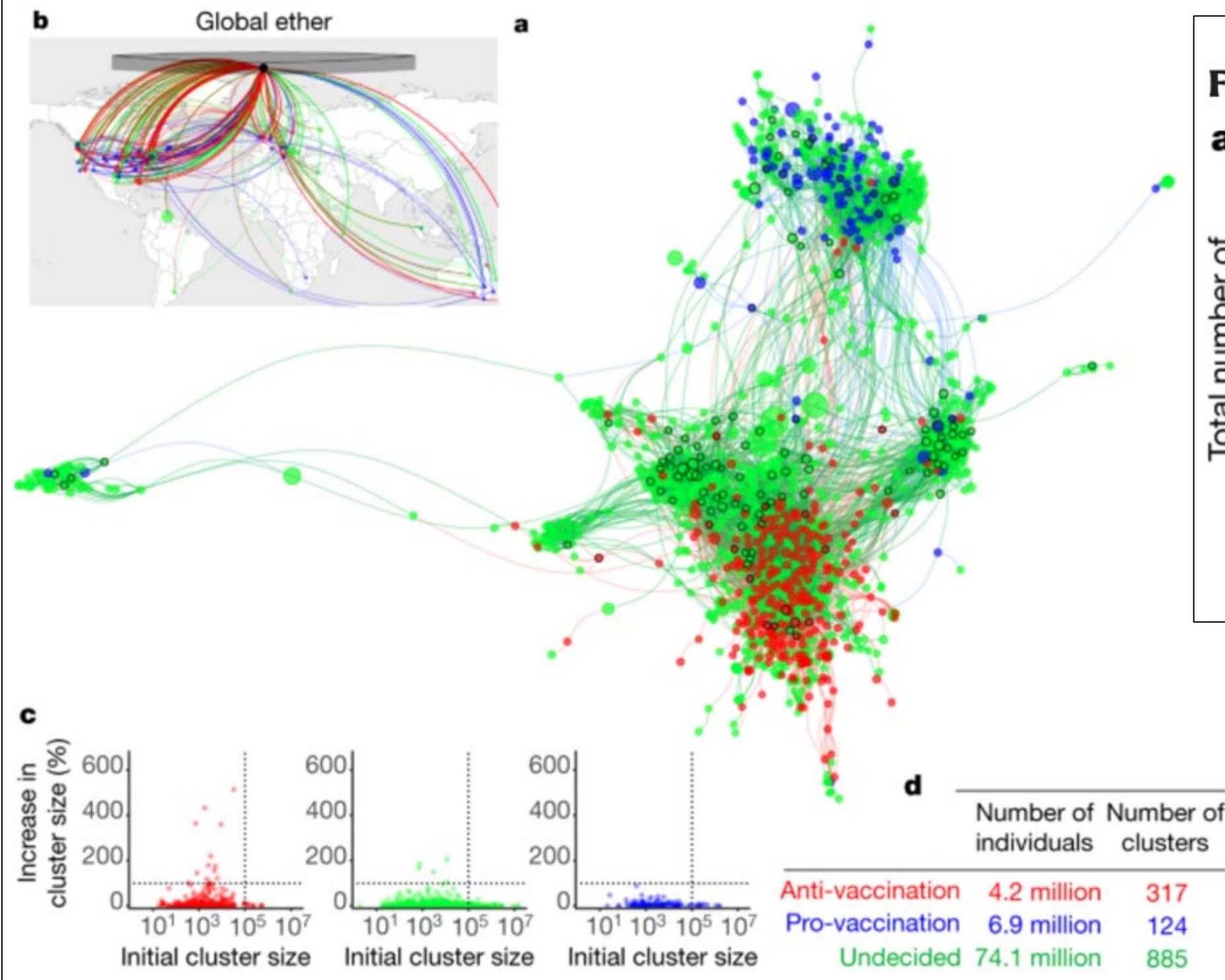
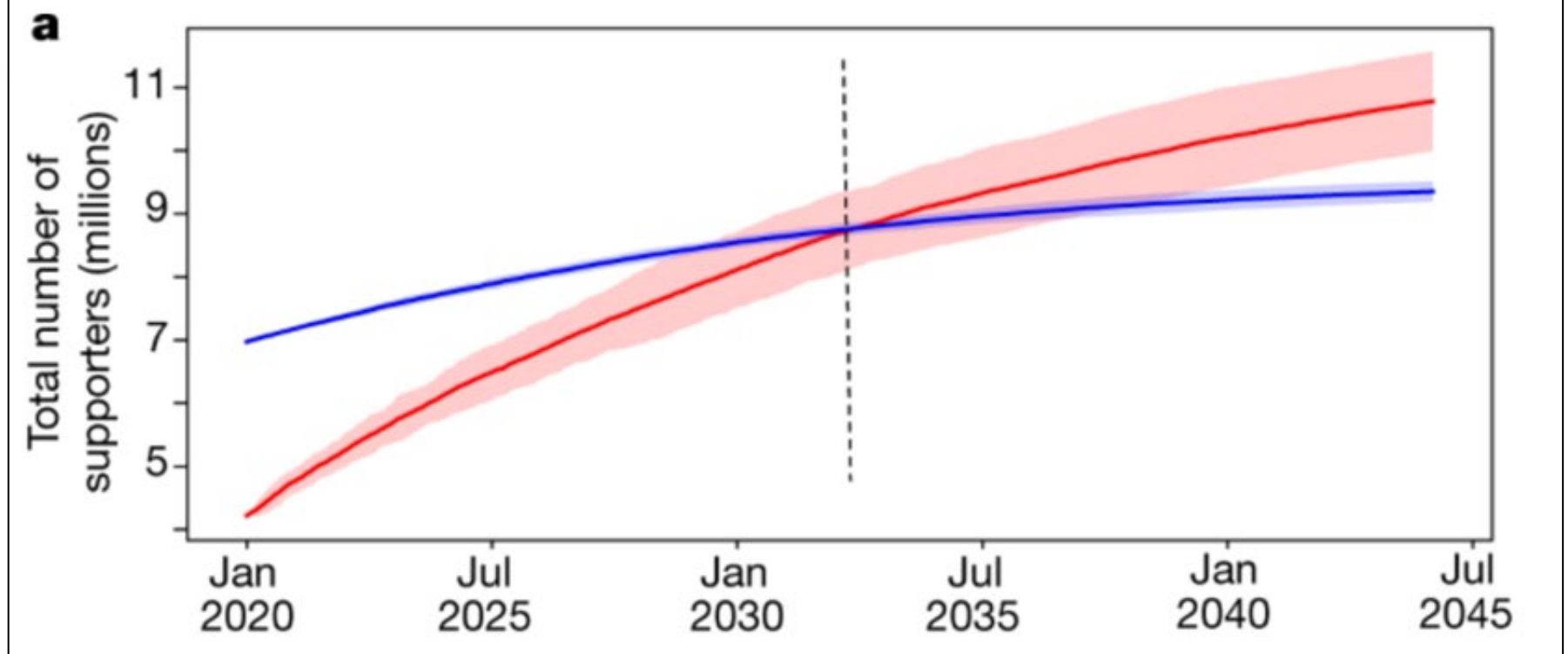


Fig. 3: Predictions and interventions.



The online competition between pro- and anti-vaccination views.

Johnson, N.F., Velásquez, N., Restrepo, N.J. *et al.*
Nature **582**, 230–233 (2020).

Rising Stress and Burnout in Public Health

Results of a National Survey of the Public Health Workforce

MARCH 2022



Confidence in Public Health

KEY FINDINGS:

More than half of public health employees report at least one symptom of **post-traumatic stress disorder**



Many public health workers, especially executives, report **bullying, threats, and harassment**

Nearly 1 in 3 public health employees say they are **considering leaving their organization within the next year**



Public health employees **are committed to their jobs and their communities**

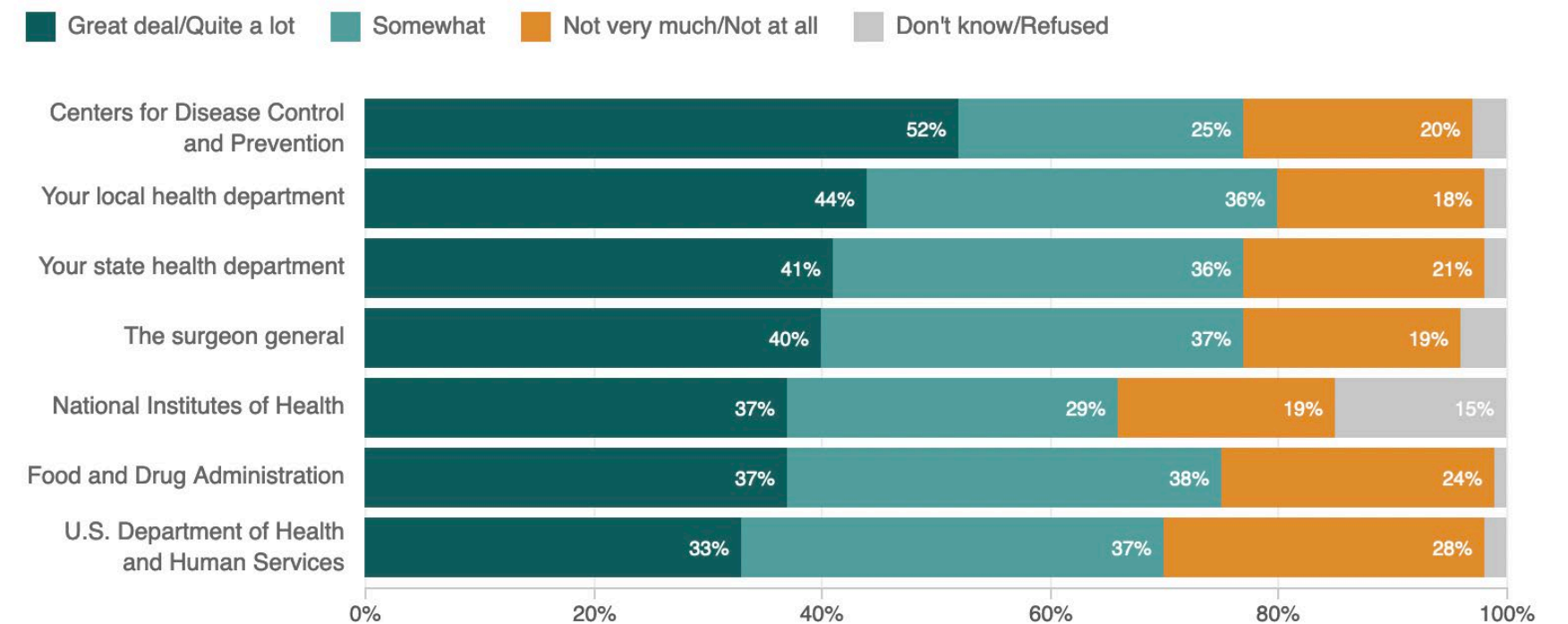
Two years of COVID response have contributed to increased stress and burnout, as well post-traumatic stress symptoms, according to the Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey (PH WINS), conducted between September 2021 and January 2022. At the same time, public health workers report that they remain committed to their jobs and communities. The survey by the de Beaumont Foundation and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials collected the perceptions of nearly 45,000 staff in state and local government public health departments.

Conducted in 2014, 2017, and 2021, PH WINS is the only nationally representative survey of state and local government public health employees. The survey collects information on engagement and satisfaction, intent to leave, training needs, and public health's most pressing issues, as well as demographic information.

This research brief describes key findings from PH WINS 2021 related to satisfaction and engagement, mental health, and intent to leave. Additional data and analyses, including a methodological report, will be released in summer 2022 to provide a more detailed picture of the issues and needs of this vital workforce.

Trust In Key Public Health Groups

Respondents were asked, "In terms of recommendations made to improve health, how much do you trust the recommendations of each of the following groups?"

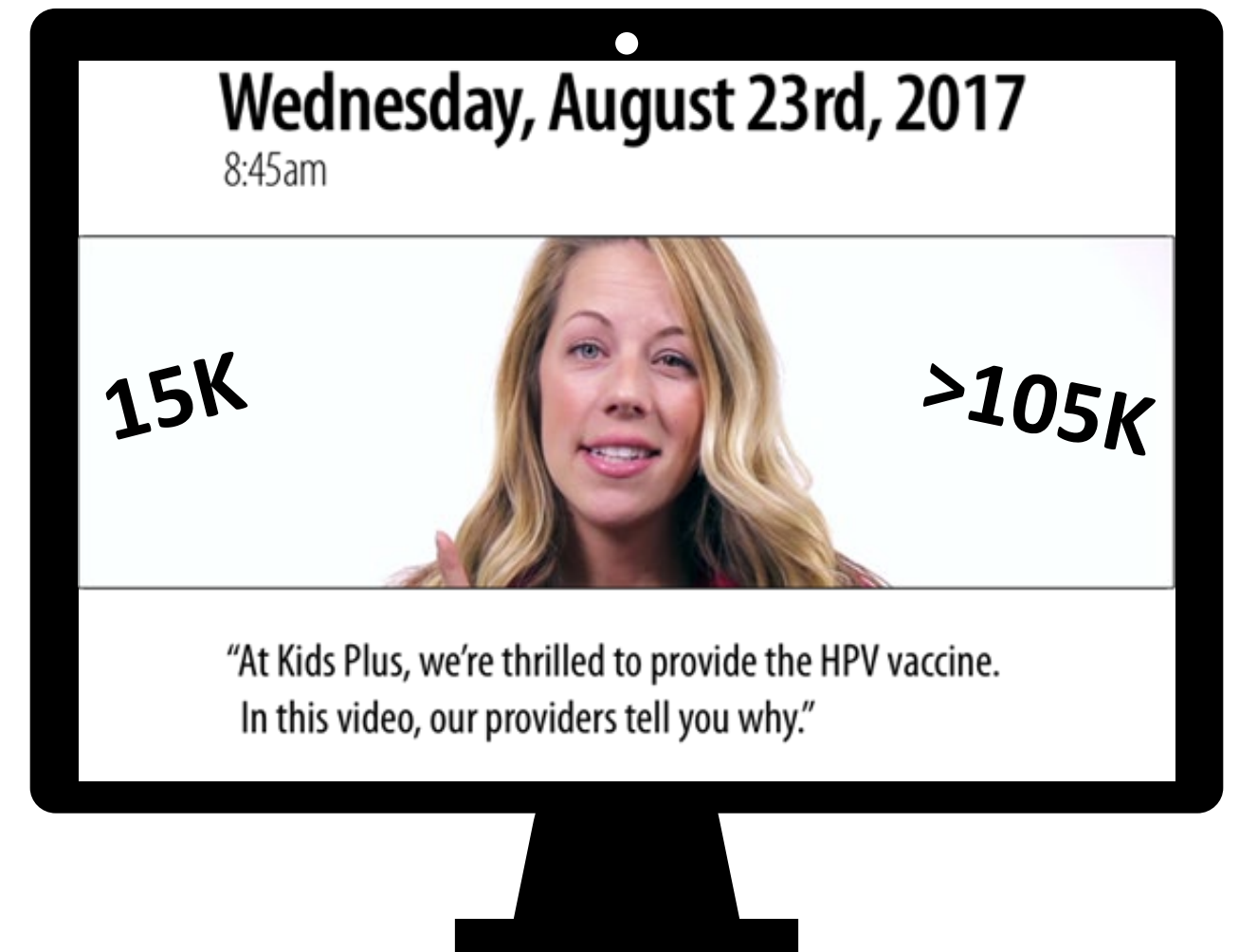


Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll "The Public's Perspective on the United States Health System." The poll, conducted Feb. 11-March 15, surveyed 1,305 U.S. adults, and the margin of error for the overall sample is 3.6 percentage points. This question was asked of half the sample.

Credit: Alyson Hurt/NPR

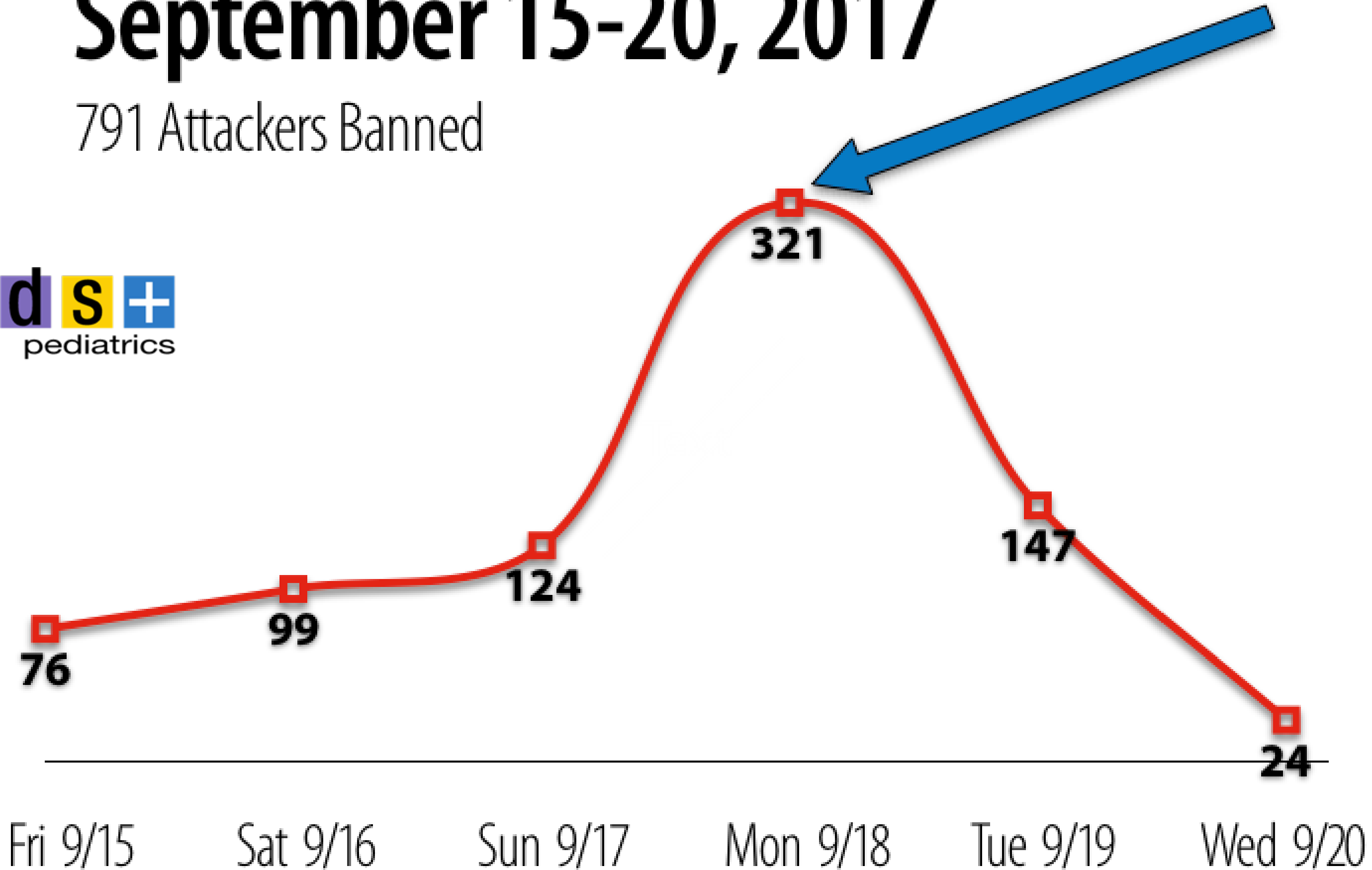
<https://www.npr.org/2021/05/13/996331692/poll-finds-public-health-has-a-trust-problem>

Case Study: Shots Heard



September 15-20, 2017

791 Attackers Banned



344
Days

Anti-Vaxx Attacks



Tactic

Goal

Rapid Waves



~~Overwhelm~~

Organized Swarms



~~Isolate~~

Threats



~~Weaken~~

Abusive Words



~~Frighten~~

Anonymity



~~Terrorize~~

Reputation Harm



~~Damage~~

Connect & Unite

Reinforce & Strengthen

Reassure & Empower

Protect & Defend

Repair & Recover

Embolden & Galvanize

People

BUSTING
MYTHS
ABOUT THE
COVID-19
VACCINE

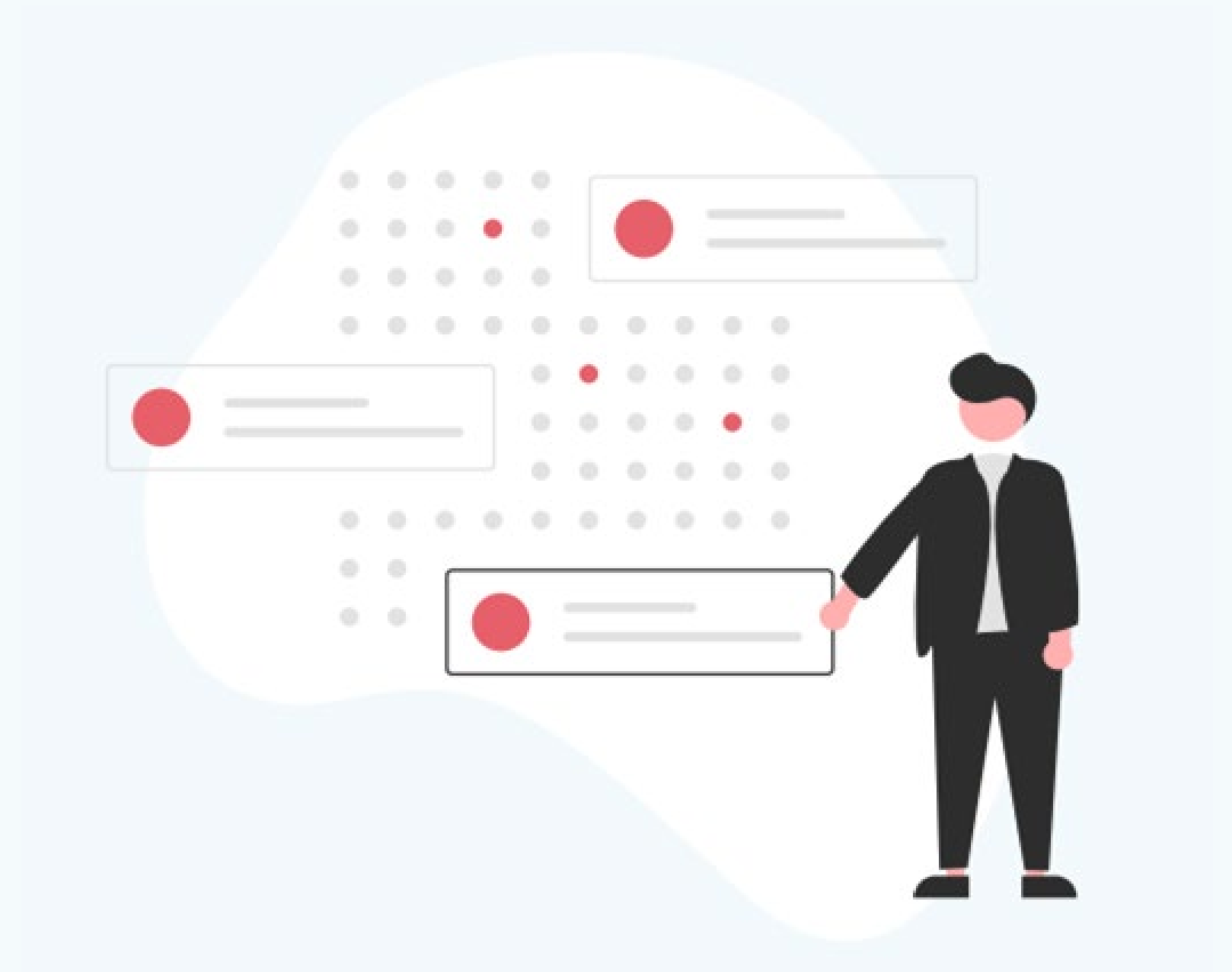
Fact-Check
“It’s important
for health care
providers to fight
the anti-vaccine
movement,” says
Hermann (right,
with Wolynn).

June 2021

What You Can Do: When Attacked

PREPARE AND AVOID

- Have reinforcements ready
- Assess your online presence
- Prepare your workplace, office, or institution
- Monitor online account security
- Know your platform's settings
- "Google" yourself



DEFEND

10 important actions to take immediately:



1. Remember: You will overcome this and you are not alone.



6. Screenshot and save all attacks, including negative comments, fraudulent reviews, and other such content.



2. [Notify us](#) to ask for support.



7. Report and block attackers and delete negative comments.



3. Don't engage with attackers.



8. Claim your businesses on [Yelp](#) and [Google](#).



4. Turn off social media notifications.



9. Inform your employer/employees of the situation.



5. Increase your privacy settings on the platform and pages of the attack.

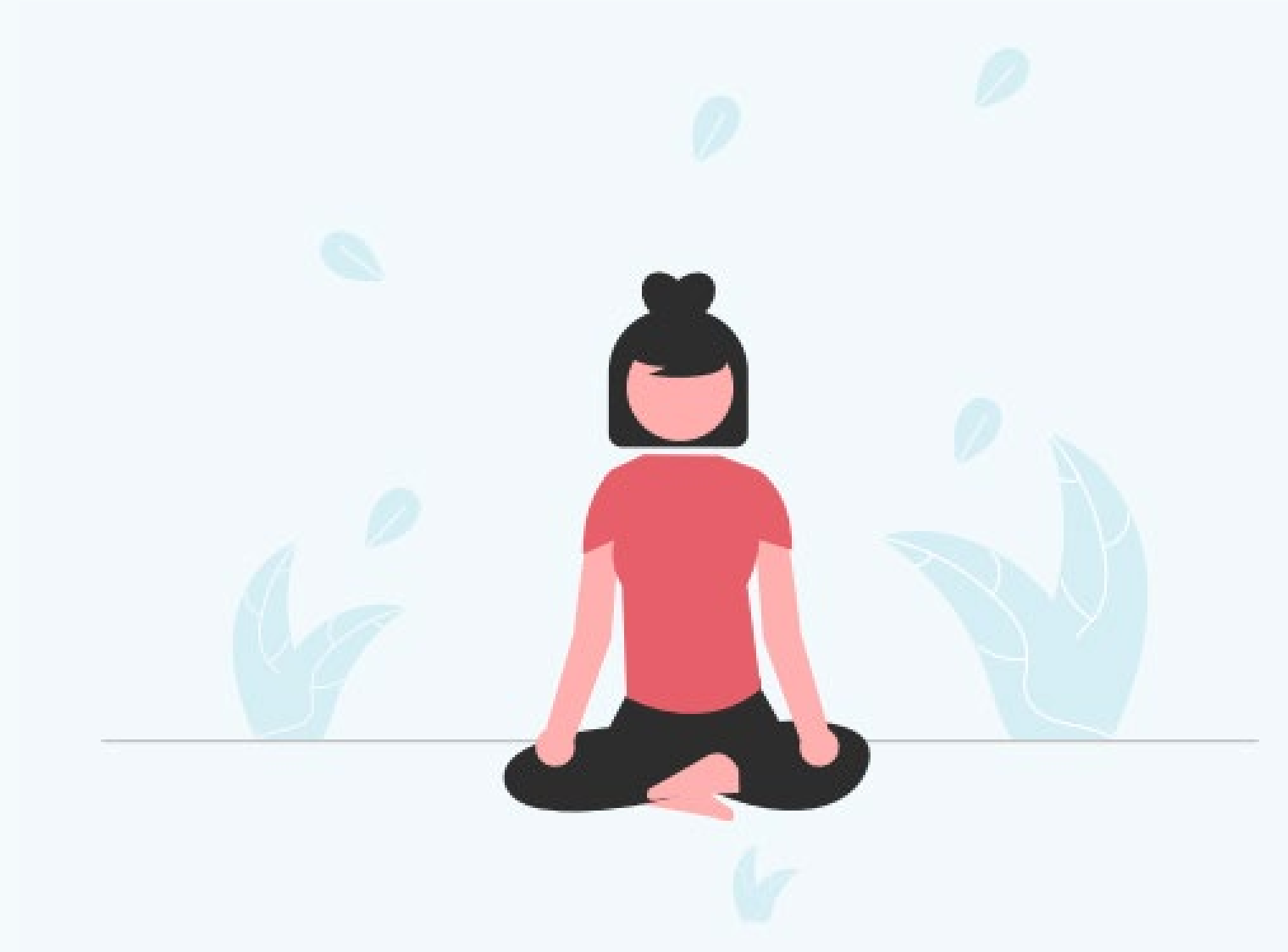


10. Take breaks to take care of yourself and your mental health.

MOVE FORWARD AFTER AN ATTACK



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF



Recap

With the right preparation, defense, and cleanup, you can get through any online attack!



What You Can Do: With Messaging

3 Main Response Scenarios

Debunk

- Respond to false information where you find it
- Provide science, data, or true information

Inoculate

(Prebunk)

- Equip people with counter-arguments to build resistance to future misinformation
- If people see truth before fiction, they're more likely to believe the truth

Report

- Help hold social platforms accountable
- Help social platforms hold super spreader users accountable

Debunk

Example From Stronger

MISINFO

MINUTE

2/5/21 - 2/11/21

SENIOR CITIZENS

A man claiming to be a CNA is spreading misinformation about the vaccine's safety for senior citizens.

This is part of a larger misinfo trend that we're seeing all over the world.

Senior citizens account for 80% of all COVID-19 deaths. No one has been killed by the vaccine.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

Beware of a fake "CDC" document that compiles social media posts from people alleging to have experienced vaccine side effects. **The document is NOT from the CDC, and its claims are unverified.**

Adverse reactions to vaccines do happen. Severe reactions are rare, and are always investigated.

To date, no one has died from taking the COVID-19 vaccine. Experts agree that the benefits of taking the vaccine far outweigh the risks for senior citizens.

IT'S NOT A FLU

A debunked video has resurfaced, along with claims that COVID-19 is just a typical flu, and that the vaccine is "gene therapy."

Let us repeat: COVID-19 is not the flu. It is currently the #1 killer in America, with a death toll of over 460,000 people.

The vaccine does not (and cannot) alter your DNA.

Debunk

Online Example

When someone on your timeline has posted misinformation.

Response depends on your comfort in that situation. You can comment truth, message the person privately, report it to the platform, or even do nothing.

Remember: don't demonize the poster

Our whole house got the flu shot every year. Our whole house got the flu every year. Except hubby, we stopped getting the flu shot 13 years ago. Haven't had the flu since...hubby...still gets the flu ever other year or so.

Like · Reply · 21w

Me nor my kids have ever had flu shot. Not starting this year.

Like · Reply · 21w

↳ 3 Replies

I am a pediatric ICU physician. Many who land in my PICU did not get the flu shot. A few died. Those who survived regretted not getting the flu shot; parents too. True, u may still get the flu despite the shot, but at the very least the flu shot may reduce the severity, complications, time off (from school/work/etc), even give u that push to survive.

In addition, there are too many overlapping symptoms between flu & COVID-19 as well as the significant risk of contracting both at the same time or back-to-back (setting u up for a similar "2-hit" phenomenon).

There are those of u who do not trust vaccines for a variety of reasons. Linked to this post is a set of references from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (<https://www.chop.edu/.../vaccine-education.../vaccine-safety>), one of the premier national/international authorities in healthcare.

For the minority but significant number of people not wanting to get the flu shot for themselves and/or their children, all I ask is that u take these comments and the link to CHOP into strong consideration.

For those young adults and children who are anxious about the needle and pain, my recommendation on minimizing if not outright PREVENTING any pain:

- let ur arm go completely 110% LIMP and HANGING down.
- completely RELAX not only ur arm but also any emotional tension. Do NOT tense up with the needle. u will feel pressure from the needle but not necessarily any pain.

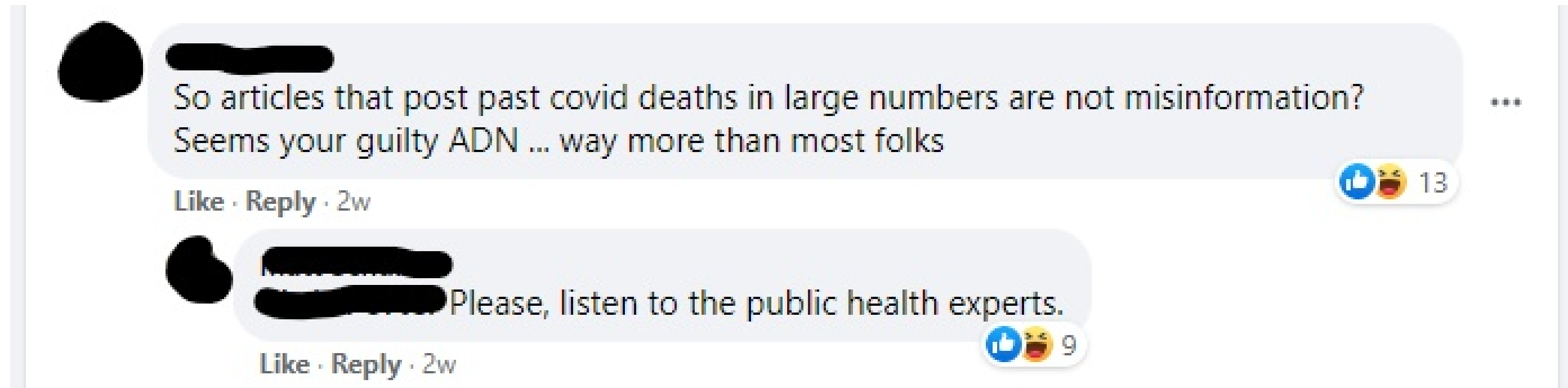
I am being 100% honest with u, when I got my flu shot this year while using this technique, I literally almost didn't even feel the needle and was even surprised it was done. The more limp u let ur arm hang, the better. [Show ur parents how it's done.]

CHOP.EDU
Vaccine Safety | Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Like · Reply · 21w

Debunk

Observational Correction



Two targets for any corrective message:

1. The Sharer: May have a higher resistance to correction. Values and reputation are at stake.
2. Observers: Anyone who sees this post.

Research has consistently documented the ability of observational correction to reduce health misperceptions across platforms and topics, and including correction from a variety of sources

Inoculate

Inoculate (Prebunk) Misinformation Before False Beliefs Take Hold

Goal: Expose people to a weakened version of the misinfo and equip them with counter-arguments



FACT

Lead with the fact

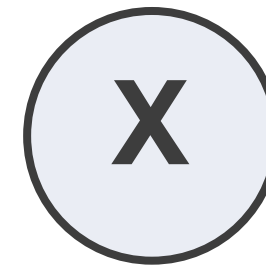
Make it clear, relevant, sticky



WARNING

Misinformation alert!

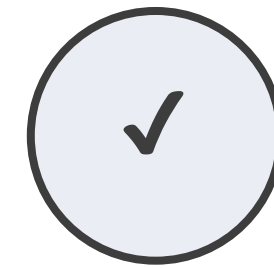
Misleading tactics alert!



FALLACY

Flag tactics used to deceive

Undermine trust in
disinformation authors



FACT

Provide alternative correct info

Must replace misinformation,
cannot leave a vacuum

Make correct information stickier
than misinformation

Inoculate

Stronger Example



Inoculate

Meme Example



Report



- Social media platforms have committed to taking down misinformation about vaccines and COVID-19
- Reporting misinformation helps hold the platforms accountable, and helps the platforms hold publishers, outlets, and superspreaders accountable
- Each platform has a menu button next to each post with a 'report' option. [Here is a walkthrough of how to report on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.](#)
- Focus on posts sharing links to content from major vaccine opposition players

Goal: Get misinformation taken down before it spreads

Do's and Don'ts

You May Need to Adjust...

DO

- Be personal and empathetic
- Listen and validate the person's concerns
- Rely on science and data - and personal experience
- Account for the varying experiences of people in different demographic groups
 - Many communities of color have valid historical reasons to be skeptical of the health system

DON'T

- Get political
- Repeat misinformation
- Take it personally
- Vilify the sharer
- Rely on fear

Resources

FACT CHECKING

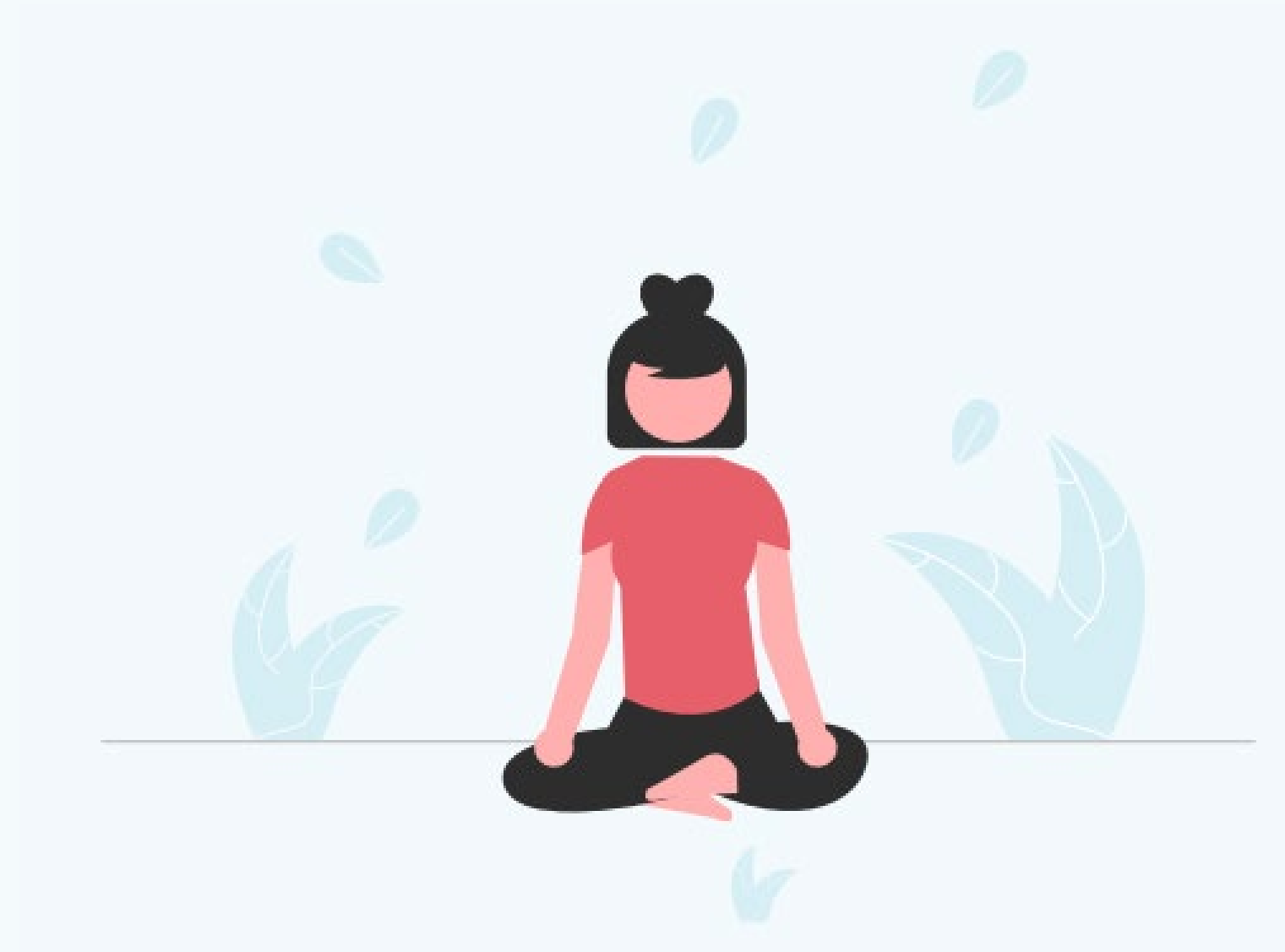
- Public use:
 - [Healthfeedback.org](https://healthfeedback.org)
 - [Fullfact.org](https://fullfact.org)
 - [Politifact \(poynter\)](https://politifact.com/poynter/)
 - [Snopes](https://snopes.com)
 - [AFP Fact Check](https://www.afp.com/fact-check)
 - Mayo Clinic "[Expert Answers](https://www.mayoclinic.org/expert-answers)"
 - Fact checks from [USA Today](https://www.usatoday.com), [Reuters](https://www.reuters.com), [AP](https://www.ap.com), etc.
- Personal use:
 - [Skeptical raptor](https://www.skepticalraptor.com)
 - [First Draft Vaccine Insights Hub](https://www.firstdraft.org)

FURTHER READING

- [WHO: How infodemics affect the world & how they can be managed](https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/2020/05/infodemics)
- [Debunking Handbook 2020 \(climate change\)](https://www.climatechange.gov/infodemics)
- [Vaccine Misinformation Management Field Guide](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s101120-vaccine-misinformation-field-guide.html)
- [Changing the COVID Conversation Communications Cheat Sheet](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s101120-changing-the-covid-conversation-communications-cheat-sheet.html)
- [Facebook's misinformation policies](https://www.facebook.com/policies)
- [Google Fact Check Explorer](https://www.google.com/factcheck/explorer/)



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF



Thank you!

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