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CONNECTICUT

william tong
attorney general

March 24, 2021

Via First Class and Electronic Mail

Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market St.
San Francisco, CA 94103

Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Vaccine Disinformation

Dear Messrs. Dorsey and Zuckerberg:

As Attorneys General committed to protecting the safety and well-being of the residents of our states, we write to express our concern about the use of your platforms to spread fraudulent information about coronavirus vaccines and to seek your cooperation in curtailing the dissemination of such information. The people and groups spreading falsehoods and misleading Americans about the safety of coronavirus vaccines are threatening the health of our communities, slowing progress in getting our residents protected from the virus, and undermining economic recovery in our states.

As safe and effective vaccines become available, the end of this pandemic is in sight. This end, however, depends on the widespread acceptance of these vaccines as safe and effective. Unfortunately, misinformation disseminated via your platforms has increased vaccine hesitancy, which will slow economic recovery and, more importantly, ultimately cause even more unnecessary deaths. A small group of individuals use your platforms to downplay the dangers of COVID-19 and spread misinformation about the safety of vaccines. These individuals lack medical expertise and are often motivated by financial interests. According to a recent report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate¹, so-called “anti-vaxxer” accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter reach more than 59 million followers. “Anti-vaxxers” are using social media platforms to target people of color and Black Americans specifically, members of communities who have suffered the worst health impacts of the virus and whose vaccination rates are lagging.

¹ [Center for Countering Digital Hate \(counterhate.com\)](https://www.counterhate.com/)

165 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

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Given “anti-vaxxers” reliance on your platforms, you are uniquely positioned to prevent the spread of misinformation about coronavirus vaccines that poses a direct threat to the health and safety of millions of Americans in our states and that will prolong our road to recovery.

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Sincerely,

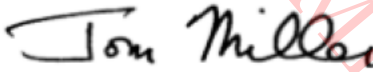


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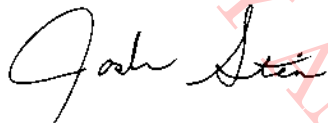


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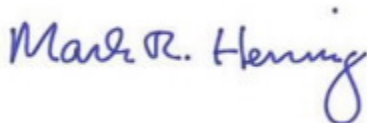
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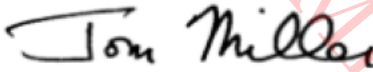


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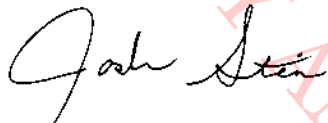


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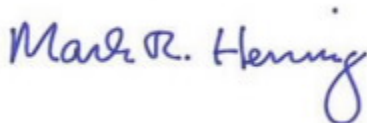
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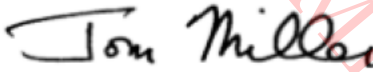


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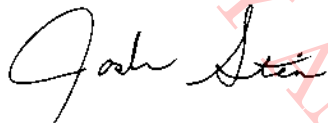


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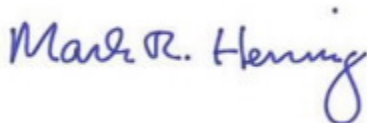
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MARK HERRING
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To: Brower, Anna[Anna.Brower@ag.ny.gov]
From: Office of the New York Attorney General[ny.sattorneygeneral@public.govdelivery.com]
Sent: Wed 3/24/2021 12:01:17 PM (UTC-04:00)
Subject: Attorney General James Calls on Facebook and Twitter to Stop Spread of Anti-Vaxxer Coronavirus Disinformation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2021

Attorney General's Press Office/212-416-8060 nyag.pressoffice@ag.ny.gov

Attorney General James Calls on Facebook and Twitter to Stop Spread of Anti-Vaxxer Coronavirus Disinformation

NEW YORK – New York Attorney General Letitia James, as part of a coalition of 12 attorneys general, today called on Facebook and Twitter to take stronger measures to stop the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine disinformation being spread by anti-vaxxers on their social media platforms. In a [letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Attorney General James and the coalition urge both CEOs to immediately and fully enforce company guidelines against vaccine misinformation in an effort to prevent needless infection and death and to hasten America's road to recovery.](#)

"The science is clear — this vaccine saves lives, which is why I already received my vaccine and why I encourage all New Yorkers to get their vaccine when eligible," said **Attorney General James**. "As we continue to make strides in vaccinating New Yorkers and recovering from the pandemic, it is imperative that every individual has access to this lifesaving vaccine and the science-based facts about it. We must ensure that there are no barriers to individuals receiving their dose, especially those in communities most impacted by the pandemic, including communities of color. Facebook and Twitter must take immediate action to protect New Yorkers and limit any further loss of life as a result of the spread of inaccurate information."

The availability of safe and effective vaccines means the end of this pandemic is in sight. But America's ability to end the pandemic quickly and limit further loss of life depends on broad public acceptance of these vaccines. False information regarding the safety of COVID-19 vaccines by a small number of individuals lacking medical expertise, and often motivated by their own financial interests, has reached over 59 million followers on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter — threatening to undermine vaccine acceptance and harm the nation's recovery. Anti-vaxxers have used these platforms to disproportionately target people of color, and Black Americans specifically — communities who have already suffered the worst health impacts of the virus and whose vaccination rates are already lagging.

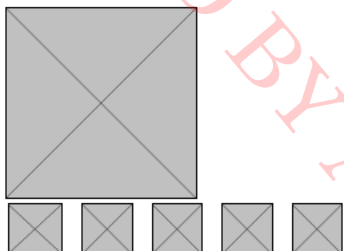
Today's letter cites specific examples where Facebook and Twitter have failed to enforce their existing guidelines, including:

- Twitter and Facebook have yet to remove from all their platforms the accounts of prominent anti vaxxers who have repeatedly violated the companies' terms of service. Digital media research groups estimate that, as of March 10, 2021, 12 anti-vaxxers' personal accounts and their associated organizations, groups, and websites are responsible for 65 percent of public anti-vaccine content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Facebook has failed to consistently apply misinformation labels and pop-ups on its pages and groups that discuss vaccines or COVID-19 generally. For example, the company neglected to apply warning labels on dozens of Facebook groups that anti-vaxxer Larry Cook created for his followers. At the same time, the company has mistakenly flagged pro-vaccine pages and content in ways that have undermined pro-vaccine public education efforts.
- Facebook has allowed anti-vaxxers to skirt its policy of removing misinformation that health experts have debunked, by failing to prevent them from using video and streaming tools like Facebook Live and sites like Bitchute, Rumble, and Brighteon to evade detection.

Today's letter comes as Zuckerberg, Dorsey, and Google CEO Sundar Pichai are set to testify tomorrow at a joint hearing of the Communications and Technology Subcommittee and the Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives regarding social media's role in promoting extremism and misinformation.

Joining Attorney General James in sending today's letter to Facebook and Twitter are the attorneys general of Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

###



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Opinion: Anti-vaxxers put us all at risk. Facebook and Twitter must ban them.

Opinion by **Letitia James** and **William Tong**

April 8, 2021 at 3:50 p.m. EDT

Letitia James is the attorney general of New York. William Tong is the attorney general of Connecticut.

President Biden has announced that every adult in the nation will be eligible for the covid-19 vaccine as of April 19. The availability of safe and effective vaccines should mark the end of the pandemic, and the start of our recovery.

But vaccine availability means nothing without vaccine acceptance. Anti-vaccine disinformation that continues to be disseminated unchecked on social media threatens to prolong our recovery and poses a grave threat to the health and safety of millions of Americans.

Facebook and Twitter have instituted a number of policies that have helped to slow the spread of dangerous vaccine disinformation on their platforms, yet these policies have been inadequately and inconsistently applied. The solution is not complicated. It's time for Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey to turn off this toxic tap and completely remove the small handful of individuals spreading this fraudulent misinformation.

Social media researchers have found that 12 individuals and their related organizations are responsible for a full 65 percent of anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter. We've found that these individuals and groups have repeatedly violated Facebook, Instagram and Twitter's terms of service, and they must be removed from the platforms.

This small group of "anti-vaxxers" — most with no medical expertise and, in some cases, motivated by personal financial interests — are putting us all at risk. They have used their social media accounts, as well as other public platforms they have access to, to promote wholly unfounded pseudoscience and wild conspiracy theories regarding the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. Some of these individuals have also used their platforms to undermine the reality of the pandemic in its entirety, have promoted fake and unproven cures, and have attacked common-sense, widely accepted public health measures, including mask-wearing and testing.

In some cases, those spreading vaccine disinformation are also spreading other dangerous, debunked political conspiracies, like QAnon.

According to a recent report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate, anti-vaccine accounts have reached more than 59 million followers as of last year. Even worse, anti-vaxxers are using social media platforms to target people of color, and Black Americans specifically — communities suffering disproportionately from the virus, and whose rates of vaccination are already lagging.

Given anti-vaxxers' reliance on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the men and women who run these companies have a unique responsibility and opportunity to act. Yet Facebook has failed to consistently apply misinformation labels and

pop-ups on anti-vaccine pages. Instead, at the same time, Facebook has mistakenly flagged pro-vaccine pages and content in ways that have undermined public education efforts. The company has allowed anti-vaxxers to exploit loopholes and evade detection through streaming tools, such as Facebook and Instagram Live, as well as through other sites, that continue to promote disinformation. That's why, just last month, our offices, along with 10 additional attorneys general from around the nation, [sent letters](#) to the Facebook and Twitter CEOs, urging both to immediately and fully enforce company guidelines against vaccine misinformation. Neither has responded.

Let us be clear — nothing is wrong with asking questions and researching vaccine effectiveness and safety. We recognize that some people are skeptical and fearful, particularly Black Americans, who know too well the racist history of vaccine experimentation in this country, as well as have experienced, firsthand, the many existing racial disparities in our health-care system.

We urge those with questions and concerns to seek out legitimate medical experts, including their own doctors, and official sources, such as local departments of public health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We are not in any way looking to limit the ability of individuals to ask these important questions, but the small handful of people we're talking about are simply promoting dangerous lies that do nothing to aid people in their legitimate search for information. The individuals spreading this misinformation have long pushed vaccine conspiracies.

As the chief law enforcement officers of our states, we can say that there is no First Amendment right to spread disinformation on social media. Twitter and Facebook have an obligation to enforce guidelines for acceptable conduct on their own platforms. In fact, there are additional state-level enforcement mechanisms against false and deceptive marketing, which might apply to those hawking fraudulent "cures" and scam preventive treatments. We are watching this closely, and attorneys general, from both sides of the aisle, have already taken legal steps, to stop those selling products, toothpastes, dietary supplements, creams and a number of other products with no scientific evidence supporting their ability to fight back against covid-19.

As attorneys general, the safety and well-being of the families in our states are our top priority. Facebook and Twitter have an obligation and an opportunity to take strong, swift action now to save lives and hasten our recovery.

Read more:

[Joe Manchin: I will not vote to eliminate or weaken the filibuster](#)

[Max Boot: The GOP can't be saved. Center-right voters need to become Biden Republicans.](#)

[Alexandra Petri: This should not happen more than once](#)

Updated April 15, 2021

Coronavirus: What you need to read

Coronavirus maps: [Cases and deaths in the U.S.](#) | [Cases and deaths worldwide](#)

Vaccines: [J&J vaccine pause](#) | [Tracker by state](#) | [Guidance for vaccinated people](#) | [How long does immunity last?](#) | [County-level vaccine data](#)

What you need to know: [Variants](#) | [Symptoms guide](#) | [Masks FAQ](#) | [Your life at home](#) | [Personal finance](#)

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Got a pandemic question? We answer one every day in our coronavirus newsletter

Are you planning a long-awaited reunion after you get vaccinated? We want to hear from you

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION



April 9, 2021

Twitter, Inc.

1355 Market St. #900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Members of the National Association of Attorneys General

Thank you for your letter regarding COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and sales of fake COVID-19 vaccine cards on Internet services. We welcome the opportunity to work with state attorneys general to address important and emerging issues associated with this unprecedented, global pandemic. We appreciate you bringing this issue to our attention.

We share your concerns about COVID-19 misinformation and associated fraud and scams and recognize the important role Twitter and other social media platforms play in disseminating information relating to public health. To that end, we have policies in place to address vaccine misinformation and to combat false and deceptive marketing of COVID-19 vaccines or vaccine cards.

Upon receipt of your letter, our enforcement teams performed sweeps to identify possible fraudulent COVID-19 vaccine cards to review against our policies. While proactive detection of this content is complex and imperfect, we did not find evidence of this activity on the service. If you are aware of concerning content, please flag it for us to share with our enforcement teams for review. We are continuing to investigate this on our service and are having discussions with other key partners about this Internet trend.

For an understanding of how we address key areas related to your inquiry, please see the following

COVID-19 Misinformation Policy & Enforcement

On March 18, 2020, we moved quickly to implement a COVID-19 misinformation policy for content that goes directly against guidance from authoritative sources of global and local public health information. Since then, we have iterated on our policies to ensure we have captured the evolution of this pandemic.

To this point, in December, we expanded our COVID-19 [misleading information policy](#) to allow the removal of Tweets that advance [harmful, false, or misleading narratives related to COVID-19 vaccines](#) in particular. Pursuant to this expanded policy, Twitter may require account holders to remove:

- False claims that suggest immunizations and vaccines are used to intentionally cause harm to or control populations, including statements about vaccines that invoke a deliberate conspiracy;

- False claims that have been widely debunked about the adverse impacts or effects of receiving vaccinations; or
- False claims that COVID-19 is not real or not serious, and therefore that vaccinations are unnecessary.

We are currently prioritizing the removal of the most harmful misleading accounts and information and labeling Tweets that contain potentially misleading information about COVID-19 vaccines.

Ensuring Access to Authoritative and Credible Information

In addition to combating harmful misinformation reactively, Twitter has prioritized ensuring that individuals who use our service have access to authoritative and credible information about COVID-19 and vaccines. We have invested heavily in product features and partnerships for this critical work. You can read more at our [COVID-19 hub](#).

Advertising Content

With respect to advertising content, Twitter has safeguards in place to ensure that it does not contain misleading claims about the cure, treatment, diagnosis or prevention of certain diseases and conditions, including vaccines. Twitter presents different types of advertisements to people who use Twitter, including Promoted Tweets, Promoted Accounts, and Promoted Trends. Individuals who use our service are shown advertisements when they are logged in or logged out of Twitter. The advertisements are clearly marked with a “promoted” icon. Individuals interact with most promoted content in much the same way as organic content. If a person follows, likes, or Retweets content on Twitter, including promoted content, the individual’s followers may see his or her name associated with that content.

Additionally, based on our advertising policy on [Inappropriate Content](#), we will halt any attempt by advertisers to opportunistically use the COVID-19 outbreak to target inappropriate advertisements, including by marketing fraudulent vaccine cards. We also take the view that fraudulent vaccine cards would qualify as counterfeit goods under our [policy prohibiting selling or promoting counterfeit goods](#). We may permanently suspend an account solely dedicated to selling or promoting counterfeit goods. At the Tweet level, we’d require the removal of individual tweets that sell or promote counterfeit goods.

Twitter further restricts the advertisements of health and pharmaceutical products and services. These restrictions are based on the specific product or service being promoted, as well as the country that the campaign is targeting.

The promotion of health and pharmaceutical products and services are

only allowed if Twitter provides pre-clearance authorization of the advertisement. Pre-clearance authorization applies to pharmacies, pharmaceutical and medical products, health supplements, nutrition products, and medical and cosmetic services. Twitter additionally requires prior authorization for the advertising of controlled, prescription, and non-prescription pharmaceuticals, pharmaceutical manufacturers, informational sites or blogs focusing on prescription drugs, regulated medical devices, prescription medical devices, prescription medication discount cards, clinical trials, and emergency contraception.

Additionally, Twitter requires pre-clearance approval of advertisements containing health claims about the cure, treatment, diagnosis or prevention of certain diseases and conditions. This advertising policy specifically applies to claims about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. We have further restrictions placed on advertising that prohibits content that is inflammatory or provocative and is likely to evoke strong negative reactions.

Paid Partnerships

While Tweets promoted through Twitter's advertising services are labeled as "Promoted" and must abide by our [Twitter Ads Policies](#), organic, non-promoted Tweets may also be considered paid product placements, endorsements, or advertisements ("Paid Partnerships"). In addition to abiding by the Twitter Rules, people on Twitter who participate in Paid Partnerships — including creators and brands — are responsible for complying with all applicable laws and regulations.

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Twitter does not allow the artificial amplification of anti-vaccination content on our service. We continue to develop the detection tools and systems needed to combat malicious automation and manipulation of our service. Twitter prioritizes identifying suspicious account activity, such as exceptionally high-volume Tweeting with the same hashtag or mentioning the same @handle without a reply from the account being addressed, and requires an individual using the service to confirm

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We work closely with law enforcement and numerous public safety authorities around the world. As our partnerships deepen, we are able to better respond to the changing threats we all face, sharing valuable information and promptly responding to valid legal requests for information.

Twitter informs individuals using the platform that we may preserve, use, or disclose an individual's personal data if we believe that it is reasonably necessary to comply with a law, regulation, legal process, or governmental request; to protect the safety of any person; to protect the safety or integrity of our platform, including to help prevent spam, abuse, or malicious actors on our services, or to explain why we have removed content or accounts from our services; to address fraud, security, or technical issues; or to protect our rights or property or the rights or property of those who use our services.

Twitter accepts requests from law enforcement to preserve records, which constitute potentially relevant evidence in legal proceedings. We will preserve a temporary snapshot of the relevant account records for 90 days pending service of valid legal process.

* * *

We're hopeful our policies and enforcement work in place will address this type of content. However, if you do come across examples of concerning content, please share so our teams can expedite it for review against our terms of service. We look forward to continued collaboration with the National Association of State Attorneys General and thank you for your continued leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Lauren Culbert on
Head of U.S. Public Policy

To: Levy, Jennifer[Jennifer.Levy@ag.ny.gov]
From: Letitia James[letty7627@aol.com]
Sent: Tue 3/16/2021 1:16:32 PM (UTC-04:00)
Subject: Fwd: CT: Letter to Social Media + Congress on Vaccine Disinformation on Social Media
[AG Letter to Tech CEOs re antivax\[1\].docx](#)
[AG Letter to Tech CEOs Cover Letter\[1\].docx](#)

[EXTERNAL]

On Tuesday, March 16, 2021, Jennifer Song <jennifer@progressivestateleaders.org> wrote

Dear All,

Please see below and attached for CT's sign on letter re vaccine disinformation on social media. Please note that the **sign-on deadline is COB on Tuesday, 3/23**. For questions and to sign-on, please reach out to Rowan at Rowan.Kane@ct.gov.

Thanks,
Jennifer

Hi,

With coronavirus vaccines ramping up dramatically, we are unfortunately seeing a rise in vaccine disinformation on social media. Over 65% of that fraudulent information comes from just 12 individuals. While Facebook (including Instagram) and Twitter have policies outlawing this kind of harmful information, they have thus far been lax in enforcing their policies. Attached is a letter to Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey asking them to enforce those policies on vaccine disinformation being spread on their platforms. There will be a Congressional hearing next Thursday, 3/25, in the Energy and Technology Committee. We have also attached a cover letter to the leadership of the E&T and the two cognizant subcommittees.

*We are asking for any **edits to be submitted by COB on Friday, 3/19** and confirmation of **sign-on by COB Tuesday, 3/23**. Thank you in advance for your support on this issue and please let me know if you have any questions.*

Best,

Rowan Kane

Counselor to the Attorney General and Deputy Director of Policy

Office of the Attorney General

165 Capitol Ave, Hartford, CT 06106

Office: +1 860-808-5318 | Fax: +1 860-808-5387 | URL: <https://ct.gov/ag/>

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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CONNECTICUT

william tong
attorney general

March 24, 2021

Via First Class and Electronic Mail

Jack Dorsey
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market St.
San Francisco, CA 94103

Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Vaccine Disinformation

Dear Messrs. Dorsey and Zuckerberg:

As Attorneys General committed to protecting the safety and well-being of the residents of our states, we write to express our concern about the use of your platforms to spread fraudulent information about coronavirus vaccines and to seek your cooperation in curtailing the dissemination of such information. The people and groups spreading falsehoods and misleading Americans about the safety of coronavirus vaccines are threatening the health of our communities, slowing progress in getting our residents protected from the virus, and undermining economic recovery in our states.

As safe and effective vaccines become available, the end of this pandemic is in sight. This end, however, depends on the widespread acceptance of these vaccines as safe and effective. Unfortunately, misinformation disseminated via your platforms has increased vaccine hesitancy, which will slow economic recovery and, more importantly, ultimately cause even more unnecessary deaths. A small group of individuals use your platforms to downplay the dangers of COVID-19 and spread misinformation about the safety of vaccines. These individuals lack medical expertise and are often motivated by financial interests. According to a recent report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate¹, so-called “anti-vaxxer” accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter reach more than 59 million followers. “Anti-vaxxers” are using social media platforms to target people of color and Black Americans specifically, members of communities who have suffered the worst health impacts of the virus and whose vaccination rates are lagging.

¹ [Center for Countering Digital Hate \(counterhate.com\)](https://www.counterhate.com)

165 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer

Jack Dorsey, CEO, Twitter
Mark Zuckerberg, Chairman & CEO, Facebook
March 24, 2021
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Given “anti-vaxxers” reliance on your platforms, you are uniquely positioned to prevent the spread of misinformation about coronavirus vaccines that poses a direct threat to the health and safety of millions of Americans in our states and that will prolong our road to recovery.

The updated community guidelines you have established to prevent the spread of vaccine misinformation appear to be a step in the right direction. However, it is apparent that Facebook has not taken sufficient action to identify violations and enforce these guidelines by removing and labelling misinformation and banning repeat offenders. As a result, anti-vaccine misinformation continues to spread on your platforms, in violation of your community standards.

- Twitter and Facebook have yet to remove from all their platforms the accounts of prominent “anti-vaxxers” who have repeatedly violated the companies’ terms of service. Digital media research groups estimate that as of March 10, 12 “anti-vaxxers” personal accounts and their associated organizations, groups and websites are responsible for 65% of public anti-vaccine content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Facebook has failed to consistently apply misinformation labels and popups on Facebook pages and groups that discuss vaccines or COVID-19. For example, the company neglected to apply warning labels on dozens of Facebook groups that “anti vaxxer” Larry Cook created for his followers. At the same time, the company has mistakenly flagged pro-vaccine pages and content in ways that have undermined pro vaccine public education efforts
- Facebook has allowed anti vaxxers to skirt its policy of removing misinformation that health experts have debunked, by failing to prevent them from using video and streaming tools like Facebook Live and sites like Bitchute, Rumble, and Brighteon to evade detection

We call on you to take immediate steps to fully enforce your companies’ guidelines against vaccine misinformation. By effectively rooting out fraudulent information about coronavirus vaccines, you can prevent needless illness and death and hasten our road to recovery.

Sincerely,

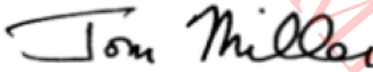


WILLIAM TONG
Attorney General of Connecticut

Jack Dorsey, CEO, Twitter
Mark Zuckerberg, Chairman & CEO, Facebook
March 24, 2021
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KATHLEEN JENNINGS
Attorney General of Delaware



TOM MILLER
Attorney General of Iowa



MAURA HEALY
Attorney General of Massachusetts



DANA NESSEL
Attorney General of Michigan

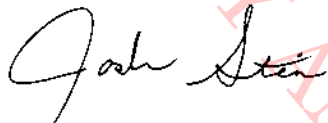


KEITH ELLISON
Attorney General of Minnesota

Jack Dorsey, CEO, Twitter
Mark Zuckerberg, Chairman & CEO, Facebook
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LETITIA JAMES
Attorney General of New York



JOSHUA STEIN
Attorney General of North Carolina



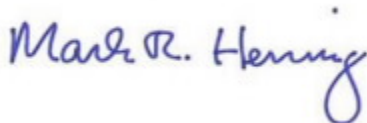
ELLEN F. ROSENBLUM
Attorney General of Oregon



JOSH SHAPIRO
Attorney General of Pennsylvania



PETER NERONHA
Attorney General of Rhode Island



MARK HERRING
Attorney General of Virginia

To: Brower, Anna[Anna.Brower@ag.ny.gov]
From: Office of the New York Attorney General[nysattorneygeneral@public.govdelivery.com]
Sent: Wed 3/24/2021 12:01:17 PM (UTC-04:00)
Subject: Attorney General James Calls on Facebook and Twitter to Stop Spread of Anti-Vaxxer Coronavirus Disinformation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2021

Attorney General's Press Office/212-416-8060 nyag.pressoffice@ag.ny.gov

Attorney General James Calls on Facebook and Twitter to Stop Spread of Anti-Vaxxer Coronavirus Disinformation

NEW YORK – New York Attorney General Letitia James, as part of a coalition of 12 attorneys general, today called on Facebook and Twitter to take stronger measures to stop the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine disinformation being spread by anti-vaxxers on their social media platforms. In a [letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Attorney General James and the coalition urge both CEOs to immediately and fully enforce company guidelines against vaccine misinformation in an effort to prevent needless infection and death and to hasten America's road to recovery.](#)

"The science is clear — this vaccine saves lives, which is why I already received my vaccine and why I encourage all New Yorkers to get their vaccine when eligible," said **Attorney General James**. "As we continue to make strides in vaccinating New Yorkers and recovering from the pandemic, it is imperative that every individual has access to this lifesaving vaccine and the science-based facts about it. We must ensure that there are no barriers to individuals receiving their dose, especially those in communities most impacted by the pandemic, including communities of color. Facebook and Twitter must take immediate action to protect New Yorkers and limit any further loss of life as a result of the spread of inaccurate information."

The availability of safe and effective vaccines means the end of this pandemic is in sight. But America's ability to end the pandemic quickly and limit further loss of life depends on broad public acceptance of these vaccines. False information regarding the safety of COVID-19 vaccines by a small number of individuals lacking medical expertise, and often motivated by their own financial interests, has reached over 59 million followers on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter — threatening to undermine vaccine acceptance and harm the nation's recovery. Anti-vaxxers have used these platforms to disproportionately target people of color, and Black Americans specifically — communities who have already suffered the worst health impacts of the virus and whose vaccination rates are already lagging.

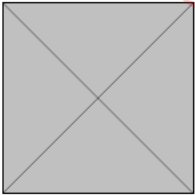
Today's letter cites specific examples where Facebook and Twitter have failed to enforce their existing guidelines, including:

- Twitter and Facebook have yet to remove from all their platforms the accounts of prominent anti vaxxers who have repeatedly violated the companies' terms of service. Digital media research groups estimate that, as of March 10, 2021, 12 anti-vaxxers' personal accounts and their associated organizations, groups, and websites are responsible for 65 percent of public anti-vaccine content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Facebook has failed to consistently apply misinformation labels and pop-ups on its pages and groups that discuss vaccines or COVID-19 generally. For example, the company neglected to apply warning labels on dozens of Facebook groups that anti-vaxxer Larry Cook created for his followers. At the same time, the company has mistakenly flagged pro-vaccine pages and content in ways that have undermined pro-vaccine public education efforts.
- Facebook has allowed anti-vaxxers to skirt its policy of removing misinformation that health experts have debunked, by failing to prevent them from using video and streaming tools like Facebook Live and sites like Bitchute, Rumble, and Brighteon to evade detection.

Today's letter comes as Zuckerberg, Dorsey, and Google CEO Sundar Pichai are set to testify tomorrow at a joint hearing of the Communications and Technology Subcommittee and the Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives regarding social media's role in promoting extremism and misinformation.

Joining Attorney General James in sending today's letter to Facebook and Twitter are the attorneys general of Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

###



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Opinion: Anti-vaxxers put us all at risk. Facebook and Twitter must ban them.

Opinion by **Letitia James** and **William Tong**

April 8, 2021 at 3:50 p.m. EDT

Letitia James is the attorney general of New York. William Tong is the attorney general of Connecticut.

President Biden has announced that every adult in the nation will be eligible for the covid-19 vaccine as of April 19. The availability of safe and effective vaccines should mark the end of the pandemic, and the start of our recovery.

But vaccine availability means nothing without vaccine acceptance. Anti-vaccine disinformation that continues to be disseminated unchecked on social media threatens to prolong our recovery and poses a grave threat to the health and safety of millions of Americans.

Facebook and Twitter have instituted a number of policies that have helped to slow the spread of dangerous vaccine disinformation on their platforms, yet these policies have been inadequately and inconsistently applied. The solution is not complicated. It's time for Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey to turn off this toxic tap and completely remove the small handful of individuals spreading this fraudulent misinformation.

Social media researchers have found that 12 individuals and their related organizations are responsible for a full 65 percent of anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter. We've found that these individuals and groups have repeatedly violated Facebook, Instagram and Twitter's terms of service, and they must be removed from the platforms.

This small group of "anti-vaxxers" — most with no medical expertise and, in some cases, motivated by personal financial interests — are putting us all at risk. They have used their social media accounts, as well as other public platforms they have access to, to promote wholly unfounded pseudoscience and wild conspiracy theories regarding the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. Some of these individuals have also used their platforms to undermine the reality of the pandemic in its entirety, have promoted fake and unproven cures, and have attacked common-sense, widely accepted public health measures, including mask-wearing and testing.

In some cases, those spreading vaccine disinformation are also spreading other dangerous, debunked political conspiracies, like QAnon.

According to a recent report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate, anti-vaccine accounts have reached more than 59 million followers as of last year. Even worse, anti-vaxxers are using social media platforms to target people of color, and Black Americans specifically — communities suffering disproportionately from the virus, and whose rates of vaccination are already lagging.

Given anti-vaxxers' reliance on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the men and women who run these companies have a unique responsibility and opportunity to act. Yet Facebook has failed to consistently apply misinformation labels and

pop-ups on anti-vaccine pages. Instead, at the same time, Facebook has mistakenly flagged pro-vaccine pages and content in ways that have undermined public education efforts. The company has allowed anti-vaxxers to exploit loopholes and evade detection through streaming tools, such as Facebook and Instagram Live, as well as through other sites, that continue to promote disinformation. That's why, just last month, our offices, along with 10 additional attorneys general from around the nation, [sent letters](#) to the Facebook and Twitter CEOs, urging both to immediately and fully enforce company guidelines against vaccine misinformation. Neither has responded.

Let us be clear — nothing is wrong with asking questions and researching vaccine effectiveness and safety. We recognize that some people are skeptical and fearful, particularly Black Americans, who know too well the racist history of vaccine experimentation in this country, as well as have experienced, firsthand, the many existing racial disparities in our health-care system.

We urge those with questions and concerns to seek out legitimate medical experts, including their own doctors, and official sources, such as local departments of public health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We are not in any way looking to limit the ability of individuals to ask these important questions, but the small handful of people we're talking about are simply promoting dangerous lies that do nothing to aid people in their legitimate search for information. The individuals spreading this misinformation have long pushed vaccine conspiracies.

As the chief law enforcement officers of our states, we can say that there is no First Amendment right to spread disinformation on social media. Twitter and Facebook have an obligation to enforce guidelines for acceptable conduct on their own platforms. In fact, there are additional state-level enforcement mechanisms against false and deceptive marketing, which might apply to those hawking fraudulent "cures" and scam preventive treatments. We are watching this closely, and attorneys general, from both sides of the aisle, have already taken legal steps, to stop those selling products, toothpastes, dietary supplements, creams and a number of other products with no scientific evidence supporting their ability to fight back against covid-19.

As attorneys general, the safety and well-being of the families in our states are our top priority. Facebook and Twitter have an obligation and an opportunity to take strong, swift action now to save lives and hasten our recovery.

Read more:

[Joe Manchin: I will not vote to eliminate or weaken the filibuster](#)

[Max Boot: The GOP can't be saved. Center-right voters need to become Biden Republicans.](#)

[Alexandra Petri: This should not happen more than once](#)

Updated April 15, 2021

Coronavirus: What you need to read

Coronavirus maps: [Cases and deaths in the U.S.](#) | [Cases and deaths worldwide](#)

Vaccines: [J&J vaccine pause](#) | [Tracker by state](#) | [Guidance for vaccinated people](#) | [How long does immunity last?](#) | [County-level vaccine data](#)

What you need to know: [Variants](#) | [Symptoms guide](#) | [Masks FAQ](#) | [Your life at home](#) | [Personal finance](#)

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Got a pandemic question? We answer one every day in our coronavirus newsletter

Are you planning a long-awaited reunion after you get vaccinated? We want to hear from you

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION



April 9, 2021

Twitter, Inc.

1355 Market St. #900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Members of the National Association of Attorneys General

Thank you for your letter regarding COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and sales of fake COVID-19 vaccine cards on Internet services. We welcome the opportunity to work with state attorneys general to address important and emerging issues associated with this unprecedented, global pandemic. We appreciate you bringing this issue to our attention.

We share your concerns about COVID-19 misinformation and associated fraud and scams and recognize the important role Twitter and other social media platforms play in disseminating information relating to public health. To that end, we have policies in place to address vaccine misinformation and to combat false and deceptive marketing of COVID-19 vaccines or vaccine cards.

Upon receipt of your letter, our enforcement teams performed sweeps to identify possible fraudulent COVID-19 vaccine cards to review against our policies. While proactive detection of this content is complex and imperfect, we did not find evidence of this activity on the service. If you are aware of concerning content, please flag it for us to share with our enforcement teams for review. We are continuing to investigate this on our service and are having discussions with other key partners about this Internet trend.

For an understanding of how we address key areas related to your inquiry, please see the following

COVID-19 Misinformation Policy & Enforcement

On March 18, 2020, we moved quickly to implement a COVID-19 misinformation policy for content that goes directly against guidance from authoritative sources of global and local public health information. Since then, we have iterated on our policies to ensure we have captured the evolution of this pandemic.

To this point, in December, we expanded our COVID-19 [misleading information policy](#) to allow the removal of Tweets that advance [harmful, false, or misleading narratives related to COVID-19 vaccines](#) in particular. Pursuant to this expanded policy, Twitter may require account holders to remove:

- False claims that suggest immunizations and vaccines are used to intentionally cause harm to or control populations, including statements about vaccines that invoke a deliberate conspiracy;

- False claims that have been widely debunked about the adverse impacts or effects of receiving vaccinations; or
- False claims that COVID-19 is not real or not serious, and therefore that vaccinations are unnecessary.

We are currently prioritizing the removal of the most harmful misleading accounts and information and labeling Tweets that contain potentially misleading information about COVID-19 vaccines.

Ensuring Access to Authoritative and Credible Information

In addition to combating harmful misinformation reactively, Twitter has prioritized ensuring that individuals who use our service have access to authoritative and credible information about COVID-19 and vaccines. We have invested heavily in product features and partnerships for this critical work. You can read more at our [COVID-19 hub](#).

Advertising Content

With respect to advertising content, Twitter has safeguards in place to ensure that it does not contain misleading claims about the cure, treatment, diagnosis or prevention of certain diseases and conditions, including vaccines. Twitter presents different types of advertisements to people who use Twitter, including Promoted Tweets, Promoted Accounts, and Promoted Trends. Individuals who use our service are shown advertisements when they are logged in or logged out of Twitter. The advertisements are clearly marked with a “promoted” icon. Individuals interact with most promoted content in much the same way as organic content. If a person follows, likes, or Retweets content on Twitter, including promoted content, the individual’s followers may see his or her name associated with that content.

Additionally, based on our advertising policy on [Inappropriate Content](#), we will halt any attempt by advertisers to opportunistically use the COVID-19 outbreak to target inappropriate advertisements, including by marketing fraudulent vaccine cards. We also take the view that fraudulent vaccine cards would qualify as counterfeit goods under our [policy prohibiting selling or promoting counterfeit goods](#). We may permanently suspend an account solely dedicated to selling or promoting counterfeit goods. At the Tweet level, we’d require the removal of individual tweets that sell or promote counterfeit goods.

Twitter further restricts the advertisements of health and pharmaceutical products and services. These restrictions are based on the specific product or service being promoted, as well as the country that the campaign is targeting.

The promotion of health and pharmaceutical products and services are

only allowed if Twitter provides pre-clearance authorization of the advertisement. Pre-clearance authorization applies to pharmacies, pharmaceutical and medical products, health supplements, nutrition products, and medical and cosmetic services. Twitter additionally requires prior authorization for the advertising of controlled, prescription, and non-prescription pharmaceuticals, pharmaceutical manufacturers, informational sites or blogs focusing on prescription drugs, regulated medical devices, prescription medical devices, prescription medication discount cards, clinical trials, and emergency contraception.

Additionally, Twitter requires pre-clearance approval of advertisements containing health claims about the cure, treatment, diagnosis or prevention of certain diseases and conditions. This advertising policy specifically applies to claims about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. We have further restrictions placed on advertising that prohibits content that is inflammatory or provocative and is likely to evoke strong negative reactions.

Paid Partnerships

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Twitter accepts requests from law enforcement to preserve records, which constitute potentially relevant evidence in legal proceedings. We will preserve a temporary snapshot of the relevant account records for 90 days pending service of valid legal process.

* * *

We're hopeful our policies and enforcement work in place will address this type of content. However, if you do come across examples of concerning content, please share so our teams can expedite it for review against our terms of service. We look forward to continued collaboration with the National Association of State Attorneys General and thank you for your continued leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Lauren Culbert on
Head of U.S. Public Policy