



November 23, 2021

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

The recent Facebook whistleblower disclosures have confirmed what many of us have suspected for a long time: that Facebook has repeatedly stonewalled the public, lawmakers and academics over the last 18 months despite having had "[deep knowledge](#)" about the scope and nature of COVID-19 and vaccine disinformation across its apps. For example, it has known [what kinds of users](#) were most likely to share falsehoods, and that authoritative sources on Facebook had become "[cesspools of anti-vaccine comments](#)" that created "a huge problem" that the company needed to fix.

This deception must end now. So many deaths could have been prevented, and we must act with haste to prevent more, particularly with vaccines becoming imminently available for young children. We simply cannot afford another deadly round of covid and vaccine misinformation.

On July 15, 2021, United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy released an advisory on the rampant spread of false health information online, declaring it a public health threat. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation has been deadly. The viral spread of lies and conspiracy theories online have led people to refuse safe and effective vaccines and enabled the most recent, deadly wave of the Delta variant. This infodemic has polarized and politicized our society's dialogue around evidence-based public health guidance such as social distancing and masking, and directly led to harassment and violence toward public health officials, healthcare professionals, and other frontline workers, from grocery store employees to airline staff.

All of us — including technology platforms like Facebook — have a moral and civic duty to limit the spread of health disinformation. That is why we join Surgeon General Murthy as he calls upon technology companies to operate with greater transparency and accountability. **Facebook must take immediate, urgent action to stop the deadly spread of COVID-19 disinformation on its platforms. Facebook must disclose *all* data about the scope, reach, and content of this disinformation**

and its impact on users for evaluation by independent public health researchers. Data that has already been released by Facebook on this landscape [has fallen far short](#) of what the public deserves to know. For Facebook to achieve [actual transparency](#), it must go beyond providing select data points to the public and provide meaningful data from its vast data trove to the public health community. This will assist experts in understanding both how disinformation has rampantly spread on the platform and how to overcome the skepticism about vaccines that has arisen from it.

Though Facebook makes claims to the contrary, recent studies and analyses suggest that despite the growing threat of viral variants, the spread of COVID-19 disinformation on Facebook is still raging. Recent research shows that Facebook algorithms [are still recommending pages](#) that promote vaccine dis/misinformation, and that the number of groups spreading this disinformation [has more than doubled since April 2021](#). [Prominent anti-vaxxers still remain on the platform](#), spreading harmful lies to millions of users, despite public calls for their removal. We do not know the full scope of anti-vaccine conspiracies spreading on Facebook, or if certain geographic areas are more affected than others, or if age, gender, race, ethnicity, profession, income, or education play a role in COVID disinformation. The lack of shared data and transparency to researchers and the public is deadly.

What we do know is that Facebook could help save lives if it would release data to help answer these critical questions. We do know that Facebook's internal study of vaccine hesitancy among its users [reportedly](#) shows that a large amount of content that does not break the rules may be causing harm in certain communities. We do know that this study and the supporting data has been kept secret from the public. We also do know that content casting doubt on the vaccine was [the most popular post](#) on Facebook in the first quarter of 2021. And, we do know that the need for Facebook to share its data is urgent, as daily infections have increased at a rate of greater than 400 percent from just a month ago.

Facebook claims it is taking responsible steps toward removing, labeling, and/or down-ranking disinformation from its platform, yet keeps this critical information shrouded in secrecy. **As public health leaders who recommend policies grounded in the principles of evidentiary science, we implore Facebook to responsibly disclose this data. Share what you know about COVID-19 disinformation with independent public health researchers so they can study it, evaluate its impact, and recommend solutions to the company and the public health community.**

Let us work together to prevent even more suffering and death, particularly amongst some of the most vulnerable members of our society: our children. Put saving lives ahead of a narrow-minded view of your business. Rather than allowing COVID to continue to kill us, help us bring this national nightmare to an end. Facebook, disclose your data NOW.

Sincerely,

Céline Gounder, MD, ScM, FIDSA

Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine and Infectious Diseases, NYU Grossman School of Medicine and Bellevue Hospital Center

Kavita Patel, MD, MSHS

Physician
Brookings Institution

Craig Spencer, MD, MPH

Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine and Population and Family Health, Columbia University Medical Center

Robert Davidson, MD

Executive Director, The Committee to Protect Health Care

Matifadza Hlatshwayo Davis, MD, MPH

Director of Health, City of St. Louis Department of Health

Kali Cyrus, MD, MPH

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Medicine, Johns Hopkins Medicine

Meenakshi Bewtra, MD, MPH, PhD

Assistant Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology
University of Pennsylvania

Oni Blackstock, MD, MHS

Founder and Executive Director, Health Justice

Uché Blackstock, MD

Founder and CEO, Advancing Health Equity LLC

Ebony Hilton, MD

Anesthesiologist
GOODSTOCK Consulting, LLC

Joia Crear Perry, MD

President, National Birth Equity Collaborative

Stella Safo, MD, MPH

Founder and Executive Director, Just Equity for Health

Megan Ranney, MD, MPH

Emergency Physician
Associate Dean, School of Public Health, Brown University

Elizabeth Clayborne, MD, MA Bioethics
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine
University of Maryland School of Medicine

Alister Francois Martin, MD, MPP
Assistant Professor, Harvard Medical School

Dara Kass, MD
Physician, Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Seth Trueger, MD, MPH
Emergency Physician, Northwestern Medicine
Digital Media Editor, JAMA Network Open

Riana Elyse Anderson, PhD, LCP
Assistant Professor, University of Michigan

Tsion Firew, MD, MPH
Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine, Columbia University

Toni Biskup, MD, MPH
Hospitalist, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Dona Kim Murphey, MD, PhD
Physician scientist
Doctors in Politics

Krishnan Narasimhan, MD
President and Board Chair, Doctors for America

Justin Lowenthal, MD-PhD Candidate
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
Board of Directors/Director of Partnerships, Doctors for America

Sujan Gogu, DO, FAAFP, CAQ Sports Medicine, CAQ Pain Medicine
Physician
Founding Circle of Doctors in Politics

LJ Punch, MD
Acute Care Surgeon
Executive Director, The T

Arghavan Salles, MD, PhD
Special Advisor for DEI Programs, Stanford University

Joseph Sakran, MD, MPH, MPA
Director, Emergency General Surgery
Johns Hopkins Hospital

Manisha Sharma, MD, FAAFP
Senior Medical Director
AAFP, AMA, CMA, DFA, CentiVox, Civic Health Alliance

Anand Swaminathan, MD, MPH
Emergency Physician, St. Joseph's University Medical Center

Lakshman Swamy, MD, MBA
Assistant Professor, Population & Quantitative Health Sciences, UMass Medical School
Instructor in Medicine, Harvard Medical School
Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Cambridge Health Alliance

Hussain Lalani, MD, MPH
Internal Medicine Physician

Steven McDonald, MD
Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine NYP / Columbia University

Manish Garg, MD
Emergency Medicine Physician
American College of Academic International Medicine and World Academic Council of
Emergency Medicine

Annalee Baker, MD
Emergency Physician, NYU Langone Health

Howard P. Forman
Professor of Radiology, Public Health, Economics, & Management, Yale University

Angie Bakke, MBA
Executive Director, Doctors for America

David Scales, MPhil, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Weill Cornell Medicine

Duncan Maru, MD, PhD
Epidemiologist and Physician
Senior Faculty, Arnhold Institute for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount
Sinai
Co-Founder, Possible

Sarah Kureshi, MD, MPH

Assistant Professor and Vice Chair of Education, Dept. of Family Medicine
Georgetown University Medical Center

