

ageofautism.com

A site publishing articles in support of the false claim that vaccines can cause autism. The site has also published false information relating to COVID-19.



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.

Score: 30/100

Ownership and Financing

Age of Autism is owned by a Connecticut-based nonprofit called Autism Age, which was created in 2015. The group's most recent tax filing was a 2018 Form 990-N, which the Internal Revenue Service states is for "small organizations that receive less than \$50,000."

The site solicits donations. It does not run advertising.

Content

AgeOfAutism.com describes itself in a banner on the site as the "Daily Web Newspaper of the Autism Epidemic." The site states in a "Letter from the Editor" that it is "published to give voice to those who believe autism is an environmentally induced illness, that it is treatable, and that children can recover."

Content on the site primarily consists of opinionated stories about vaccines and autism that seek to cast doubt on established scientific evidence that no connection exists between the two.

Credibility

The site's mission is founded on an assortment of unproven, questionable, and false scientific beliefs pertaining to autism and skepticism about the benefits of vaccines.

AgeOfAutism.com has repeatedly promoted a since-retracted 1998 study published in the medical journal *The Lancet* by Andrew Wakefield, which sought to establish a connection between the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism. For example, a February 2019 article stated that "the study by Wakefield and twelve other brilliant doctors and researchers of gastroenterology, neurology, psychiatry,

- ✗ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✗ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- ✓ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✗ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✓ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✓ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- ✓ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

and radiology, done in 1998, showed concerning connections, and those connections led to a debate that continues today.”

In fact, the Wakefield study, which only involved 12 participants, has been refuted by numerous larger studies published in the years since. The U.S. Centers for Disease and Control, for example, states on its website, “There is no link between vaccines and autism,” citing multiple controlled, peer-reviewed studies as evidence. Wakefield was barred from practicing medicine in the UK in 2010.

Kim Rossi, Age of Autism’s Managing Editor, told NewsGuard in an August 2019 email, “We are proud of our record of defending the integrity of Andrew Wakefield who continues to be maliciously represented in the mainstream media.”

The site repeatedly promotes the claim of a causal connection between vaccines and autism. For example, a July 2018 article pointed to “150 published papers that show both that vaccines can cause autism, and how they cause autism.” In fact, many of the papers have been retracted or widely criticized because of questionable methodology, according to the website Retraction Watch, which covers retractions and transparency issues in scientific papers.

A February 2019 story on the site stated that “The United States government in its Vaccine Injury Compensation Program [VICP], however, acknowledged the connection between vaccines and autism on a number of occasions.” This is false. In 2009, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims’ 2009 Omnibus Autism Proceeding denied any causal link between vaccines and autism, which had been alleged in thousands of claims to the VICP from 1999 to 2007. The VICP has not agreed to any compensation on the basis of such a connection.

In 2020, the site published false claims related to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in a January 2020 article titled “Coronavirus Can Be Caused By Viral Interference, A Known Result Of Flu Vaccines,” the site falsely claimed the COVID-19 virus is linked to the flu

shot. The site backed this conclusion by misrepresenting an April 2018 study published in the journal *Vaccine*. The AgeofAutism.com article said of the study, “The conclusion, after saying that indeed those who are vaccinated DO get more acute pathogen-creating illness, like CORONAVIRUS, that should make us all wonder if there are any connections here. The acknowledging that patients DO get ill after flu shots from these other viruses (VIRAL INTERFERENCE) is priceless yet disturbing.”

In fact, while the study found an association between getting a flu shot and a slightly higher risk of other respiratory infections, in children, it did not conclude that the shot caused those infections. The study’s lead author, Dr. Sharon Rikin, an assistant professor of medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, told FactCheck.org in April 2020 that “just because we found an association between flu vaccines and acute respiratory infections does not mean that the flu vaccine actually caused there to be a higher risk of infections.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states on its website that the preponderance of scientific evidence suggests “that influenza vaccination does not, in fact, make people more susceptible to other respiratory infections.” Moreover, fact-checking articles published in 2020 by USA Today, HealthFeedback.org, and LeadStories.com concluded that there is no evidence that the flu vaccine increases the risk of infection.

Age of Autism’s managing editor, Kim Rossi, did not respond to a June 2020 email from NewsGuard seeking comment on this article.

The site has also promoted the false claim that the COVID-19 virus was created in a lab. An April 2020 article, titled “Vinu Arumugham: SARS-CoV2 Unlikely Bioweapon Likely Sloppy Experiment Gone Awry,” asserted that the COVID-19 virus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, was the result of laboratory experiments in the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China combining HIV with a coronavirus similar to the one that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS. The

article stated that “novel recombinant SARS-like viruses can be created with HIV-1 derived inserts. Such novel coronaviruses would have been exposed to laboratory workers and animals during handling ... thus resulting in SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19.”

Scientific evidence has refuted the claim that the COVID-19 virus was engineered or created in a lab. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” In an April 2020 statement, the U.S. intelligence community said that it “concur[s] with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.”

There is also no evidence that the COVID-19 virus includes “HIV-1 derived inserts,” as the article claimed. This claim originated with a study posted in February 2020 to a website called BioRxiv.org, which publishes scientific studies before they have undergone peer review. According to a February 2020 article on the fact-checking website HealthFeedback.org, the study’s finding that there was a similarity between the COVID-19 virus and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) “was detected using extremely short protein sequences, a practice that often gives rise to false positive results,” noting that those same sequences are found in many other organisms. The authors of the study withdrew it from BioRxiv.org just two days after it was published.

Vinu Arumugham, the article’s author, disputed NewsGuard’s determination and said that scientists who have insisted that the COVID-19 virus has natural origins are trying to protect the Wuhan Institute of Virology. “The reason is if the Chinese lab is investigated, all US/European labs will go under the microscope next,” he said. “These scientists are terrified that all the skeletons in their closets are going to pile out.”

The site has also repeatedly promoted the work of Christopher Exley, a Keele University professor who has expressed the scientifically unsupported belief that aluminium adjuvants — which are substances added to vaccines to help accelerate the immune system’s

response in producing antibodies — can cause autism. In four stories between January and April 2019, the AgeOfAutism.com cited Exley and his work, primarily a 2018 study titled “Aluminum in Brain Tissue in Autism.”

Rossi told NewsGuard in an email, “Christopher Exley is still hugely respected in his field even if his research is being persecuted.”

However, according to the Sunday Times, the paper has been criticized for its lack of a control group. Moreover, Exley has been criticized for potential conflicts of interest because of his sources of funding, primarily the Children’s Medical Safety Research Institute, an anti-vaccine group, the Times reported.

The U.K. National Health Service states on its website, “The amount of aluminium used in killed vaccines is very, very small. No harmful effects have been seen with vaccines that contain an aluminium-based adjuvant.”

Because AgeOfAutism.com repeatedly publishes articles and headlines promoting baseless and misleading health claims, NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false information, does not gather and present information responsibly, and fails to avoid deceptive headlines.

Asked for comment about NewsGuard’s finding, Rossi said in an August 2019 email: “We are accustomed to being disparaged on a regular basis, as were those who spoke out against big tobacco, Vioxx, baby powder, and other products.”

Given the site’s clear disclosure of its mission and perspective, NewsGuard has determined that the site distinguishes between news and opinion responsibly.

Age of Autism does not state a corrections policy, and NewsGuard did not find corrections on the site.

Rossi, the site’s managing editor, did not respond to NewsGuard’s question about the site’s lack of corrections.

nonprofit owner on a Donate page. However, the site does not include information about the group's donors — which does not meet NewsGuard's standard for nonprofits' disclosure of ownership and financing.

The Contact Us page includes names and email addresses for the site's editorial staff, including top editors. The site's original content typically includes the name of the writer.

Rossi, the site's managing editor, did not answer questions about the site's lack of disclosure about donors in her response to NewsGuard.

The site does not run advertising.

History

The Age of Autism website was created in 2007.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on June 10, 2020, to include comments from one of the site's contributors. It was previously updated on June 2, 2020, to include examples of the site's COVID-19 coverage.

Written by: [Kendrick McDonald](#)

Edited by: [John Gregory](#), [Eric Efron](#), [Richard Sambrook](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

Sources

Ownership and Financing

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<https://www.ageofautism.com/contact-us.html>
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Content

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Credibility

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Transparency

<https://www.ageofautism.com/contact-us.html>

<https://www.ageofautism.com/donate.html>

History

<https://whois.com/whois/ageofautism.com>