

ftbagency.com

The website for a group called the Freedom to Breathe Agency, which has published false and misleading information about the use of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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

Score: 20/100

Ownership and Financing

FTBAgency.com does not disclose its ownership and NewsGuard was unable to determine who or what owns it. The website's domain was registered in June 2020.

The site does not run advertisements.

Content

On its Resources page, FTBAgency.com says that "we must protect our birth right to breathe. This is NOT negotiable. FTBA is an agency designed to stop face mask orders and human rights oppression from spreading nationwide and globally."

The site features sections titled Resources, Your Tools, Merchandise, and Get Involved. Most of the website's content appears in the Resources and Your Tools sections, and includes messages and videos that advance views that face masks do not prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The Your Tools section of FTBAgency.com encourages readers to download and print a "face mask exempt card," which states that, under the Americans with Disabilities Act, a person does not need to wear a face mask in public if they have a disability. The card also emphasizes that people are not required to disclose their disabilities to authorities under the ADA.

The Resources section, which features the headline "Importance of Breathing" at the top of the page, links to published quotations and comments from medical professionals that the website says support its views against the use of face coverings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Credibility

FTBAgency.com has published several false claims about the supposed risks of wearing face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The website's Resources

✗ 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.](#)

page stated, for example, that “wearing a face mask is an unhealthy obstruction of oxygen flow that can lead to hypoxemia (low oxygen level in the blood) and hypoxia (low oxygen level in the tissue). Both of these conditions are health threatening and can permanently damage the brain, lungs, heart and about any other organ.”

The website does not include any evidence to support this claim. While it is true that hypoxemia can indeed “be fatal if severe in the short term and can affect the heart or brain if it persists over a long period of time,” according to the Cleveland Clinic’s website, the claim that wearing a face covering can cause hypoxia or hypoxemia is unfounded. Dr. Shelley Payne, the director of the LaMontagne Center for Infectious Disease at the University of Texas at Austin, told Agence France-Presse in a May 2020 fact check that “a properly fitted mask will not cause hypoxia. The World Health Organization notes on its website that while “the prolonged use of medical masks can be uncomfortable ... it does not lead to CO₂ intoxication nor oxygen deficiency.”

Government agencies have made one notable exception to this guidance when describing N95 masks, which are respirators intended to protect health care workers from inhaling hazardous substances. A spokesperson for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told fact-checking site Snopes in May 2020 that carbon dioxide can accumulate in N95 respirators if the masks are worn continuously for hours. However, the spokesperson said, “to fix the problem of breathing too much CO₂ that has built up within the respirator’s facepiece, a worker can simply remove the respirator.”

The CDC does not recommend that the general public use N95 respirators to protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus. Neither the World Health Organization nor the CDC mention hypoxia or hypoxemia as a potential side effect of wearing face masks in their COVID-19 health guidance.

The website's Resources page also relayed a retired neurosurgeon's false claim that wearing masks can increase the potential for contracting viruses. The page quoted Dr. Russell Blaylock, a retired neurosurgeon, as saying, "There is no scientific evidence that masks are effective. If you are not sick, you should not wear a face mask." The quote links to a May 2020 article on Technocracy.news in which Blaylock claimed, without evidence, that "by wearing a mask, the exhaled viruses will not be able to escape and will concentrate in the nasal passages, enter the olfactory nerves and travel into the brain."

Sarah Stanley, an infectious diseases professor at the University of California, Berkeley, told The Associated Press in May 2020 that Blaylock's claim is false. "Breathing out the virus is not going to appreciably change the amount that is there," Stanley told The AP. "Therefore, there should be no reason why wearing a mask would increase your chance of infection in the brain." The University of Nebraska Medical Center writes on its website that "the idea that wearing a mask after you've been exposed to COVID-19 will increase your level of infection is a myth. There is no evidence to support this self-contamination claim."

Emerging evidence, including a June 2020 study published in The Lancet, an April 2020 study in Nature Medicine, and a May 2020 study in BMJ Global Health, suggests that the usage of face masks can curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The website also has misrepresented statements of government agencies and health experts to advance claims that masks are not necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Resources page, for example, published a February 2020 tweet from U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, saying "Masks are not effective in preventing the general public from catching coronavirus." The website also quoted National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci as saying on a March 2020 episode of CBS News' "60 Minutes," "People should not be walking around wearing masks. Masks do not provide the protection people think they do."

While the website accurately quoted Fauci and Adams, it failed to say that the experts made their statements in the earlier stages of the pandemic, and before the government changed its guidance to recommend that the general public wear face coverings to prevent the spread of the virus.

In April 2020 — two months before FTBAgency.com launched — the CDC formally advised Americans to wear face coverings in public, citing new data that showed asymptomatic people could transmit the virus.

Several other health experts have since advised the general public to wear face coverings as protection from potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus. The Cleveland Clinic states on its website that “because we don’t know for sure who’s infected” with the COVID-19 virus, “the best option is for all of us to wear masks.” In a June 2020 article on the University of California, San Francisco’s website, UCSF epidemiologist Dr. Peter Chin-Hong said that “I think there’s enough evidence to say that the best benefit is for people who have COVID-19 to protect them from giving COVID-19 to other people, but you’re still going to benefit from wearing a mask if you don’t have COVID-19.”

In a June 2020 interview with The Street, Fauci said that the public was told to forgo face coverings at the beginning of the pandemic because “we were concerned that it was at a time when personal protective equipment, including the N95 masks and the surgical masks, were in very short supply.”

FTBAgency.com also publishes several versions of a “face mask exemption card,” which is available for readers to download, on its undated Your Tools page. The card states, “I AM EXEMPT FROM ANY ORDINANCE REQUIRING FACE MASK USAGE IN PUBLIC.” The card adds, “Wearing a face mask poses a mental and/or physical risk to me. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I am not required to disclose my condition to you.” Some of the cards urge users to call the “Department of Justice ADA Violation information line” if a user is told to put on a face mask inside a business.

After FTBAgency.com published the cards in June 2020, the Department of Justice issued a statement calling the cards “fraudulent.” While it is true that the Americans with Disabilities Act does not allow businesses to ask customers about specific disabilities, the DOJ said, “the ADA does not provide a blanket exemption to people with disabilities from complying with legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operations.”

Headlines for links on the site’s Resources page have also advanced the same false claims as articles and videos, including “CDC — There is no scientific evidence for healthy people wearing masks,” “FDA — ‘Even a properly fitted N95 mask does not prevent illness or death,’” and “CAL-OSHA Regulations: ‘Cloth face coverings do not protect against COVID -19.’”

Because FTBAgency.com has published false information about the use of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic, NewsGuard has determined that the website repeatedly publishes false information, does not gather and present information responsibly, and does not avoid the use of deceptive headlines.

The site does not publish a corrections policy, and NewsGuard was unable to find examples of corrections.

NewsGuard was unable to reach FTBAgency.com for comment on its editorial standards, corrections policy, and examples of misleading and false information. The website does not provide contact information.

While the content on FTBAgency.com is uniformly opinionated and critical of the use of face masks to protect people from COVID-19, the website clearly states its mission on the homepage and elsewhere on the site. The website’s Resources page says that “FTBA is an agency designed to stop face mask orders and human rights oppression from spreading nationwide and globally,”

Because FTBAgency.com discloses its overall point of view and does not label its content as news, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not

handle the difference between news and opinion irresponsibly.

Transparency The Freedom to Breathe Agency does not disclose who owns it, identify its editorial leadership or content creators.

The site does not run advertisements.

NewsGuard was unable to reach FTBAgency.com for comment on its lack of disclosure of ownership and lack of information about editorial leaders and content creators. The site does not publish any contact information, and NewsGuard was unable to find any email addresses or telephone numbers associated with the site.

History The domain for FTBAgency.com was registered in June 2020.

Written by: [Anicka Slachta](#)

Edited by: [Amy Westfeldt](#)

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

Sources

Ownership and Financing <https://lookup.icann.org/lookup>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162437/https://www.ftbagency.com/>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728163006/https://www.ftbagency.com/merchandise.php>

Content <https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162437/https://www.ftbagency.com/>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162609/https://www.ftbagency.com/resources.php>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162930/https://www.ftbagency.com/your-tools.php>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728163006/https://www.ftbagency.com/merchandise.php>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728163043/https://www.ftbagency.com/get-involved.php>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162609/https://www.ftbagency.com/resources.php>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162930/https://www.ftbagency.com/your-tools.php>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17727-hypoxemia/management-and-treatment>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control/n95-respirators-surgical-masks-and-face-masks#s1>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/05/30/fact-check-wearing-face-mask-not-cause-hypoxia-hypercapnia/5260106002/>

<https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2020/it-is-not-true-that-masks-cause-hypoxia-this-hoax-is-now-viral-and-dangerous/>

<https://factcheck.afp.com/using-face-masks-does-not-cause-hypoxia>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/53108405>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/06/13/spate-new-research-supports-wearing-masks-control-coronavirus-spread/>

<http://rc.rcjournal.com/content/55/5/569>

<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/masks-dangerous-health/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wear-cloth-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-face-masks-what-you-need-to-know>

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/5-myths-about-coronavirus-and-face-masks-debunked/>

<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/06/417906/still-confused-about-masks-heres-science-behind-how-face-masks-prevent>

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31142-9/fulltext#%20](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31142-9/fulltext#%20)

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0843-2>

<https://gh.bmj.com/content/5/5/e002794>

<https://apnews.com/afs:Content:8949990001>
<https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/3-common-mask-myths-debunked-by-an-infectious-diseases-expert>
<https://www.technocracy.news/blaylock-face-masks-pose-serious-risks-to-the-healthy/>
<https://apnews.com/afs:Content:8949990001>
<https://www.factcheck.org/2020/05/outdated-fauci-video-on-face-masks-shared-out-of-context/>
<https://www.thestreet.com/video/dr-fauci-masks-changing-directive-coronavirus>
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-18/>
https://www.ada.gov/covid-19_flyer_alert.html
https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/06/covid-mask-exemption-cards-are-not-government?utm_source=govdelivery
<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-warns-inaccurate-flyers-and-postings-regarding-use-face-masks-and>
<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/valid-face-mask-exemption-card/>
<https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2020/jun/26/instagram-posts/face-mask-exempt-card-doesnt-exempt-you-wearing-ma/>
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/07/15/fact-check-ada-disability-rights-and-face-mask-requirements/5391830002/>
<https://www.today.com/health/viral-face-mask-exemption-cards-are-fake-doj-warns-t185181>
<https://time.com/5860715/face-mask-exempt-cards-fake-coronavirus/>
<https://www.newsweek.com/face-mask-exemption-cards-fake-1513402>
<https://www.nbcboston.com/investigations/consumer/nbc-boston-responds/justice-department-issues-warning-about-fake-face-mask-exemption-cards/2158414/>
<https://www.inc.com/brit-morse/face-mask-freedom-breathe-americans-with-disabilities-act.html>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/28/us/fake-face-mask-exemption-card-coronavirus.html>

<https://abc7chicago.com/face-mask-exemption-card-fake-exempt-ftba-freedom-to-breathe-agency/6274213/>
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/26/us/face-mask-exemption-cards-doj-fraudulent-trnd/index.html>

Transparency

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162437/https://www.ftbagency.com/>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200728162609/https://www.ftbagency.com/resources.php>

History

<https://lookup.icann.org/lookup>