

covid19refusers.com

A website run by an anti-vaccination activist that publishes false information and conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic.



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

Ownership and Financing

The website does not clearly disclose its ownership. A domain privacy service is listed as COVID19Refusers.com's registrant. However, COVID19Refusers.com appears to be owned by anti-vaccine advocate Larry Cook, who is identified on the website as its "admin." Cook's profile page on the website identifies Cook as "an anti-vaccine, anti-medical mandate activist who also owns the brand Stop Mandatory Vaccination," implying that he also owns COVID19Refusers.com.

A Contact link on the site takes readers to the contact form for StopMandatoryVaccination.com, the website owned by Cook that NewsGuard has determined publishes misinformation about vaccines.

According to Cook's personal website, he also runs the websites BiomedicalTreatmentForAutism.com and TheVaccineFreeChild.com, both of which promote the false claim that vaccines cause autism. Cook also authored a holistic health book, "The Beginner's Guide to Natural Living," in 2005.

The biography page on Cook's site states that he was the executive director of the California Naturopathic Doctors Association from 2012 to 2016, although an NBC News story from September 2019 noted that he has no medical training.

The website does not run display advertisements. However, the website's Terms of Service page states, "we may receive money or products from any link or link in a product image on this website."

Content

COVID19Refusers.com functions as a social media network in which users create and maintain profiles, write and publish blog posts, and post publicly to the site's News Feed, which is featured on the website's

Score: 25/100

-  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.](#)

homepage. On a Writers page, the website says, “TOGETHER, we can educate the masses why we reject the COVID-19 narrative and if enough of us reject it, stop the incoming tyranny! Join us!”

Content on the site is divided into sections including Blog, Courses, Groups, Members, and Writers. Blog posts, which are produced by users and reviewed by website administrator Larry Cook prior to publication, advance conspiracy theories and pseudoscience surrounding the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Typical posts in the section include “How To Create Social Change in the Face of Elite Dominance,” “Why I Refuse to Wear a Mask (And You Should Too),” and “Plandemics, Vaccine Mandates, Riots and the Deep State vs President Trump, Qanon and Us!”

The Courses section features a 12-part online course called “The Vaccine Free Parenting MasterClass,” which is described as “a parent’s guide to raising healthy vaccine free children.” The course is free and includes lessons such as “Natural immunity versus vaccination,” “Vaccine ‘science,’” and “Join the fight to end medical tyranny.”

The website’s Groups section acts as a forum for users to discuss particular topics surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, with groups including “COVID-19 REFUSERS” and “Qanon,” a reference to a movement whose supporters believe far-right conspiracy theories about a “deep state” plotting to overthrow U.S. President Donald Trump.

Credibility

The site has repeatedly published false claims about purported treatments and cures for the COVID-19 virus, as well as on the efficacy of public health measures such as wearing masks.

For example, a July 2020 post titled “Front Line Doctors Tell The World That Hydroxychloroquine Prevents & Cures COVID-19,” promoted the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a cure for the COVID-19 virus. The article included a transcript of a July 2020 news conference by a group called America’s Frontline

Doctors, in which Texas physician Dr. Stella Immanuel claimed that a combination of hydroxychloroquine, zinc, and the antibiotic Zithromax was “a cure for COVID.”

“I came here to Washington, D.C., to tell America nobody needs to get sick,” the article stated, quoting Immanuel. “This virus has a cure. It is called hydroxychloroquine, zinc, and Zithromax. I know you people want to talk about a mask. Hello? You don’t need a mask. There is a cure.” Immanuel called any study that did not prove hydroxychloroquine’s efficacy against the virus “fake science.”

The article omitted the abundance of scientific evidence and research published in 2020 that has found that the drug has not been effective at treating COVID-19. For example, a large U.K. trial that had enrolled 4,600 patients was cut short in June 2020 after the researchers concluded that patients hospitalized with COVID-19 were not benefiting from the drug. In a statement issued in June 2020, Martin Landray, the team’s deputy chief investigator, said that the study results were “quite clear — hydroxychloroquine does not reduce the risk of death among hospitalized patients with this new disease.”

Another trial, which involved 400 non-hospitalized patients and was conducted at the University of Minnesota, found that hydroxychloroquine did not decrease the severity of COVID-19 symptoms over 14 days any better than a placebo drug.

In June 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration revoked an emergency use authorization (EUA) that it had issued for hydroxychloroquine in March 2020.

“Based on its ongoing analysis of the EUA and emerging scientific data, the FDA determined that chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine are unlikely to be effective in treating COVID-19,” the agency reported in a statement on its website.

Another COVID19Refusers post from July 2020, titled “Here’s The Science That Shows Face Mask Mandates Are Political And Not Medical,” advanced

unsubstantiated claims about the dangers of wearing face masks to protect people from spreading the COVID-19 virus.

“There is a danger of masks reducing oxygen levels and increasing levels of carbon dioxide to unsafe levels,” the article stated. Citing a September 2018 study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Scientific Reports*, the post noted that hypercapnia — the elevation of carbon dioxide in blood and tissue — “is associated with increased risk of mortality. Recent studies have shown that hypercapnia adversely affects innate immunity, host defense, lung edema clearance and cell proliferation.”

The study in question was a lab study that did not involve humans, and it did not consider hypercapnia in the context of face masks or coverings. In May 2020, a representative from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) told Reuters, “it is unlikely that wearing a mask will cause hypercapnia.” The representative noted that although carbon dioxide will build up in the mask over time, particularly if it is a medical-grade respirator, “the level of CO₂ likely to build up in the mask is mostly tolerable to people exposed to it.”

The Mayo Clinic says on its website that cloth face masks are a “very breathable” option for reducing the spread of the COVID-19 virus in public, noting that “carbon dioxide will freely diffuse through your mask as you breathe.” In a June 2020 blog post on the American Lung Association’s website, pulmonologist David G. Hill wrote, “we wear masks all day long in the hospital. The masks are designed to be breathed through and there is no evidence that low oxygen levels occur.”

The same post on COVID19Refusers.com falsely claimed that “face masks restrict the elimination of virus, recirculating the virus into the nasal/sinus and upper respiratory passages and can infect the brain.” The post quoted retired neurosurgeon Russell Blaylock, who wrote in a May 2020 article on the website *Technocracy.news*, 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.”

In a May 2020 interview with The Associated Press, Sarah Stanley, an associate professor of infectious diseases and vaccinology at the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health, said that there is no evidence that wearing a face mask will trap the COVID-19 virus in the nose and lead to an infection in the brain. “Breathing out the virus is not going to appreciably change the amount that is there,” she said. “Therefore, there should be no reason why wearing a mask would increase your chance of infection in the brain.”

A growing body of evidence suggests that wearing masks is beneficial in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. One study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in July 2020, tracked infection rates among nearly 10,000 employees at Mass General Brigham Hospital before and after a mask mandate, and concluded that “universal masking at MGB was associated with a significantly lower rate of SARS-CoV-2 positive among health workers.”

A July 2020 study published by the CDC followed the transmission of the COVID-19 virus at a Missouri hair salon and found that “broader implementation of face covering policies could mitigate the spread of infection in the general population.” In a July statement, CDC Director Dr. Robert R. Redfield said, “cloth face coverings are one of the most powerful weapons we have to slow and stop the spread of the virus.”

A July 2020 COVID19Refusers.com post, titled “Dr. Bartlett Clinical Success: Inhaled Steroid Budesonide Prevents COVID-19 Death!”, promoted Texas doctor Richard Bartlett’s widely shared theory that inhaled budesonide — a steroid often used to treat asthma — could cure the virus and had been used successfully to minimize deaths in other countries.

“He combined budesonide with zinc and other protocols and so far has had no COVID-19 deaths!!!” the article said of Bartlett. “Japan, Taiwan and Singapore have

used inhaled steroids with excellent success to treat COVID-19 patients and that is one reason why their death rate is so incredibly low. Dr. Bartlett also says there is no need for a COVID vaccine and there is no need to be afraid!”

The World Health Organization told FactCheck.org in August 2020, “there is no evidence suggesting that inhaled corticosteroid[s] have reduced case fatality rate in Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and Iceland.” Tsung-Mei Cheng, a health policy research analyst at Princeton University, told Fact Check that she had “never” heard of such a treatment being used to control fatalities in Taiwan, noting that the country had prepared itself well for future crises after the SARS outbreak in the early 2000s.

WHO also said that “[t]here is limited information on possible effect of inhaled steroids and there is no evidence there is any advantage to use this route of administration to improve patient outcomes.”

The agency did say that, based on available evidence, steroids delivered orally or via a shot might reduce mortality in “severe and critically ill patients requiring respiratory support.” Another steroid, dexamethasone, was recommended by the National Institutes of Health’s COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines Panel in July 2020 for treating patients who required supplemental oxygen. But the panel recommended only oral or intravenous delivery of the drug, not the inhalation method that Bartlett promoted.

“[T]here is no definitive evidence to support the use of inhaled corticosteroids like budesonide for the treatment of COVID-19,” Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security, told FactCheck.org. “While there is biological plausibility that such a treatment could have a beneficial role it can only be determined in a proper clinical trial.”

Because COVID19Refusers.com regularly published false, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic, NewsGuard has determined that

the website repeatedly publishes false content, does not gather and present information responsibly, and does not avoid deceptive headlines.

The website does not have a corrections policy, and NewsGuard was unable to find any corrections.

Three NewsGuard emails sent to site administrator Larry Cook, inquiring about the website's corrections policy and examples of false information and headlines, were not returned.

Although there is no labeled opinion content on the website, many blog posts on COVID19Refusers.com contain authors' opinions about the pandemic. However, because the site clearly states on its Writers page that part of its purpose is to "challenge the pandemic narrative" with "a constant flow of new and relevant stories," NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion irresponsibly.

Transparency

The website does not clearly disclose its ownership by Larry Cook. Cook's leadership of the site, however, is mentioned in a number of places, including on his profile and in his screen name, Larry Cook Admin. Cook's profile page leads to a contact form for him through StopMandatoryVaccination.com.

Authors of blog posts are identified, and users can find their profiles on the website. However, the profiles generally only include photographs and website usernames and do not provide biographical or contact information, which does not meet NewsGuard's standard for providing information about content creators.

The website says in its Terms of Service page that "we may receive money or products from any link or link in a product image on this website." NewsGuard located a July 2020 blog post on the site that promoted a supplement called zeolite, and offered users a 20 percent discount for a supplement called Pure Body Extra Strength Supplement. The post said, "Pure Body Extra Strength will give you a way to free yourself of toxins, alkalize the body, strengthen your immunity and

much more.” A link at the top of the story, titled “PURCHASE RIGHT HERE,” takes users to the website of the manufacturer, Touchstone Essentials.

The post does not disclose a financial relationship between COVID19Refusers.com and the supplement’s manufacturer. Apart from the one post, NewsGuard did not find any advertisements or other promotional articles, which is why it has determined that the advertising criterion does not apply to COVID19Refusers.com.

Three emails to website administrator Larry Cook about the site’s failure to disclose ownership, failure to provide information about content creators, and about the article that promoted the zeolite supplement, were not returned.

History COVID19Refusers.com’ domain was registered in May 2020.

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

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Ownership and
Financing

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