

The website of Italian blogger Claudio Messori, which has published false and unsubstantiated health claims, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.

 **20 / 100**

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

-  Does not repeatedly publish false content 22 points
-  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
- N/A** 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. [Learn More.](#)

## Ownership and Financing

The site is owned by ByoBlu Edizioni Srls, a private company based in Milan, which, according to documents provided by the Italian Business Registry, is owned by Messori. Messori served as a former communication consultant for the anti-establishment Five Star Movement until 2014.

The site solicits donations from its readers and sells subscriptions to its content through the site.

ByoBlu.com does not publish advertisements.

## Content

ByoBlu.com, which describes itself as "The Citizens' TV" ("La TV dei Cittadini"), combines short articles with video reports by ByoBlu staff and commentary by Messoria.

Content is organized into sections such as Front Page (Primo Piano), Programmes (Programmi), Podcast, Shop (Negozio), and About ByoBlu (Su ByoBlu). News is organized by topics including Politics (Politica), Economy and Finance (Economia e Finanza), European Union (Unione Europea), Health (Salute), and COVID-19.

## Credibility

The site has repeatedly published unsubstantiated medical claims, including false information about the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines.

For example, an April 2021 article headlined "Pfizer vaccine, a 2-year-old American child dies after second shot" ("Vaccino Pfizer, bambina americana di due anni muore dopo la seconda dose"), reported "the death of a 2-year-old girl following the administration of the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine on February 25, 2021. On March 1, however, the little girl was hospitalized. Three days later, death." The article added, "It is now expected that light will be shed on the cause of the child's death and whether this can be directly linked to the administration of the Pfizer vaccine."

("Il Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, il programma statunitense per la sicurezza dei vaccini, ha riportato qualche giorno fa la notizia della morte di una bambina di 2 anni, a seguito della somministrazione della seconda dose del vaccino Pfizer, lo scorso 25 febbraio 2021. Il 1 marzo, però, la piccola è stata ricoverata d'urgenza. Tre giorni dopo, la morte.")

The article based its claim on a report that was submitted to VAERS, or the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, a database run jointly by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

While VAERS' website says it seeks to serve as a "national early warning system to detect possible safety problems in U.S.-licensed vaccines," reports submitted to VAERS are unverified and can be submitted by anyone, without including their name or contact information, or any proof that the vaccine was responsible for an adverse effect. Indeed, the database includes events that lack a plausible link to a vaccine, such as someone dying in a car accident on their drive home after being vaccinated.

The VAERS website is clear about the database's limitations, including a disclaimer that states that VAERS data "cannot be used to determine if a vaccine caused or contributed to an adverse event or illness" and "cannot be used to determine rates of adverse events." Dr. Tom Shimabukuro, deputy director of the CDC's Immunization Safety Office, told NewsGuard in an April 2021 phone interview, "As a passive surveillance system, VAERS is not designed to determine cause and effect."

The ByoBlu.com article did not provide context about the limitations of the VAERS system.

Moreover, according to a May 2021 fact-check by USA Today, the VAERS report about the 2-year-old who supposedly died after getting her second shot in February 2021 was "not authentic" and "no longer exists." CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nordlund told USA Today that the report was removed from VAERS' system.

"We wrote about a fact that was really reported to the VAERS," Virginia Camerieri, ByoBlu's director, told NewsGuard in a December 2021 email, in response to questions about the article about the child's alleged death.

ByoBlu.com updated the article after its email exchange with NewsGuard, adding a note that said that the report about the child's death is "no longer available." However, the article did not make clear that the CDC had said the report was inaccurate, merely saying,

"We believe it is likely that, over the course of the eight months that have passed, the report has been verified by the relevant American government bodies. In any case, it was an existing report." "Riteniamo probabile che, nel corso degli otto mesi intercorsi, la segnalazione sia stata verificata dagli organi governativi statunitensi preposti. In ogni caso si trattava di una segnalazione esistente di cui siamo in grado di mostrarvi la fotografia allegata a questo stesso articolo").

In an October 2020 video interview headlined "Swabs, lockdown, face masks: everything they did not allow me to say on TV" ("Tamponi, lockdown, mascherine: tutto quello che non mi hanno fatto dire in TV"), Italian researcher Stefano Montanari claimed that face masks cause hypercapnia, or the excessive production of carbon dioxide in the bloodstream. Montanari said in the video that face masks do not help prevent the spread of COVID-19, saying to those who use them, "we are in danger: we breathe carbonic anhydride and we go into hypercapnia... All this leads to acidosis and puts our body at risks for a series of diseases, including cancer" ("siamo veramente in condizione di pericolo: respiriamo anidride carbonica e andiamo in ipercapnia... Tutto questo porta ad acidosi... e predispone l'organismo a tutta una serie di malattie, cancro in primis").

Hypercapnia is caused by having much carbon dioxide in the bloodstream, such as can be caused by underwater diving. In fact, health care workers who regularly wear face masks for long periods of time have not developed this condition. According to health fact-checking website HealthFeedback.org, even surgical and N95 masks are porous enough to allow gas molecules such as carbon dioxide to pass through, while limiting exposure to the respiratory droplets that could spread the COVID-19 virus.

In a March 2020 video interview published on ByoBlu.com about the coronavirus outbreak, Italian researcher Stefano Montanari said, "Healthy people suffer absolutely no harm from this virus" ("Le persone sane non subiscono assolutamente nessun danno da questo virus"), and "The virus mortality is very low, probably even nonexistent" ("La mortalità da virus è bassissima, probabilmente addirittura inesistente"). Montanari, citing the National Institute of Health (ISS) as a source, also said that only three people had died of COVID-19 in Italy as of March 18, 2020.

The National Institute of Health never said that only three people had died of COVID-19 as of March 18. In a press release on that date, the institute's president, Silvio Brusaferro, said that after looking at reports of the deaths of 2,003 people who died of COVID-19, the institute found that only three of those victims had no known previous health conditions. As of April 16, 2020, 22,170 Italians overall had died as a result of the COVID-19 virus.

In a March 2020 video, Montanari said that the term herd immunity "is the most brilliant invention of the pharmaceutical industry. Herd immunity does not exist, it's a scam" ("L'immunità di gregge è l'invenzione più brillante dell'industria farmaceutica. L'immunità di gregge non esiste, è una truffa").

Scientific literature dating to the 1920s has provided evidence supporting herd immunity, explaining how the spread of a contagious disease can be limited when enough of the population gains immunity through previous infections or vaccination. According to a September 2011 study in the *Scandinavian Journal of Infectious Diseases*, herd immunity "has had a major impact in the eradication of smallpox, has reduced transmission of pertussis, and protects against influenza and pneumococcal disease."

On March 25, 2020, Patto Trasversale per la Scienza, a group that tracks hoaxes and false medical claims, said that it had reported Montanari, along with the websites that published his interviews, to prosecutors in Modena and Ancona "for the serious claims on the spread, containment and treatment of SARS-CoV-2 and the disease COVID-19 and for the anti-vaccination conspiracy theories in various videos and interviews." ("per le gravi affermazioni sulla diffusione, contenimento e cura del SARS-CoV-2 e della malattia COVID-19 e per le tesi complottistiche anti-vaccinali, contenute in vari video ed interviste dello stesso").

Messora replied with a video, posted on ByoBlu.com, saying, "we will not remove that video ... if the country you want is this one, here it is" ("non lo rimuoviamo ... se l'Italia che volete è questa, sostanzialmente, tenetevela").

In February 2020, ByoBlu.com published a video interview headlined: "Coronavirus, Panzironi: the government should give Vitamin C and D for free to strengthen people's immune system" ("Coronavirus, Panzironi: lo stato regali vitamina C e D per potenziare il sistema immunitario").

In the interview, Adriano Panzironi, a journalist who promotes dietary supplements, discussed how the use of vitamins C and D could prevent the COVID-19 virus.

On April 14, 2020, Agcom, the Italian Authority for Communications Guarantees, ordered that Panzironi's television programs be suspended because of "the diffusion of contents potentially liable to endanger the health of users as causes of an underestimation of the potential risks connected to the COVID-19 virus and of the erroneous belief that the virus itself can be treated or prevented with non-therapeutic measures, but with food or supplements" ("la diffusione di contenuti, commerciali e non, potenzialmente suscettibili di porre in pericolo la salute degli utenti in quanto induttivi di una sottovalutazione dei rischi potenziali connessi al virus Covid-19 e dell'erroneo convincimento che lo stesso virus possa essere trattato o prevenuto con misure non terapeutiche, ma alimentari o di mera integrazione").

Although the video featuring Panzironi's interview was removed from ByoBlu.com after Agcom's ruling, an article attached to it and found on the site as of April 2020 said, "How to strengthen the immune system to help prevention and to deal with the symptoms ... The state should give Vitamin C and Vitamin D for free to the whole population" ("Come potenziare il sistema immunitario per aiutare la prevenzione, per fronteggiare cioè l'insorgere dei sintomi? ... Lo Stato dovrebbe regalare Vitamina C e Vitamina D a tutta la popolazione").

ByoBlu.com has also promoted the false claim about a connection between vaccines and autism. A 2019 video interview with former doctor Andrew Wakefield promoted a study that had been retracted in 1998, which sought to establish a connection between the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism.

The Wakefield study, which only involved 12 participants, has been refuted by numerous other studies. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said on its website, "There is no link between vaccines and autism," citing multiple, controlled, peer-reviewed studies. Wakefield was banned from practicing medicine in the U.K. in 2010.

Because ByoBlu.com frequently publishes false and unsubstantiated health claims, NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false content, 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 did not find any corrections on the site.

Despite an Editorial Policy (Politica Editoriale) page describes ByoBlu.com's mission as "producing independent information, free from any political, economic, and financial conditioning" ("produrre informazione indipendente, libera da ogni condizionamento politico, economico e finanziario"), the site does not disclose a political perspective or agenda. However, the website, which does not have an opinion section, frequently publishes unlabeled articles that advance views critical of vaccines and of COVID-19 policies intended to reduce the spread of the virus.

For example, a November 2021 article, labeled as ByoBlu24 and European Union and headlined "The European Union monitors and tracks your conversations about vaccines" ("L'Unione Europea controlla e sorveglia le tue conversazioni sui vaccini"), described the European Joint Action on Vaccination, a group that says it seeks to coordinate policies on vaccine-preventable disease, as "the umpteenth proof of a declining society, fearful of critical thinking and the free opinion of its citizens" ("Ecco a voi l'ennesima prova di una società in declino, intimorita del pensiero critico e dalla libera opinione dei suoi cittadini").

In a December 2020 article labeled Economy and Politics, the author criticized the ESM (European Stability Mechanism) stating, "The ESM is of no use in numerical-economic terms, but it certainly has a role in anti-democratic terms. It serves the European oligarchies to get an entire population by the balls and then make them docile and condescending" ("Il MES non serve a niente in termini numerico-economici, ma serve eccome in termini anti-democratici. Serve alle oligarchie europee per stringere nelle mani le palle di un intero popolo e renderlo poi docile e condiscendente").

In a video published in the News section in April 2020, Italian blogger Massimo Mazzucco criticized mainstream news outlets, including Rai and La7, as well as Italian task forces that were created to fight misinformation, saying, "The pincer of censorship is about to tighten on the internet and on the voices of free information" ("la tenaglia della censura sta per stringersi sulla rete e sulle voci della libera informazione").

In an April 2020 article published in the News section and headlined "The clear dictatorship" ("La dittatura conclamata"), the author referred to the Italian Government as "a dictatorship".

Because ByoBlu.com frequently publishes unlabeled opinionated content in its news section, and advances an anti-vaccine perspective that it does not disclose, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

In 2020, ByoBlu.com did not answer NewsGuard's questions about other false claims cited above, as well as the site's lack of corrections and its mixing of news and opinion.

## Transparency

In a Transparency section, ByoBlu.com states it is published by Byoblu Edizioni Srls and identifies its owner, Claudio Messori. The same page also identifies the site's editor-in-chief.

Users can reach the site through a contact form at the bottom of the homepage or through a general email address listed in the Transparency page.

While articles generally are attributed to authors, the website does not provide biographical or contact information for them.

In 2020, NewsGuard sent three messages to the website seeking comment on the lack of information about the site's content creators, but it did not receive a response.

The site does not publish advertisements.

## History

The domain was registered in 2002.

In January 2017 Google banned ByoBlu.com from its advertising platform AdSense for violating its policies on deceptive content. Messori published an article on ByoBlu.com in response, blaming the decision on "the effects of the campaign against the so-called 'fake news' (but in reality with the aim of hitting free and independent information)." ("ma in realtà con l'obiettivo di colpire l'informazione libera e indipendente"). Messori blamed the campaign against misinformation on a number of U.S. and foreign leaders, including former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; Laura Boldrini, former president of the Chamber of Deputies in Italy; German Chancellor Angela Merkel; and the European parliament.

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