Monkeypox misinformation on social media — and the main myths that are being spread.

A Report for Governments and the WHO

June 27, 2022
In May 2022, thousands of cases of monkeypox, a disease commonly found in central and west Africa, were confirmed in Europe, the U.S. and other non-endemic countries. This outbreak led to false or misleading claims spreading online about the virus, often pushed by well-known purveyors of health misinformation.

In this report, we feature monkeypox false claims that have been shared in English, French, Italian and German to over 3.8 million people on Facebook (pages and groups) and Twitter, between May 21 and June 13, 2022.

The sites whose false claims were shared on large groups and pages on social media included:

- 100PercentFedUp.com and Expose-news.com in English.
- FranceSoir.fr and LeMediaen442.fr in French.
- NoGeongegneria.com and DatabaseItalia.it in Italian.
- Compact-online.de and Wochenblick.at in German.

These sites have all have long been identified by NewsGuard as repeatedly publishing false information.
The Myths:

Common myths about the 2022 monkeypox outbreak spreading on social media - all of which are listed in NewsGuard’s Misinformation Fingerprints dataset - include:

- The monkeypox outbreak was caused by a lab-created virus.
- Monkeypox cases are linked to COVID-19 vaccines.
- The 2022 monkeypox outbreak was predicted in a simulation.
- Bill Gates predicted the outbreak.

Many are similar to early COVID-19 myths, using in some cases the exact same narratives and characters.

While some posts were flagged as false or partially false on social media platforms, others (at times, the exact same claim, but coming from another source) went completely unchecked.
English-language misinformation
False claim: The monkeypox outbreak originated in a bioweapons lab in Ukraine, as revealed by a source at the European Centers For Disease Prevention and Control.

- Source was a Facebook page that is managed and owned by the owner of News Punch, which NewsGuard has rated Red for being untrustworthy, and whose description says: “We're a group of writers who cover topics the mainstream media won't touch.”
- 729,000 followers
This false claim was based on a May 21, 2022, tweet by “independent investigator Dr. Benjamin Braddock.” Braddock - which is the name of Dustin Hoffman in the 1967 movie The Graduate - has 48,000 followers on Twitter, where he presents himself as a “Writer, beauty appreciator, raw egg sloinker, environmentalist, human and animal rights activist.” In the cited Twitter thread, he also quoted Russian-state owned news agency Tass, which reported Russia’s claim that the U.S. was “conducting illegal smallpox research in Ukraine.”

ECDC source tells me that the preliminary analysis of monkeypox indicates that it is “a third lab strain with unknown characteristics” and that there is chatter about this being somehow related to Moscow’s charges against U.S. biological activities in Ukraine.

The website for TASS, a major Russian government-owned wire agency. The site uncritically promotes the false claims of the Russian government.

Twitter account 48,000 followers
False claim: The 2022 monkeypox outbreak was predicted in a simulation conducted in March 2021, which proves that, much like the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak was planned.

- Source was the official Facebook page of Red-rated site 100PercentFedUp.com. ~1.56 million followers

(The post was flagged as “Partly false” by Facebook, but only several days after the post was published.)
On the same day, the 100PercentFedUp.com article was shared on multiple Facebook pages linked to the site, all of which have large followings. All these posts were flagged as partially false by Facebook.

- Source was a Facebook page with a disclaimer stating that the late conservative political commentator Rush Limbaugh “does not operate this page.” The disclaimer is signed “Unafraid truth tellers.”
- 286,000 followers

Facebook page
174,000 followers

May 22, 2022
The same claim, coming from a different Red-rated source, was also shared within several Facebook groups in Canada. This time, it was not flagged by Facebook.

May 22, 2022

Pierre Poilievre for Leader of our Party and Country

Facebook group
59,800 members

expose-news.com

A website that has repeatedly published false or misleading claims about the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines.

7.5 / 100

May 22, 2022

Forum For Canadian Sovereignty

Facebook group
4,600 members
The claim was also shared on Twitter by Kyle Becker, the founder and CEO of BeckerNews.com, which NewsGuard has rated Red for being untrustworthy.

Twitter account
237,100 followers

"[T]he exercise scenario portrayed a deadly, global pandemic involving an unusual strain of monkeypox... [it] concludes with more than three billion cases and 270 million fatalities globally."

They planned for monkeypox to strike in May 2022.

Global Health Agencies Planned for Monkeypox Pandemic to Strike in May 2022

"The exercise scenario concludes with more than three billion cases and 270 million fatalities globally."

May 21, 2022
False claim: Monkeypox cases are a cover-up for an autoimmune disease caused by COVID-19 vaccines.

- Facebook group
- 20,200 members
- The group’s stated goal is to “tell us about possible adverse reactions you may have had due to having the Vaccine.”

May 25, 2022

(The post was flagged as “False” by Facebook.)
This false claim was also shared on a Canadian Facebook group. This time, it was not flagged as false by Facebook.

Breaking News

Official Government reports suggest Authorities are using Monkeypox to cover up the fact the Covid-19 Vaccines cause Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

BY THE EXPOSÉ ON MAY 25, 2022 • ( 24 COMMENTS )

Print Friendly, PDF & Email

The new evolving hysteria surrounding the alleged emergence of ‘monkeypox’ in Western nations is not what it appears to be. We are not witnessing the monkeypox virus run rampant across first world countries for the first time ever.

Instead, we are witnessing the latest attempt to advance Draconian biosecurity policies through a monumental coverup of the devastating damage done to the immune systems of people who have had the Covid-19 vaccine. Damage so severe that it can be likened to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.

And we can prove it...

May 28, 2022
French-language misinformation
False claim: The virus responsible for the 2022 monkeypox outbreak was manipulated and/or created in a lab.

expose-news.com
A website that has repeatedly published false or misleading claims about the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines.

Twitter account
26,900 followers

June 4, 2022
This tweet shared two links, including one to Red-rated site LeMediaEn442.fr, and said: “The two links seem to show once more that this ‘monkeypox’ was created in a lab. How could it appear all of the sudden in several countries with no relationship between the people affected, except for the U.S. and Canada?”
False claim: the 2022 monkeypox outbreak was predicted in a simulation.

beckernews.com

A conservative commentary site named after former Fox News producer Kyle Becker, which has repeatedly published false and misleading claims about U.S. politics and COVID-19.

Facebook group
22,100 members

(The post was flagged as “Partially False” by Facebook.)

May 22, 2022
- Source was a Facebook page which says its goal is to “accompany the euthanasia of the Fifth Republic” (France’s current political regime.) - 6,800 followers

May 28, 2022
False claim: the 2022 monkeypox outbreak was part of a plan to impose new vaccines on the world’s population.
Twitter account
41,100 followers

This tweet said:
“Monkeypox: what does the French National Authority for Health recommend? ... to vaccinate contact cases I guess... the vaccine is already recommended all around... strange... it already exists? the vaccine was created before the outbreak started... troubling... a dream, no?”

Variole du singe : que recommande la Haute autorité de Santé ? ....de vacciner les cas contacts je présume...le vaccin est ressorti à toutes les sauces...étrange...il existe déjà ? le vaccin est créé avant la survenue de l'affection....troublant..un rêve ,non?”

Translate Tweet
6:54 AM · May 25, 2022 · Twitter Web App

727 Retweets 23 Quote Tweets 1,831 Likes

May 25, 2022
Italian-language misinformation
This Facebook post said: "MONKEYPOX IN A SIMULATION IN MARCH 2021. It is unsettling that a few months ago the main donor of the WHO, Bill Gates, suddenly spoke of the risks of smallpox - a theoretically eradicated disease - and of an associated epidemiological and/or bioterrorist threat. In March 2021, the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) partnered with the Munich Security Conference to conduct a Table-Top Simulation on reducing high-risk biological threats."

False claim: The 2022 monkeypox outbreak was predicted in a simulation.
"Another case of planned terrorism," said this Facebook post, sharing the same claim, but coming from another Red-rated website.
On June 7, Red-rated site Imolaoggi.it posted an article with this claim on its official Facebook page and Twitter account, to its more than 68,400 followers in total. Both posts started with these words: “Monkeypox. Another epidemic predicted by the usual ‘prophets.’”
This Facebook post shared the same claim, coming from yet another Red-rated website.
The claim, coming from Red-rated site DatabaseItalia.it, was also widely shared on Facebook.

(AAlthough the article shared here contained the same false claim as the other posts, which were not flagged by Facebook, this specific post was flagged as “False.”)
Facebook group
19,400 members

(This post was also flagged as “False” by Facebook.)

May 23, 2022
False claim: The 2022 monkeypox outbreak could be the result of a false-flag operation designed to blame China, and it could be linked to U.S. biological research in Ukraine.

gospanews.net

An anti-immigration site that says it provides “Christian Journalistic Information.” The site has published pro-Russia propaganda, including about the Ukraine-Russia conflict, among other false claims.

20 / 100

Facebook group
30,700 members

Facebook group
10,400 members

May 31, 2022
False claim: Monkeypox cases are a “cover-up” for an autoimmune disease caused by COVID-19 mRNA vaccines.

The blog of the journalist Alberto Capece that frequently publishes false information about COVID-19, vaccines, the Russian-Ukraine conflict, and climate change.

June 1, 2022

Facebook page
37,700 followers
German-language misinformation
False claim: A Portugal study said that the 2022 monkeypox outbreak was caused by a lab-manipulated virus.

- Source was the official Twitter account of Red-rated site Compact-Online.de.
  - 32,700 followers

June 8, 2022
False claim: Bill Gates predicted the 2022 monkeypox outbreak.

- Source was the Twitter account of someone who describes himself as a “Krav Maga Instructor.”
- 2,800 followers

June 13, 2022
False claim: The 2022 monkeypox outbreak was predicted in a simulation conducted in March 2021, which proves that the outbreak was planned.

- Facebook group called Völker dieser Welt erheben sich!! (“People of this world rise up!!”)
- 19,000 members
June 7, 2022

- Source was the Facebook group Glaub nicht alles! (Don't believe everything!,) which states that “People should know what is really important. Enlightenment beyond the mainstream.”
- 65,600 members
False claim: The 2022 monkeypox outbreak is linked to COVID-19 mRNA vaccines.

- Source was the Facebook group Neuwahlen für Österreich Demokratie JETZT (“New elections for Austria Democracy NOW”) - 20,500 members

May 27, 2022

- Source was the Facebook group Völker dieser Welt erheben sich!! (“People of this world rise up !!”) - 19,000 members

May 30, 2022

- Source was the Facebook group Weltweiter Widerstand (“Worldwide resistance”) - 16,300 members

May 31, 2022

- Source was the Facebook group Neuwahlen für Österreich Demokratie JETZT (https://www.wochenblick.at/themen/auswirkungen-von-impf-aids-ist-nicht-wahr/) which has published false content that advances nationalist and pro-FPÖ views, including about COVID-19.

7.5 / 100
Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.
Source was the Facebook group Ungeimpft, Gesund und Glücklich ("Unvaccinated, Healthy and Happy") - 6,500 members
This report was produced using two proprietary datasets from NewsGuard:

- The Misinformation Fingerprints dataset, a catalogue of data about top misinformation narratives, contains related keywords and search terms for all of the top misinformation and disinformation narratives spreading online - produced using human intelligence but designed for use with AI/ML/NLP tools to identify content matching specific false claims. NewsGuard analysts used the Misinformation Fingerprints dataset to identify relevant searches related to misinformation narratives about monkeypox.

- The second dataset used was the News Website Reliability Ratings, which consists of credibility ratings for over 7,500 news and information website that account for 95% of online engagement with news in the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Italy, and Canada. Each site's rating is based on nine basic, apolitical journalistic criteria. Based on the criteria, each site receives an overall designation of green (generally trustworthy) or red (generally not trustworthy) and a trust score of 0-100. NewsGuard's analyst used the News Website Reliability Ratings dataset to identify misinformation sources that appeared in the results for searches conducted as part of the analysis.

- Examples selected for the report represent an illustrative, but by no means exhaustive, list of false claims shared on social media. Both the Misinformation Fingerprints and the News Website Reliability Index are available to be licensed for research and other purposes.