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Facebook pushes back against WH over COVID vax 'disinformation dozen'

By [Samuel Chamberlain](#)

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A top **official at Facebook** laid out actions the social network had taken to contain the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines by 12 prominent users Wednesday, but denied claims by the White House that the so-called “disinformation dozen” were responsible for the majority of all such falsehoods.

“In recent months, there has been a debate about whether the global problem of COVID-19 vaccine misinformation can be solved simply by removing 12 people from social media platforms,” Facebook Vice President of Content Policy Monika Bickert said **in a statement**.

“People who have advanced this narrative contend that these 12 people are responsible for 73 [percent] of online vaccine misinformation on Facebook,” Bickert added. “There isn’t any evidence to support this claim. Moreover, focusing on such a small group of people distracts from the complex challenges we all face in addressing misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines.”

The 12 Facebook users — including prominent anti-vaccination advocate **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** — were initially identified in a **March report** by the London-based Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH). That report alleged that the “disinformation dozen” were responsible for 65 percent of “anti-vaccine content” on Facebook and Twitter, as well as “up to 73 percent” of anti-vaccine content on Facebook.

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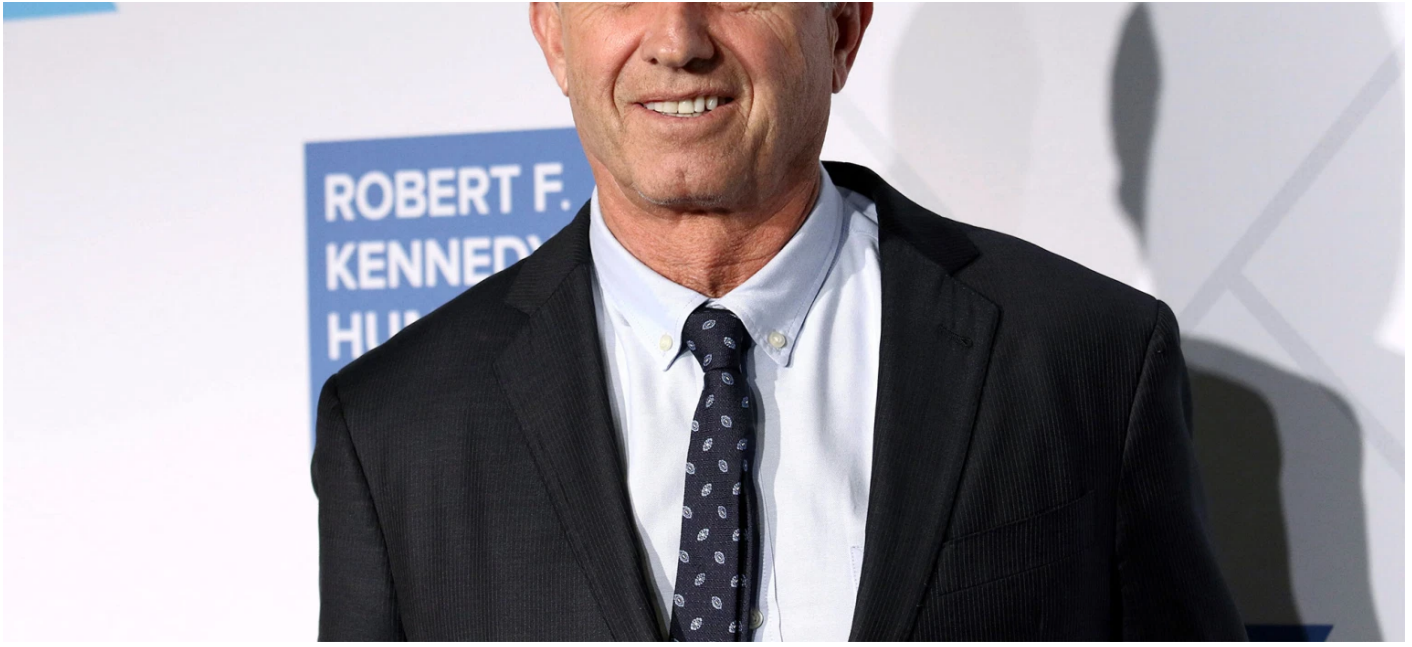
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Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is one of the “disinformation dozen” accounts who are accused of being the main spreaders of online anti-vaccine content.

Greg Allen/Invision/AP

Last month, White House press secretary Jen Psaki **cited the CCDH report**, telling reporters that “there’s about 12 people who are producing 65 percent of anti-vaccine misinformation on social media platforms. All of them remain active on Facebook, despite some even being banned on other platforms, including Facebook — ones that Facebook owns.”

During the same news conference, **Psaki revealed that the Biden administration** had been “flagging problematic posts for Facebook that spread disinformation,” and admission that touched off a minor First Amendment uproar.

“It’s important to take faster action against harmful posts ... And Facebook needs to move more quickly to remove harmful, violative posts,” Psaki added. “Posts that will be within their policies for removal often remain up for days. That’s too long. The information spreads too quickly.”

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White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki previously claimed the White House had flagged anti-vaccine disinformation posts to Facebook.

AP Photo/Susan Walsh

On Wednesday, Bickert said Facebook had “removed over three dozen Pages, groups and Facebook or Instagram accounts linked to these 12 people,” and had restricted the reach of nearly two dozen additional pages, groups, and accounts — typically by moving them down in news feeds or not recommending them to other users.

However, Bickert added, “these 12 people are responsible for about just 0.05 [percent] of all views of vaccine-related content on Facebook. This includes all vaccine-related posts they’ve shared, whether true or false, as well as URLs associated with these people.”

The Facebook exec then slammed the CCDH report, saying it “analyzed only a narrow set of 483 pieces of content over six weeks from only 30 groups, some of which are as small as 2,500 users. They are in no way representative of the hundreds of millions of posts that people have shared about COVID-19 vaccines in the past months on Facebook.”

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Bickert claimed that the “disinformation dozen” report is inaccurate.

OLIVIER DOULIERY/AFP via Getty Images

“Focusing on these 12 individuals misses the forest for the trees,” Bickert went on, before adding: “None of this is to suggest that our work is done or that we are satisfied. Tracking and combating vaccine misinformation is a complex challenge, made more difficult by the lack of common definitions about what constitutes misinformation, and the reality that guidance from scientific and health experts has evolved and will continue to evolve throughout the pandemic ... In the meantime, we will continue doing our part to show people reliable information about COVID-19 vaccines from health experts and help people get vaccinated.”

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being actively promoted — on their platform.



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As of Wednesday evening, 199.3 million Americans had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a number that works out to 60 percent of the total population.

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