INSIDE YOUTUBE

A long term vision for YouTube's medical misinformation policies

BY DR. GARTH GRAHAM AND MATT HALPRIN

DIRECTOR AND GLOBAL HEAD OF HEALTHCARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS, AND VP AND GLOBAL HEAD OF TRUST AND SAFETY

AUG 15, 2023   –   5 MINUTE READ

An update on how YouTube is thinking about the future of medical misinformation policies, including removing cancer misinformation.

In the years since we began our efforts to make YouTube a destination for high-quality health content, we've learned critical lessons about developing Community Guidelines in line with local and global health authority guidance on topics that pose serious real-world risks, such as misinformation on COVID-19, vaccines, reproductive health, harmful substances, and more. We're taking what we've learned so far about the most effective ways to tackle medical misinformation to simplify our approach for creators, viewers, and partners.

As medical information – and misinformation – continuously evolves, YouTube needs a policy framework that holds up in the long term, and preserves the important balance of removing egregiously harmful content while ensuring space for debate and discussion. While specific medical guidance can change over time as we learn more, our goal is to ensure that when it comes to areas of well-studied scientific consensus, YouTube is not a platform for distributing information that could harm people.

Moving forward, YouTube will

our existing medical misinformation guidelines to fall under three categories – Prevention, Treatment, and Denial.

Moving forward, YouTube will streamline dozens of our existing medical misinformation guidelines to fall under three categories – Prevention, Treatment, and Denial. These policies will apply to specific health conditions, treatments, and substances where content contradicts local health authorities or the World Health Organization (WHO).

To determine if a condition, treatment or substance is in scope of our medical misinformation policies, we'll evaluate whether it's associated with a high public health risk, publicly available guidance from health authorities around the world, and whether it's generally prone to misinformation.

Here's what the framework will look like:

- **Prevention misinformation:** We will remove content that contradicts health authority guidance on the prevention and transmission of specific health conditions, and on the safety and efficacy of approved vaccines. For example, this encompasses content that promotes a harmful substance for disease prevention.
- **Treatment misinformation:** We will remove content that contradicts health authority guidance on treatments for specific health conditions, including promoting specific harmful substances or practices. Examples include content that encourages unproven remedies in place of seeking medical attention for specific conditions, like promoting caesium chloride as a treatment for cancer.
- **Denial misinformation:** We will remove content that disputes the existence of specific health conditions. This covers content that denies people have died from COVID-19.

Our goal is to make the rules of the road clearer and have a more transparent

examples.

Removing cancer treatment misinformation

When cancer patients and their loved ones are faced with a diagnosis, they often turn to online spaces to research symptoms, learn about treatment journeys, and find community. Our mission is to make sure that when they turn to YouTube, they can easily find high-quality content from credible health sources.

In applying our updated approach, cancer treatment misinformation fits the framework – the public health risk is high as cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, there is stable consensus about safe cancer treatments from local and global health authorities, and it's a topic that's prone to misinformation,.

Starting today and ramping up in the coming weeks, we will begin removing content that promotes cancer treatments proven to be harmful or ineffective, or content that discourages viewers from seeking professional medical treatment. This includes content that promotes unproven treatments in place of approved care or as a guaranteed cure, and treatments that have been specifically deemed harmful by health authorities. For instance, a video that claims "garlic cures cancer," or "take vitamin C instead of radiation therapy" would be removed.
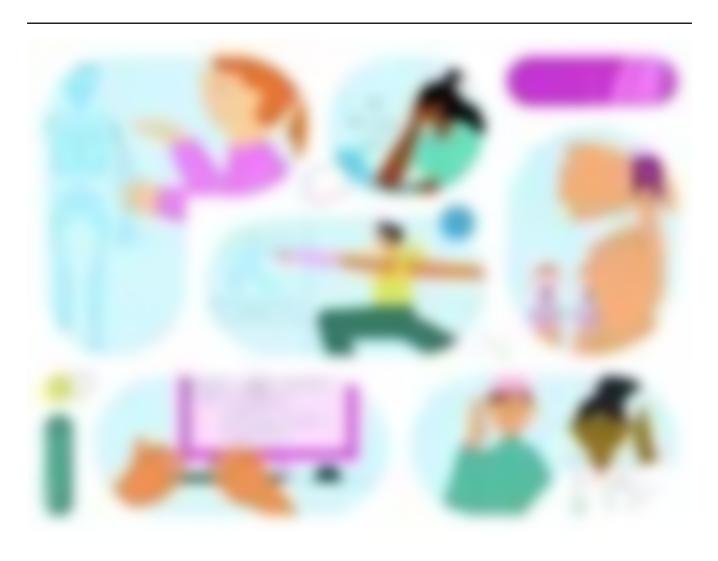
And as part of our ongoing work to increase the amount of high-quality health content on YouTube, we're publishing a playlist of engaging, informative cancer-related videos from a range of authoritative sources, and we're collaborating with Mayo Clinic on new video content to share information on a variety of cancer conditions.

Debate and discussion are critical to the advancement of science and medicine. We always carefully take into account context when enforcing our policies, and allow content that provides educational, documentary, scientific and artistic (EDSA) context. One element we consider is public interest. This means that we may allow content that is sufficiently in the public interest to remain on YouTube, even if it otherwise violates our policies – for example, a video of a public hearing or comments made by national political candidates on the campaign trail that

content that discusses the results of a specific medical study. Adding context to a video doesn't guarantee that it'll be allowed to remain, and we may also age-gate some content or surface an information panel underneath these videos to provide additional context for viewers.

Looking ahead, we want to make sure there is a robust framework to build upon when the need for new medical misinformation policies arises. We'll continue to monitor local and global health authority guidance to make sure our policies adapt. We want our approach to be clear and transparent, so that content creators understand where the policy lines are, and viewers know they can trust the health information they find on YouTube.

More like this

How we're putting patient voices front and center