

## What's Real? What's Not? News about COVID-19

Based on reporting by the Associated Press March 22, 2020

Messages that pop up on social media can scare us.

*Be prepared for a national **quarantine**.*

*Children cannot get the new coronavirus.*

*Gargling with saltwater can prevent COVID-19.*

All untrue.

The coronavirus **pandemic** is leading to information **overload** for many people. Some information is true. Some is not. It can be hard to tell the difference.

Separating fact from fiction is important, however. Sometimes we pass along wrong information. Then our friends and family can become scared, too. **Misinformation** means we might not learn real news that can save lives.

COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus, has spread around the world. But most people with COVID-19 have only mild **symptoms** such as a fever and a cough. Older people can become very sick or die. So can people with other health problems.

The World Health Organization is working with Facebook, Twitter, and other social media companies to stop misinformation. Fact-checking groups are studying stories that pop up on the internet to see if they are real.

Here are some things you can do to avoid misinformation:

### **Check the Source**

We are more likely to believe things our friends tell us. That's why rumors spread on social media. Be careful of important-sounding information that is

coming from a friend rather than an official health organization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization are two sources of information you can trust. Check information through the [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) or [who.int](http://who.int).

### **Act Like a Journalist**

News stories are different from **opinion** essays. An opinion essay shares only one person's belief or feelings. The essay is meant to get the reader to agree. News stories name official sources of information. Also, if the news is real, more than one news organization will report it. If only one news organization carries a story, that is a warning or a **red flag**.

### **Pause**

A 2018 study found that false news travels faster than real news. False news grabs people's attention. False news often makes us scared or angry. We react and want to share the story. But by taking time to breath, we can think about whether what we read is real.

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### **Check Comprehension**

1. Why is it important to pass along accurate information?
2. What are three things you can do to make sure the information you see or hear is real?

### **Discussion**

1. Have you ever discovered a story on social media was fake news? What did you do?